

## NOT EVERYONE FAILED THE CHEMISTRY FINAL

Lisa Yaeger

(1) As we were cruising along the highway with the fresh breeze of summer whipping our hair to a tangled frenzy, I could not help cranking the tunes to Alice Cooper's "School's Out for the Summer." Because after tomorrow morning, June 23, 1982, that long awaited fantasy would be reality. Occasionally, Holly and I would suffer momentary bouts of guilt because we should have been studying Chemistry rather than heading to see Sylvester Stallone's latest smash hit, Rocky III. However, I had only to adjust the volume of the stereo upward, and any thoughts pertaining to homework were quickly drowned out by the music. For tonight we were free, and life was fun. At least that's what I thought until 11:15 when I parked the car in the driveway, only fifteen minutes later than my designated curfew. I knew something was wrong when my dad did not start lecturing me about my chronic tardiness. I still don't know who finally told me--I only heard the words thundering in my brain over and over, "Wendy has died!"

(2) My first thought was that that was impossible--that Wendy had to take the Chemistry final tomorrow at 8:00 a.m. along with the rest of our class. Wendy Fiorella could not be dead; she was only seventeen and soon to be a senior. After the first shock, I listened to my mother repeat the story she had heard on the radio. Wendy had been playing basketball and left to drive home to take a shower before meeting her boyfriend. She was on the outskirts of town, driving over a familiar road. Yet, that little dip in the road caught Wendy unaware, and she overcompensated in order to avoid hitting a mailbox. The car turned over three times before all motion ceased. Wendy, vivacious as always, was chattering to the firemen as they carried her to the ambulance. "Would someone please grab my folder from the car?" she asked. "I have to study for an exam tomorrow. I'm not doing so well, and I really need to study." They were the last words she ever uttered.

(3) The next morning I heard the gruesome report on the radio myself. It was terrible. How could the announcer be so impersonal? Didn't he care that Wendy Fiorella had just died, causing a major upset in our community? However, the worst part was not over. The silence in the gym, where everyone gathered for the science finals, was awesome. The heat was stifling, and no breeze circulated within those claustrophobic walls. Normally all of us kids would have been laughing and anxiously awaiting the end of our last exam. Not this June 23. Every person had thought of Wendy as a friend. How could one not be attracted to her bubbly personality and happy-go-lucky smile? Because she had been so well known and popular with everyone her absence was sharply felt. The gym was transformed into a mausoleum, and we sat at our desks in a nearly comatose state. There was only one empty seat;

no one would dare miss a final. That one conspicuous seat drew all our attention and slapped our faces with the cold reality of Wendy's death.

(4) I still remember Dr. Burke's somber face as he told us how unfortunate it was to be gathered in a room filled with such immense sadness, but that we should only try our best. Somehow we all managed to get through the minimum time period of two hours before we could make our escape. School was out for the summer, only no one was celebrating. For Wendy, school was out forever. The exam grades for the class of 1983 were the lowest in the history of Akron Central School. However, Wendy Fiorella did not fail Chemistry.

(5) Even today when I cheer with the crowds at a sports event in the gym, I think back to that fateful day when no one was cheering and the silence was unbearable. The memory is still vivid; yet time has passed, and I can look back upon the friendship I shared with Wendy as a precious time. The entire school mourned her death, but the memoriam in the 1983 Akronite yearbook eases the pain: "Wendy will be a part of us for a lifetime. She'll run with us in spring, swim and walk barefoot with us in summer, reflect on our mortality and immortality in fall, and await rebirth with us in winter."