

# Public vs. Private: The Epidemic of Social Media

*Added by laureltilton on March 17, 2014.*

I was fourteen when I began to hate Facebook.

I knew my aunt was sick, but nothing prepared me when I logged on that day. Among the mindless banter and chatter, a three word post stopped my heart.

“RIP Aunt Willy”

She was dead.

My dad was five minutes away from calling us.

I shouldn't have found out that way. Instead of arms to fall into, I had a harsh screen to stare at. The post was impersonal. My aunt's 93 years of life couldn't possibly be wrapped up into three words. It would take novels, spin off plot lines, it would take years to jot down the exact way she smiled, the way her house smelled, the doilies that littered her living room. Yet in three words, pixelated, everything drew to a close.

I've noticed this trend throughout the past couple of years. Instead of sharing things intimately, being there in the moment to lend a shoulder to cry on, a congratulatory hug, friendly advice, our generation whips out their phones, shooting words in the form of signals to outer space. Making their mark permanently on a computer screen.

We've lost our touch.

Not addressing the recent events in Talawanda would be poor newswriting. I never knew Kathryn. I still struggle placing a name with a face. But my sister did. My best friends did. And their stories paint her in brilliant colors, the way she laughed, smiled, the way she loved. It's gotten to the point where I feel like I knew her. To the point where my grief isn't just for her friends and family, but because I'll never know her. I'll only hear stories.

I was told of Kathryn's tragedy the night it happened. I thought I would be prepared for what the next day would bring.

I was so incredibly wrong.

Waking up to a barrage of texts, Facebook statuses, Snapchats, all summarizing the life that had once been Kathryn's. Nothing could have prepared me for the wake up call. That life is so much more fragile than we give it credit for.

My sister and I didn't wake up that morning thinking nothing was wrong. We were the lucky ones. We didn't wake up oblivious to the loss that Talawanda had just faced, but some did. They went to bed like they always did. And suddenly, when they woke up, in a flurry of texts, we lost a student forever.

I'm not saying that social media is all bad. In so many ways it can help us thrive and learn. Grieving takes form in many ways, but I fear our generation can no longer determine between what's public and what's private. In times like these we need connection, not a facade on a screen.

I didn't want to find out about my aunt's death through facebook. My best friend shook after waking up to a Twitter post that informed her that Talawanda now has one more empty desk. We didn't need Facebook, Twitter or Snapchat to bring their lives to a close.

We needed comfort. A friend to fall into. Not a harsh white screen.

Our generation will always be known as the technology era.

I just hope it isn't for the wrong reasons.