

'Adam, why did you leave us?'

Students struggle to understand friend's suicide

By Anas Ben-Musa
The Battalion

Dec. 17, 1992. . . it's a cold, clear night. Adam Nathanael Van Steen, 22, and his close friend, Ronald Joe, decide to ride around northern Bryan to see the Christmas lights and stargaze at Adam's favorite spot. Adam used to live near the Woodville overpass that overlooks Highway 6. He loves to relax and ponder on the bridge.

But this particular night is special, and Adam doesn't want to be alone. A stellar phenomenon his grandmother calls "John's Eye" will appear tonight. It only appears every 17 years. The evening is filled with many intense memories and feelings for Adam, and much of it relates to the number 17.

Dec. 17th marks Adam's "adopted" parents' wedding anniversary. Adam believes they are the ideal parents — the perfect family. Perfect in every way except in dealing with Adam's homosexuality.

And 17 years ago, Adam's biological grandfather, John, died in a freak car accident after dropping Adam off at a nursery. Ronald remembers how Adam said he was very close to him.

Tonight, Adam will say goodbye to his grandfather. It's a chilly night. At the foot of the overpass, Adam removes his jacket and gloves and lays them at Ronald's feet. Adam has borrowed a candle and lighter from Ronald. He takes them out.

Adam looks at Ronald and tells him, "I knew that you would understand about the ceremony and wouldn't make fun of me."

Ronald reassures Adam that he



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would never make fun of him and that he understands Adam's need to remember his grandfather.

A few steps more, Adam stops again, turns around and asks Ronald, "You do understand what atonement means, don't you?"

Ronald replies, "Of course I do."

Ronald is a little irritated. Many times he and Adam had discussed in depth how Jesus atoned for all the world's sins by sacrificing himself. And Adam knows Ronald is a spiritual counselor with Lambda Christian Fellowship. Ronald wonders why Adam asked him that question, but the thought

passes as they reach the middle of the overpass.

Adam begins the ceremony. Ronald keeps back a few feet. Adam lights the candle, sets it on the guard rail and kneels down. He begins singing.

Ronald becomes nervous about being in the middle of the road. He

doesn't have a flashlight to ward off the cars passing by. But luckily, there haven't been any cars. Ronald is thinking that some people would consider two men on the overpass a very strange sight.

"Some may even think that we're going to jump," Ronald ponders. "What a dumb thought."

Adam stands up and blows out the candle. He takes a small step to the left and places both hands on the guard rail. With little effort, Adam hops over the rail and turns himself around to face the rail. He pushes himself backward.

Ronald screams, "Adam, don't!" But it's too late. Ronald hears the thud. He looks down to the highway below and sees Adam's body.

Ronald runs to the Exxon station nearby and screams to the attendant to call 911 — "My friend just jumped off the overpass!"

The police and ambulance arrive almost immediately, but little can be done. Adam dies on the way to the hospital.

Many of his friends still wonder why Adam wanted to die. Many are still in shock, others confused. They all ask the same question — Adam, why did you leave us?

Adam helped so many people to be comfortable with their sexuality, says Dawn Lacaille, co-president of the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Aggies (GLBA). Adam was the social chair of Gay & Lesbian Student Services (former name of GLBA).

"His life was caring for other people," says Dawn, a sophomore environmental design major. "His encouragement was the most important thing in my coming out."

Dawn "came out" when she was a freshman and she immediately began having problems with her roommate. Adam overheard what was happening. "He handed me the keys to his place and told me to stay as long as I needed," Dawn says.

She explains that Adam's generosity

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Strength in numbers

Student Bible study grows to 600 members

By Traci Travis
The Battalion

What began as a small apartment Bible study in 1989 has grown into a campus-wide ministry.

Breakaway, a non-denominational, weekly Bible study, has done away with the typical "churchy" atmosphere and is instead reaching out to students in a comfortable way, said Gregg Matte, Class of '92 and the leader of Breakaway.

The group's original purpose was to provide an opportunity for students to be in a small group Bible study, Matte said.

"It was at an apartment where people could come and hang out and have fun," he said. "They'd talk about God and Christ and how that was affecting their lives as students."

Originally consisting of 12 members, Breakaway now plays host to over 600 students every

Tuesday at 9 p.m. at First Baptist College Station.

Its staff consists of a five-student worship team that leads songs, a three-member board of directors who are not students, a student in charge of finances and speaker Gregg Matte.

Decked out in blue jeans, a T-shirt and a cordless mike every week, Matte takes the stage talking about problems college students face and relates them to the Bible.

"I'll tell you exactly how I feel about something and what I'm struggling with," he said. "A lot of times people think Christians are perfect and they've got it all going on, but really we just know Christ and that we're forgiven."

Matte said Christians are struggling to find answers just like everyone else. It would be fake for the leadership team of Breakaway to get up on stage and act like they know what's going on, he said.

Instead, Jesus Christ is presented in a real and relevant way, Matte said.

Despite its large numbers, he said he thinks the purpose of Breakaway has been served.

"It's changed from a group of people who knew everything about each other," Matte said, "to a Bible study where people we

didn't know could come in, sit and be affected."

There is no way to be personal with 600 people, he said. But Breakaway tries to by planning weekly lunches, prayer meetings, retreats and providing a worship team composed strictly of students.

In an effort to get away from the church atmosphere, despite its location, the staff uses an overhead displaying contemporary songs unlike usual hymnal books. There is no pulpit, no dress code and no booming organ, Matte said.

Traes Howard, a senior history and English major and member of the worship team, said when you're inside the church it looks like a gym with pews in it.

Dr. Stephen McDaniel, a marketing professor and member of the Breakaway board of directors, said the staff members and students who attend have been an encouragement to him and a role model for his children.

"God's hand is on Gregg's ministry," McDaniel said. "He is really in touch with the Lord."

Without a model to follow, Breakaway has had to chart its own course with prayer and faith, Matte said.

"I've learned how to go from

being a student minister," he said, "to being a minister of students."

Breakaway, in itself, is naturally attractive to people, Howard said.

"I really believe it is God's deal," he said. "You walk into a place where God speaks to you directly."

Students say Breakaway gives more to its audience than just a discussion of a Bible verse or two.

Leah Schwarz, a junior accounting major, said Breakaway has given her everything.

"Whether it's through a song or what Gregg says," she said, "God just gets to me every time."

With its ever-growing popularity, Breakaway continues to challenge its staff.

"I think that if we would have known what was going to happen to it," Matte said, "we would have been scared to death."

Their purpose now is to give students the choice to decide if they want to give Jesus Christ a chance in their lives, Matte said. They don't try to push it down anybody's throat.

"You can sit and listen for 10 years and never make a decision, or you can give Him a chance in your life and he will blow you away," Matte said. "It has changed all of us. The choice is up to you."

Class teaches the art of body language

By Margaret Claughton
The Battalion

Students who enroll in Dr. Beth Lepoire's non-verbal communication class will soon learn there is a lot more to body language than crossing your arms and rolling your eyes.

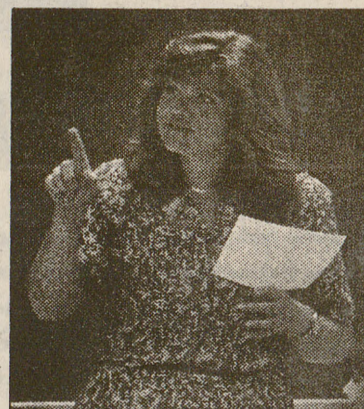
Lepoire, an assistant professor in speech communications, focuses her class on the many aspects of human behavior that make up non-verbal communication.

In the first half of her class, Lepoire said, she begins by showing the students all the aspects that make up non-verbal communication by dividing them into seven different categories.

The first category, Kinesics, formed from the Greek word for "movement", refers to all forms of body movements such as gestures or facial expressions.

"This is what you generally think of as body language," Lepoire said. "Such as the movement of the eyes and hands."

Vocalics, a second category, is one of the richest channels in non-verbal communication, according to Lepoire. Vocalics



Lepoire

refers to the aspects of the voice, other than the spoken word, that are used to affect the way we communicate. The pitch of our voice, the loudness, sighs and the pauses in our voice are all important indicators of how we are really feeling, Lepoire said.

"In fact, kinesics and vocalics together are stronger cues of communication than verbal communication is," Lepoire said.

Physical appearance is another

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