

## Julia O'Malley

Julia O'Malley writes a general interest column about life and politics in Anchorage and around Alaska. She grew up in Anchorage and has worked at the ADN on and off as a columnist and reporter since 1996. She came back full time as a reporter in 2005.

As a reporter, she covered the court system and wrote extensively about life in Anchorage, including big changes in the city's ethnic and minority communities.

In 2008, she won the Scripps-Howard Foundation's Ernie Pyle award for the best human-interest writing in America. She has also written for the Oregonian, the Juneau Empire and the Anchorage Press.

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## Months after Stevens crash, mourning another fallen star

Posted by adn\_jomalley

Posted: May 9, 2011 - 5:06 pm

In the news about the plane crash that killed Sen. Ted Stevens last August, the headlines read, "Stevens and four others killed." Corey Tindall was one of the four - an asterisk to a historic tragedy.



*Corey Tindall*

Corey's mother, GCI executive Dana Tindall, was also killed in the crash, as were Bill Phillips, a former Stevens aide, and the pilot, Terry Smith.

Corey was 16 years old, a gifted South High sophomore with chestnut hair and big dark eyes. Her kingdom was not the nation or the state or a corporation; it was her family and her friends, most of them on the South High debate team. For them, her death left a hole in the world.

"8/9/10," said her father, John Tindall, "that was my 9/11."

All the things she could have done, he said. Corey's family found a letter in her room after she died. It was marked "Don't open until graduation." Inside was a detailed plan to become a surgeon. She wanted to go to a third-world country, to give people care they couldn't get otherwise. She had talked about being a doctor since she was small, John said.

She would have done it too. Corey was the kind of A student who did her homework on Friday so she didn't have to think about it over the weekend. She wrote poems from the moment she could write at all. The night before she died, she played poker with Stevens and the others, John said, and took them for \$260.

John and Dana were divorced, so Corey belonged to two families. For now, John's way of getting through the ordeal of each day is to ride his bike. He rode every day all winter in the cold and dark -- long distances, hard hills.

And he threw himself into raising money. He created a non-profit that awards travel money for the South debate team. So far he has raised more than \$50,000, and the team, which was at the center of Corey's school life, has traveled and won more competitions than ever.

Corey had a talent for debate, easily absorbing facts, deft at building and deconstructing arguments. She took first place last year in the Northern Lights debate competition.

"The kid was on cloud nine," her father said. "It was like she won the Heisman Trophy. I wanted other kids to get that feeling."

I met some of Corey's good friends, some of the state's and the country's most competitive debaters, in a cluttered classroom at South a few weeks ago.

The Alaska debate season is over. There are close to 25 students on the team, but those still practicing are the core, and they are headed to national debate tournaments in Dallas and Washington, D.C. Corey's fund will help them go. An MVP award, which she won as a freshman, has been named in her honor.

Corey's friends Kenny Hubbell, 18, Tavish Logan, 17, and Dylan Hardenbergh, 17, stooped over a large Tupperware file, organizing papers for a debate on military policy in Turkey.

They are lanky, serious kids. Kenny, a senior, wears a watch that seems big on his skinny wrist as he unconsciously twirls a pen around his fingers. Dylan, a junior, stands with his arms crossed, looking professorial. Tavish, with longish hair and braces, was Corey's debate partner.

We all took seats to watch Austin Heyroth, 18, go through his speech for an upcoming competition. Austin is among Alaska's best high school debaters. A week after my visit, he became one of the top 24 debaters in the country.

Austin started in about politics between Israel, Palestine and Iran. His body language reminded me of free-style rapping, except he was talking about "asymmetric warfare" and not rhyming.

Later we met at IHOP on the south side. The boys crowded into a booth. Austin is going to Columbia University. Kenny had just decided on Princeton. They wolfed down plates of waffles. I asked how people saw debaters at school. The club didn't attract the most social people, they said. But cool is relative.

"Debate kind of distills some of the smartest, wittiest people in school," Kenny said.

"We're hardcore nerds," said Tavish, cutting to the chase.

When Corey arrived as a freshman, she changed the team dynamics. She was outgoing. They didn't party or drink. She organized them, planning brunches and cooking parties and arranging dance-dates. She got everybody hooked on grilled pineapple.

"She had a real ability to force you out of your shell," Kenny said.

How did losing Corey change the team, I asked. They got quiet. Grieving made them closer, they said. Sometimes, unexpectedly, one of them will choke up at a tournament. They didn't talk about it much, but she was on everybody's mind.

Later in the week, they e-mailed me. Tavish described a long drive with Corey, dropping her off just before curfew, not knowing he'd never see her again. Dylan described an empty feeling at the beginning of school when she wasn't there.

Kenny sent me a long, artful tribute. He considered what column I might write:

"I imagine it can be kind of hard to see one clear plot line in all of this. It's probably easy to see the "And then they came together as a team" story, or the "And they all learned a horrible lesson about grief" story. I have no idea what the ultimate narrative is. Pain, love, and growth? I'm sure that it is different for all of us."

For John Tindall, the loss feels more solitary now. People don't talk about Corey as much anymore.

I wanted to know about Corey, so he and I met last week for coffee. He paged through a binder he carries all the time, with information about Corey's memorial fund. He told me about the students who came into Northrim Bank, slid 10 or 20 dollars across the counter and said, "This is for Corey."

He'd like to expand the fund to support all debate students in Anchorage.

It was afternoon. South High kids streamed into the coffee shop. As he and I talked outside, by the door, a girl poked her head out and yelled, "Dad!" into the parking lot. John stopped in mid-sentence. His eyes welled.

The ache hung there. Corey, daughter, sister, friend, so full of talent and promise, now vanished, a life broken off, as incomplete as an unfinished dream.