

My name is Jessica Russell. Troy Michael Goode was a cousin to me and even a best friend. After 17 years I couldn't possibly narrow it down to just one favorite memory that I had with Troy. But as I look back, I am realizing that most of my favorite memories just so happen to revolve around trouble, chaos, danger, mess, panic, madness, hysteria, and a really bad idea. Although, I guess they always did result in laughter and a really good story to tell.

Our family went camping for my dad's birthday, and we all met up at the campsite and stayed for a cold weekend in November. Troy wanted some wood for the campfire, so he grabbed an axe. Now, you know this story is going to be good when the first two things mentioned are Troy's name and an axe. As he was chopping the wood, he missed the wood and got his knee. Talk about blood! Aunt Sally bandaged him up before we went out to dinner at Bob Evans. Troy couldn't order "chicken nibbles" without laughing all the way through his order, which I believe he ordered solely because of the ridiculous name.

When we were younger, Jamie, Jennifer, Kyle, Troy, and I walked down the steep driveway and waited at the mailbox for a long enough break in traffic to cross the street. There was heavy traffic that day near Dad's house. Troy picked up a handful of rocks, pulled out his slingshot, and I wondered if this could possibly have a good ending. He slung each rock across traffic and informed us that it was not the cars he was trying to hit, but the stop sign across the street. After each rock he slung, he held his ear to listen for the "ping". Once we crossed the street, we went to an open field to play. Troy tackled me to the ground and I thought I broke my neck. Once I regained feeling from the waist down, I forgave him.

The last thanksgiving we had before Troy passed away was memorable because of the hunting of a squirrel. Kyle and Troy went out back to hunt a squirrel with a slingshot. With good aim and lucky timing, the two of them actually killed a squirrel. Grandpa carefully instructed them on how to de-head and skin it. And where else to store a headless skinless squirrel, but in the freezer right next to the ice cream for the annual pumpkin pie? Aunt Sally lost her appetite and barely got down her turkey and stuffing before feeling nauseous at the thought of that squirrel. Kyle and Troy thought it was nothing short of hilarious that their mother was so disgusted.

One summer when we were at crescent beach, all of us cousins headed out in the waves with buggy boards and surfboards. As soon as we got knocked over by a wave and tossed back at the shoreline, we'd run back in for more. We stayed out there for hours. I glanced over to my left and saw Troy get wiped out by a wave and then almost a minute later, he finally emerged from the water looking frazzled. The water was shallow, yet he was in the water all the way up to his neck, so I knew he was squatting for some reason. He was looking around in the water as if he had lost something, and all the while I just stood there watching him. He looked over at me and shouted, "I lost my bathing suit!" With his back hunched over, he shuffled his way back up to the beach, attempting to cover his skinny white legs and his revealing boxer shorts. We all laughed as he ran back to the hotel room in his skimpy boxers to find another bathing suit. I imagine whoever was standing nearby as that bathing suit washed up on shore also got a good laugh.

I think more so than anything, I miss the mysterious look he gave as he was plotting something. He was never good at being secretive about it; he didn't exactly have a good poker face. We all knew he was up to no good when he had that look on his face. It would all start with him drifting out of the conversation. He's stare off somewhere and then his smile would widen, as his eyes would squint, and then he'd chuckle quietly to himself. At that point I knew to make one of two decisions: get far away from Troy, or if I was feeling gutsy I'd whisper, "Alright, what's the plan?"

I dream of Troy often. I love it when he visits me in my sleep, because it's the only way I get to see him. But even while I'm awake... he talks to me all the time. I just have to listen. And it's when I listen closely, that I find he's all around me. He hasn't gone very far at all!

Godspeed little man,
Sweet dreams little man,
All my love will fly,
To you each night,
On angel's wings.
Godspeed,
Sweet dreams.
-Dixie Chicks