

## *McKayla Jade Brewer*

Hello everyone.

My name is Denise Johnson. I'm McKayla's cousin, for those who don't know who I am. I want to start off by saying thank you to everyone who joined us here today to help us say good-bye to McKayla. It has been the most difficult experience in the world to lose her and I just want to express our appreciation for you being here.

McKayla Jade Brewer was born in Galveston on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2002, right in the middle of summer. Her mom and dad, my Aunt Claudia and Uncle Mark, used to say that she brought summer with her the day she was born, because she brought so much sunshine into their lives. She was an only child, but she never once asked for a brother or sister. When she was little she would say that the fish and dolphins and sea turtles were her brothers and sisters.

McKayla grew up here in Surfside, right on the beach. Maybe to you Surfside isn't the beautiful, blue-sea experience you might find elsewhere, but the gulf was McKayla's home and heart and she was so proud of it. Anyone who knew McKayla knew how proud she was to be a "beach girl" through and through. Do you picture a sweet teen girl having the time of her life in the waves with her best friends on a bright, balmy day? That was McKayla. She was very outgoing and some would even say extroverted, but she was also just the sweetest girl you ever met. Her best friends since elementary school, Karissa, Alex and Gracie, are here today and can attest to this! Guys, I want you to know that you were McKayla's world. Each of you gave her so much happiness in her young life, and in return I know that she, with each of you, built memories that will last a lifetime. I want to thank you, Karissa, Alex, and Gracie, for being here today to honor her memory. I know that this is the hardest day ever for you, but the fact that you are here would have meant the world to her.

As she grew older, McKayla took her passion for the ocean to the next level. She participated in A & M Galveston's Sea Camp for five years in a row. There she got to experience the ocean, her home, hands-on and in a way that she never had before. Aggie Sea Camp ultimately led to her decision to one day become a marine biologist. Quite the career change from wanting to be a professional mermaid!

McKayla cared deeply about our beaches, the ocean, and the creatures that lived in and around it. She was a member of Brazosport High's Keep It Clean club, which meets twice a month in the spring and fall to pick up litter along the coast. I see several of her Brazosport peers and teachers here today...thank you so much for being here. Just last week I was telling McKayla that I couldn't believe that she was going to be a senior this year. And now I wish it was the only thing I couldn't believe.

Looking around I also see several of her co-workers from Kitty's Purple Cow Cafe. The Purple Cow held a special place in McKayla's heart; our families were regulars there for many years when we were younger and it was a dream of hers to one day get to work there. So I want to thank you all for granting her that dream last summer and all the memories that went with it.

McKayla often expressed her desire to learn how to surf, and sadly she never got the chance to do that. But I like to think that she's surfing the waves of heaven's oceans right now, as I speak. If any of you surf, why don't you catch a wave one day soon in her memory? I think that would have put a huge smile on her face.

I'm sure that everyone here today has several special memories of McKayla, and I would like to share one of mine. I am older than my beautiful cousin, but for many years our families lived right next door to each other, up until just a few years ago. One day when she was about seven, we were playing in the water and Aunt Claudia had asked me to watch McKayla while she went back to the house to get something. As soon as my aunt was gone, McKayla started screaming, "Shark!

Shark! A shark just bit my hand!" I thought I was in big trouble! I ran up to her and tried to look at her hand. She was flapping it back and forth and a little crab flew up in the air and back into the water. She looked at me and I looked at her and we busted out laughing!

It's precious memories like these that take my breath away. How could someone who was so full of life and love and joy just be taken from us like this, in the blink of an eye? McKayla was only 16 when God took her back to heaven. She missed her 17<sup>th</sup> birthday by just four days. It just doesn't seem fair, does it? But who are we to question God's will? They say that He breaks our hearts to prove to us that He only takes the best, and now I believe that with all my heart. McKayla was a beautiful, rare soul that will be forever young and beautiful, and greatly missed.

On behalf of my family, Aunt Claudia and Uncle Mark, her best friends forever Karissa, Alex and Gracie, and everyone who was touched by my cousin's light, thank you for being here today. I would like to extend a special thanks as well to Martin-Deen Funeral Home for taking care of us this past week, and for helping us to get through today as gently as possible.

Lastly, I want to say thank you, my beautiful cousin McKayla, for all the love and smiles and giggles and memories that you generously gave to each and every one of us. Your life was painfully short, but the memory of you will last a lifetime.

Thank you.