Hale to Heaven
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English 258 Basic News Writing: Fall 2010

The sea of suits and church hats filled all 25,000 square feet of the sanctuary at Enon Tabernacle Church on Saturday morning. The hour was cold and still, just as the time reached 9 a.m. Lorna and Tony Hale were forced to bury their only son. Melissa Hale was saying goodbye to her only brother. As the preacher eulogized Tony Jr.’s cold and lifeless body, his parents were paralyzed in agonizing thought: How would life go on?

They walked past the gray chrome casket with praying hands stitched on the inside, their son resting peacefully with one hand over the other. The immeasurable amount of white roses framed the casket. Even from the last pew in the church, the beauty of the flowers offered some comfort.

To keep her grief-stricken, 115-pound frame from falling, Lorna placed her hands on the sides of her son’s casket. One mascara plagued tear dripped from her pale brown skin and onto his cheek, as she leaned to kiss him goodbye.
It was last Friday that Tony Hale Jr. lost his life, at the age of 25 in a robbery homicide three blocks from his home. Hale was shot several times, including once in the head. The perpetrators stole his wallet and jewelry.

“The coldest thing I’ve ever felt,” she said. “I wondered if his soul was even there, because when they killed my son, they killed a part of me.”

Though there are no suspects, police reports indicate that robbery was the only motive. Tragedy has been following the Hale family as they lost a nephew to gun violence just three weeks ago.

“We are disheartened by the recent events surrounding our family,” Tony Hale Sr. said. “Right now our focus is healing and our grandchildren.”

Kassandra, 22, Tony Hale Jr.’s girlfriend of seven years, was devastated when she got wind of her boyfriend’s murder. She choked on her tears as she said goodbye to him in a letter she prepared for the funeral.

“I know I can’t see you, or feel your arms caressing my belly, talking to our child. But when we meet again, everything will be perfect. You are an angel now, what more could I ask for?”

Melissa, Hale’s older sister, declined comment.

Tony Hale Jr. had a love for mechanics, specifically motorcycles. “When he wasn’t caring for me and or the kids, he was in the garage working on something,” Kassandra said.
Kinley 2, Karly 3, and Kaleb 5 (the Hale family requested their full names not be used) sat on the first pew, bright-eyed, dressed in all black. Sheltered by age and innocence, the white noise from the microphone distracted them. All they knew was daddy was an angel and he wouldn't be coming home for Thanksgiving.

Allison Wilson, head embalmer for Baker Funeral Home, shared how hard it was losing a stranger. “The thing that hurts me the most is that I often bare others’ sorrow. It comes with the territory but I love my job. But it’s services like this, days like this, where you look into a family’s eyes, especially the children, and literally hurt for them. My heart literally hurts.”

As the family processioned out the brass double doors of the church, they piled silently into the black snake-like limo. Lorna, Tony, Melissa, nor Kassandra looked back as the pallbearers carried the casket to the hearse. Instead, they looked into the eyes of the children, still wondering what life would be like now without Tony.