

A Magazine for Young Salvationists

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# God's Perfect Timing

Matt Trantham's ready for the future

- Lesley Carter finds her voice
- A dash between life and death
- Coping with change



# THE DASH

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I count the minutes until my mom gets home. She should be back any minute, but it can't be soon enough. I hear her car. Running toward the front door, I explode with emotion, "Krista's dead. Krista's dead." My mom rocks me like she did when I was a baby.

Through my broken words, I share the few known details of my friend's death. "The ... the police ... found her body. Krista was so ... Why would someone kill her? I'm scared, Mama." I sob uncontrollably.

My parents seem as shocked as I am.

I'm used to watching Hollywood's version of death, but this is too real. Only six weeks into high school, I clearly realize this isn't Hollywood. That terrible night I lay awake, questions racing through my mind.

What happened? Why? What should I do? Why am I so upset? Could something like this happen to me? Will I ever feel safe again?

I drift in and out of sleep all night, tossing and turning. When the alarm goes off I pull the covers over my head. Perhaps if I don't get up the nightmare won't be real. I don't feel like going to school, but I know I'll find some comfort hanging around friends.

Other students look as sad as I feel. I'm not the only one who didn't put on makeup. The school makes a counselor available, but I don't want to talk to some stranger.

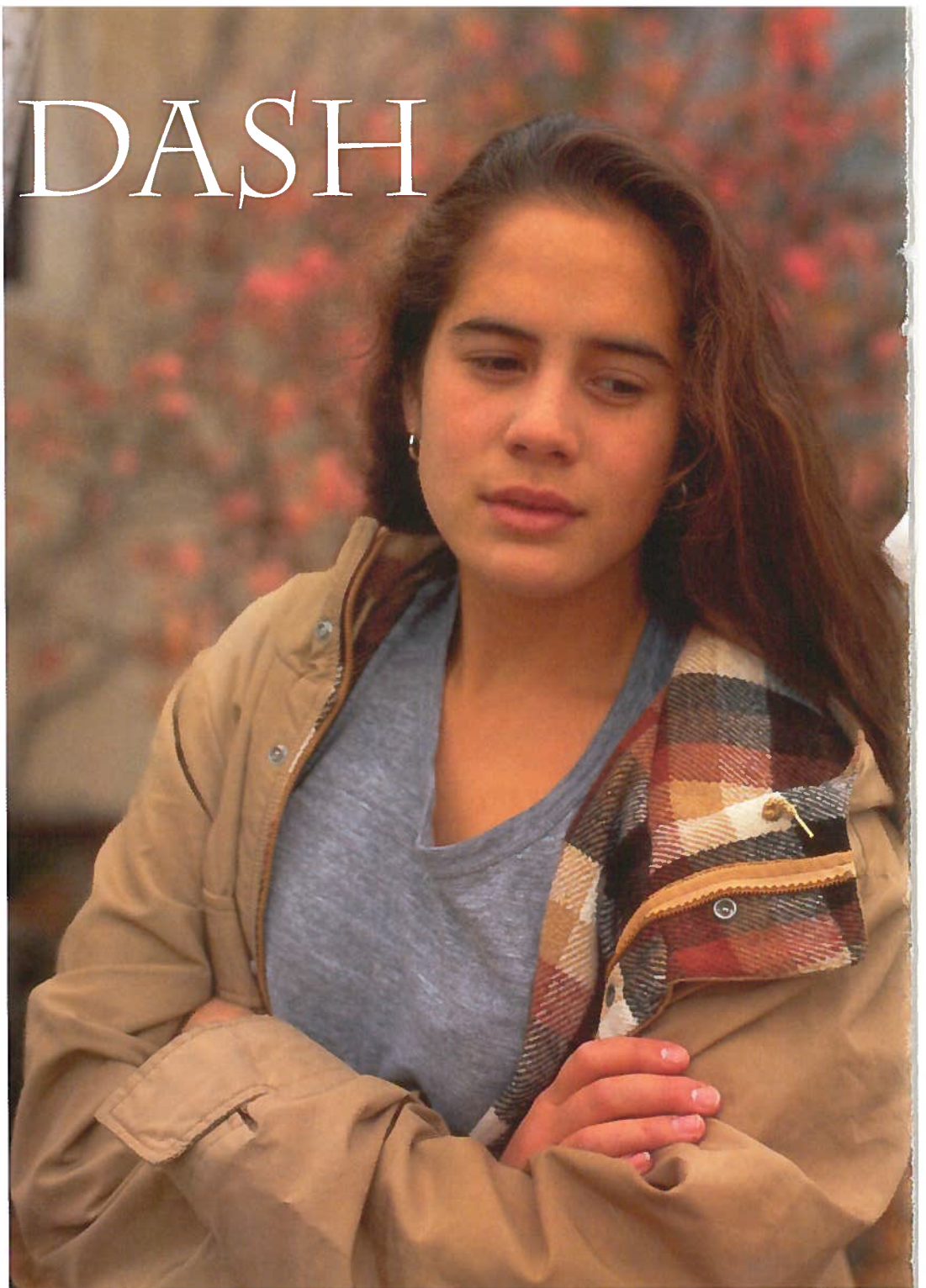
My parents gently offer, "We'd like to attend the funeral with you." I don't want to admit it, but this gives me comfort. I've never been to a funeral before, so I'm not sure what to expect.

Being at the church three days later makes it all seem

even more real. The church is packed, mostly with teenagers with tear-stained faces. I anxiously look around for someone I know. My parents seem to understand. My mom hands me tissues as she finds a seat in the back row.

My friends and I cautiously walk toward the front of the church. The open casket stares at me from the center of the aisle. I really want to remember my friend alive, but I'm drawn toward the casket. Part of me needs to see my friend one last time. Then I realize my worst fear. That could be me.

Before the service starts, the family shows pictures of my friend. The pictures remind me of my own childhood dolls,



playing with my tiger-striped kitten, my first day of kindergarten, decorating the Christmas tree and blowing out birthday candles. I realize there won't be any first date, graduation, or wedding for my friend.

A lot of people sing during the funeral service, but I don't feel like singing. My mind wanders. It doesn't seem like a time to sing, but a time for feeling sad and hopeless. Then I hear that because my friend had a relationship with Jesus Christ, we know that she is in Heaven without any pain or sorrow. For a moment, I actually experience some comfort and hope.

God. I haven't thought much about Him lately. I still go to church on Sunday with my family and attend youth group, but I'm really living my own life in high school, not caring much what God or my parents want for me. I'm cutting classes, smoking, hanging out with friends who have a negative influence on my life, and continually lying to my parents to cover up my escapades. Today it seems important for me to discover what I believe.

My mind is drawn back to the funeral. I'm not sure what it really means to follow Christ, but I commit myself to finding out.

*I certainly don't remember the songs or the weather, but I do remember Krista's pictures, my tears and the youth pastor's words: "Something incredible invaded the life of a teenager. When bad, evil, heinous tragedies happen, God does not turn bad into good, but He uses it to His glory."*

He explains that on every person's gravestone, there is a date showing when each person is born and the date when each person dies, separated with a simple dash. "That little dash represents your entire life. You can change your dash by the choices you make today."

His words make sense. I think about the dash in my own life. I think of some choices I'm making ... choices I'm secretly not proud of. It's as if God is showing me pictures of my own life through my friend's death.

After the funeral, my parents encourage me as best they can. They have as many questions as I do. I think maybe they're a little afraid, yet relieved that it isn't their daughter.



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My mom and I look through the local newspaper, carefully cutting out related articles for my memorial scrapbook. This seems like one way of keeping my friend's memory alive. I add the church program to my scrapbook and place a sunflower from one of Krista's beautiful floral arrangements in a vase on my dresser.

A week after the funeral, my mom takes me to the mall to make a memory T-shirt. I watch the artist airbrush the stark white T-shirt with Krista's favorite colors, green and purple. The back says, "In Loving Memory of Krista, 1984-1998."

I plop on my unmade bed, staring at the dead flower. Krista's dead. I feel dead. I remember again the youth pastor's words, "What will your dash represent at the end of your life?"

I pray out loud, "God, I'm really messing up my life. I'm not paying any attention to what You want for me. I'm sorry that I'm doing so many wrong things. I want to live each day for You. I'm not really

sure how right now, but I want my dash to count for You."

It has been a year since Krista's death. Her picture isn't in our yearbook this year. I still wonder what happened to her. There are so many unanswered questions.

I still wear the slightly faded T-shirt, tearfully linger through my memory book and look at the dried sunflower on my dresser. These keepsakes help me remember that my friend is in Heaven. They also remind me of my second chance in life.

Living each day for God isn't easy, but I've been talking to God more about my life and trying to follow Him. My growing relationship with Jesus Christ and memories of last year give me the courage to keep living each day and make my dash count for God.