

Night Games

It is 10:00 pm on a Friday night. Ten cheap flashlights illuminate an elm tree in the middle of Kenwood Park, creating a beacon for those who saw the hastily written Facebook message and are still trying to find their way through the dark. Beneath its phosphorescent branches, a small group of high schoolers gossip. The sound of casual conversation falls from our lips and diffuses out into the night, mingling with the distant whine of a siren. We are waiting. More teenagers arrive, all drawn by the same need to forget the past week's pressures with a late-night game of Capture the Flag. For a few hours, we will put aside our academic ailments and sprint through the park on an epic quest for victory. The wait is over. The flashlights turn off, and the illuminated tree is swallowed by the night.

We march, climbing the hill to the plateau where, during the daytime, normal civilians bring their dogs to frolic with their unleashed friends. But now teens rule the area, energized by the air. A hand juts into the atmosphere, silencing the spirited crowd. We number off, one two, one two, until two teams stand facing each other, tossing playful insults back and forth like a game of beach volleyball. Above the banter I yell the rules and give each team two flashlights: one to mark the jail and one to act as the flag. Properly equipped, we run off to compose elaborate attack plans, leaving thoughts of homework and college applications behind as we slip effortlessly into the intensity of the game. Even the cell phones are shut off, and soon silence blankets the entire park. Only occasional shrieks of laughter reveal their quickening heartbeats. Night Games has begun.

Night Games isn't a club, a sport, or a society, but a group of high school students who every so often wage barefoot war on the fields of Kenwood Park. Dashing through the

moonlit grass, we can be anything. A rescue squad risking their lives to save a shivering hostage; ninjas crawling through the jungle to free their captured empress; Indiana Jones running out of a crumbling pyramid with the Holy Grail cradled in his callused hands. When high school stress reaches its boiling point, and the future accelerates out of control, we find freedom in the surge of adrenaline that comes from sneaking behind enemy lines to retrieve that flashlight flag.

The sense of imagination that surrounds Night Games has a purpose. The problems facing the world today are vast, and the task ahead of us is daunting. Whether it's global warming or immigration reform or the war in Iraq, the message is clear: our generation has work to do. However, instead of getting overwhelmed (which is the usual reaction) we instead must take a moment to mentally relax. That's where Night Games comes in.

I started this event in an attempt to reduce the stress of entering today's chaotic world. Our DNA is telling us to leave adolescence behind, and our consciousness is telling us to make a difference, but every once in a while we all need a moment to remember what it felt like to stay out past our bed time. Night Games is just that. It is a reminder that we can enjoy a Friday night without loud music or the pressure to fit in or look sharp or grow up. It's a small break from the challenging task of changing the world. That's what makes it so much fun.

It is 10:00 pm now, and the sun set long ago. For some, darkness signals the end of activity, but for us, the night is just the beginning.