

## The Imprint Michelle Chalk Left Behind

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Everyone's life affects the many lives that surround them. Michelle Chalk's life was like a small pebble thrown into still water. Her life had a ripple effect on everyone with which she came in contact. When talking to people who knew Michelle, they revealed that she was full of happiness, joyfulness, and love that left strong memories. "The nicest person you know times a thousand. She was like an angel." said Sam Grau, ninth grade. However, on August 1, 2017, Michelle unexpectedly lost her life at the young age of 15. Michelle's life and death had a strong impact on her family, friends, and community.

It was a summer day, just like any other, for a teen in Fort Thomas. Michelle had gone to her friend's house, but no one could ever imagine what happened next. While relaxing in a hammock with a friend, a tree uprooted and came down on her.

Michelle's passing caused many to stop and take inventory of what had been lost. The Fort Thomas community realized the imprint that this young lady had made. "The impact she left on me is to be happy, stay strong, and work hard and you will succeed," said Paige Ossege, ninth grader. Many described her as such a cheerful person. The message that was left behind for Paige and others was to never give up and to just be yourself.

Michelle left an important and caring mark not only on Paige, but on many others as well. This included a close friend, Lexi Crawford, ninth grader. She said, "She's left behind love. I don't know if that makes sense, but love is what she always gave out, and now that she's gone, I try to hold onto any of that love that I can." Lexi spoke about Michelle as a caring person, and now that she's gone, Lexi tries to hold onto every bit of that love. Lexi said that Michelle's love is still in her heart, but it will never be the same. This is her first real loss, and she doesn't yet know how life will play out. Holding onto Michelle's imprint of love is the only way Lexi and others like her will be able to deal with the situation and eventually move on.

Not only were her friends and family influenced by this tragic accident, but her teachers as well. Mrs. Tracy Houston-Smith, seventh grade teacher, said, "I am actually surprised at how often I think of her. That's because she was such a bright human being, intellectually, of course, but also in spirit. The way she lived her life and the way she affected the school and community was so sincere and enthusiastic. I think I would describe her imprint on me as a kind of gentle, subconscious reminder to seize the day." Mrs. Houston went on to say how such a great lesson can be learned from how Michelle lived her life. She also said that she appreciates her own children even more. "One night I passed by my daughter's room, she's just a year older than Michelle, and started to cry as I heard my daughter laughing and playing around with a friend. I was happy to hear my own child's joy, but profoundly saddened that someone else's parents will never hear that sound again."

Outside of school, Sonja Harney, a dance teacher and owner of Dance Express, taught Michelle since she was three. She said she felt Michelle was a part of her family. She watched Michelle grow and develop as a person and a dancer. She attended Michelle's extracurricular activities

such as her play's and her many recitals. Mrs. Harney said, "She has taught us to show love for those we meet and give compassion to those who need it." She went on to say, " Whether you realize it or not, the impact of her kindness will never be forgotten."

After Michelle's passing, many family members, friends, and the town grieved. Her passing affected so many, but no one more than her parents, Mr. Keith and Mrs. Patty Chalk. Mr. Chalk said, "We ponder what Michelle is missing out on. We believe that Michelle is in heaven and experiencing something better. The realization is that Michelle is not missing out on anything. Patty and I are missing out on sharing the experience with Michelle. Her friends are missing out on sharing the experiences with Michelle."

Mr. Chalk has been very open and honest with the community. He realized that so many were grieving and he wanted to reach out to them to share stories and experiences. Mr. Chalk said, "I think Michelle's death has brought out the absolute best in people and demonstrated that we live in the best community." People all over town have made some sort of effort in help remembering Michelle, whether that may be putting up ribbons in her honor, or contributing financially to the scholarship being held in her name. Many have the #LiveFreeLikeMichelle bracelet around their wrist, reminding them to live like Michelle. Others created posters that said, "The Life of Michelle." People of all sorts came together to share memories. There were several memorials and most recently a middle school chorus concert dedicated to Michelle. Maddison Baldrick, ninth grader, said that one of her favorite memories she shared with Michelle was in elementary school. She said, "I had gone up to her and asked if she wanted to be best friends and ever since then we will be."

"Time does NOT heal wounds, but time does make us less sensitive to the pain from the wound," said Mr. Chalk. In reflecting, those that knew her well or only a little think about how she affected them and what sort of imprint she left behind. Michelle's life went from a ripple to a wave of kindness and love. "Michelle was one of the sweetest, down to earth girls I knew," said Lexi Crawford, ninth grader.