

Caleb was my cousin, but our relationship always felt like something more than



that. He was almost like an older brother to me, especially because he was the oldest in our big group of cousins. He was very protective of us and always seemed more mature than the rest of us. At first, people might have described him as quiet or nonchalant, but growing up with him, I saw another side of him. He could be goofy, funny, and completely unserious when he wanted to be. At the same time, he had a way of giving advice that made you stop and listen. I didn't know then how much some of the things he said to me

would stay with me.

One day all of my cousins came to my house for a sleepover. This was nothing unusual



because they always came over and played basketball in my backyard. This day specifically we had a 3v3 scrimmage. After some hours of playing, Caleb decided he was done and wanted to go back inside. Everyone was complaining and telling him to stay because we needed the teams to be even to keep playing. Then he suddenly got serious and told us, “Never beg anyone to stay in your life.” At the time we were all thinking “here he goes again”, because he always tried sprinkling in some wisdom at the most seemingly

random moments. But looking back at it now, I understand that this was definitely not just about basketball and I was able to carry this advice with me through high school without even realizing it.

As we all got older, Caleb started becoming more distant. We all just figured it was because he was the oldest and he thought he was getting too old to hang with us because we were too childish. When they would come over he would stay inside on the game and when we came to his house he would stay in his room playing Call of Duty. Eventually he moved out and started living with our grandma, helping take care of her and making sure she had everything she needed.

One day I was sitting in my dorm room with a couple of my friends. My mom called me saying to join the zoom call she sent. I was so confused making jokes because I was confused on



why she called to tell me to join another call. Once I joined, it was her and my dad sitting in my dad's study room and my older brother was on the call from his phone. The way my parents were looking I could tell something was wrong so I said “is everything okay?” and she replied with a trembling tone, “I'm sorry we have to tell you this way” and my mind immediately went to someone passing away because this is also how I found out my grandfather passed away. I assumed it was one of my grandmothers but then she said something that made the world freeze. She said “Caleb passed away.” I thought it was some kind of

sick joke at first and I said “Caleb who” and she just said “Caleb...” I couldn't even speak but the next words to come from my mouth was “how?” and she said it was suicide. Hearing that this is the way he passed hurt worse than finding out he was gone. I couldn't process it. The only thing I could do was throw my ipad across the room. I didn't understand how someone who grew up with me could suddenly be gone.



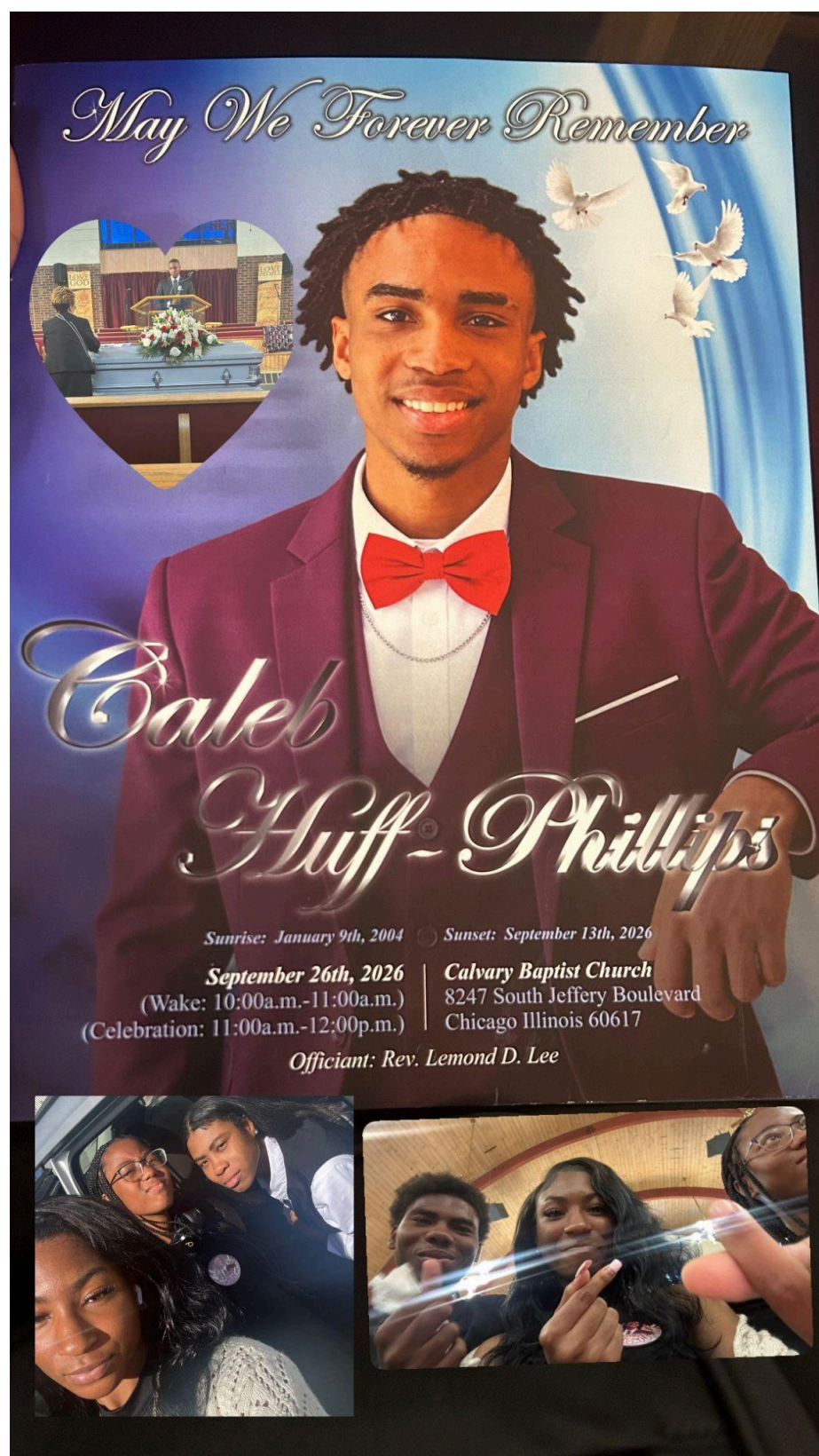
That weekend I went back to Chicago for his funeral. I hugged my other cousins tightly because Caleb is their older brother. I hugged my auntie because Caleb is her first born son. And I hugged my little sister because that is her big cousin. This made me realize that everyone was experiencing the same loss but from different

relationships with him. This loss changed my perception of the world. When someone says they're thinking about suicide, I take it seriously no matter how much they say they are joking. I started checking on people more, paying closer attention to people's eyes, and listening differently.

Ironically, Caleb's death changed my life. I no longer take people for granted as much, I understand that someone can appear okay while struggling privately. I value my relationships more and I try to keep going even when life gets hard. I want other people to recognize that their lives can change. And I carry Caleb's advice with me everyday. Specifically, something interesting I came across during meditation is that small piece of advice about not begging someone to stay in your life. I'm learning what this truly means to me. Sometimes you can't control whether someone stays, but while people are here, you can make sure they know they matter.



Of course his death is heavy on my heart. But he left a good legacy and I will continue to use his name and keep him relevant because his story has taught me so much about life. His humor, his protectiveness, his advice, his memory. I'm choosing to keep going forward with a caring heart.



#Long live Caleb