

I had just finished closing up the food stand I ran at Hershey Park when I got the call. My mother wouldn't tell me what happened, she wanted to tell me in person, so I made the half hour drive home with cold dread clutching at my heart. I had never heard her sound like that, and I knew someone had died. Nothing could prepare me to find out two people had died, two people with so much promise, potential, life to live and goodness to give to the world. My cousins Jillian and Lindsay were 21 and 19 respectively when they were killed in a fire that shouldn't have happened.

After I found out, I couldn't move from the couch where I was sitting. I stayed there all night. The next 2 days passed in a haze. I didn't do anything at all. The only thing I remember is telling my Fiancé, now wife. I couldn't talk to anyone else about it. I wasn't ready to tell people of the unimaginable thing that happened to my family, and then be met with whatever well meaning thing they had to say. Because you can't say anything. You can't imagine what it's like if it hasn't happened to you. And I'm just a cousin. I can't imagine how it feels for my aunt, my uncle of blessed memory, and my cousin, the girls' brother.

My family has always been very close, extended family gathering together for holidays, weddings, birthdays. We are so used to gathering together for happy occasions that gathering together for the girls funeral felt like inverted reality, like living in the twilight zone. But we showed up, people coming in from across the country to support my aunt and uncle and cousin.

At every family gathering from here on out, we will be missing two of us.

I remember when the girls were born. I remember playing all together at the beach. I remember cracking up at jokes, watching way too much tv, celebrating at birthday parties, making each other laugh at the dinner table, picking apples, going to fairs. I cherish these memories, but my family should have more than memories. They should be here, too.

This Nightmare come to life was avoidable. It should not have happened. But the terrifying reality is that it could happen again G-d forbid, to another family. Action must be taken, safety must be a priority. When people go on a vacation, they deserve to know they are staying somewhere safe. They deserve to return home.