

IN THE END



ILLUSTRATION: SHAHRUKH IKHTEAR

2003 was the year which marked the start of all my troubles at school. I didn't belong with the bullies, or the studious ones. I forgot what it felt like to be confident about myself and I became a husk of the person I used to be. My only escape from reality would be music and video games. During this period of turmoil, I discovered Linkin Park and I was instantly hooked. The lyrics and the Nu-Metal riffs all combined to form songs that I could relate to on a daily basis. Most importantly, Chester Bennington's voice resonated with the pain that resided within me.

I could never lash out and tell the world what I was going through. People would laugh it off saying it's nothing and that there was something wrong with me. I felt like I was always responsible for my suffering. Linkin Park's songs taught me that it's okay to hurt, to be in pain. Chester's voice helped me through so many days when I was at my most vulnerable. The feeling of disappointing someone is excruciating itself, but it's worse when that person is yourself. The lyrics showed me that you will never be able to live up to people's expectations if you carve out a life that is based on their terms.

Between that time and now, I've changed a lot as a person. I'm glad I went through that ordeal because I learned a lot, and Chester and the entire band were largely responsible for it. I even started singing because I wanted to sing like him. My foray into learning more about music stemmed from the band. I will not rest easy knowing that Chester will not sing anymore, but I hope the legacy he left behind will shine a light on some kid who feels like he isn't worth anything to anyone.

– Shahrukh Ikhtear

The music scene of the early 2000s was entirely swallowed up by Linkin Park for kids my age. Mp3 players were still new technology and iPods were considered the sort of luxury in my middle class family that got followed up by a stern look if you wanted one. My eldest sister was the one who bought the Sony CD Walkman. I didn't understand music back then. I just assumed it was something that you needed to like in order to become a functional member of society. In fact, the only reason I liked music was to fit in with my (much) older siblings. The day my brother brought home the Hybrid Theory disc in 2001, everything changed and that's not even an exaggeration. My 7-year-old soul could finally relate to music and a brand new door was opened for me through Linkin Park. Not to mention that the disc had Crazy Town's *Butterfly* at the end for some reason. From that point onwards, Linkin Park was always a staple in my playlists until the turn of the decade. Chester Bennington was the voice that taught me what music is. When he left, it was difficult — still is difficult — to process exactly what happened.

The question that keeps plaguing me is how much a role we fans played. Ever since Minutes to Midnight, I laughed off Linkin Park as has-beens who can't channel their adolescent energy anymore; artists who haven't evolved at all. If you let me list reasons for why I didn't listen to Linkin Park, I wouldn't run out of words. But at the end of the day, it was me and countless others who didn't give Linkin Park, and Chester, the chance to evolve with their fans. We wanted the old Linkin Park while at the same time we rarely listened to the old Linkin Park. We were only there to criticise and dehumanise.

I still remember the Points of Authority video with robots they aired on Cartoon Network that I would wait for.

I wonder how I feel about the tape deck of my car that has the Reanimation cassette stuck inside it for the past 12 years.

That's a lot of regret you left us with, Chester. A lot of it. I personally am sorry for being an overall horrible fan.

– Rumman R Kalam

I will remember you.

Back in 2002 when I was just 10, I was introduced to this wildfire of a song called *In the End*. Everyone knew the lyrics and it was crazy how we'd rap to you and Shinoda all day. I saw the blonde you in that CGI-ridden music video on VH1 and bought all the Linkin Park albums at one go. Did I crawl into the music that shook the world? I sure as hell did.

As you grew in fame, I grew in age – in another side of the world. Your fever kept me up many nights, with earbuds blaring the sounds of *Hybrid Theory*, *Collision Course*, and *Minutes to Midnight*. I often argued with my friends that your soft numbers were better than the ones that took much of your vocal cords. Take everything from the inside and throw it all away? Well, you sure have.

I was one of the millions of millennials around the world whose life you'd touched. Maybe the lyrics of your songs weren't meant for me or my age. Yet how beautifully they made me happy, sad, angry, forgiving, but mostly made me think about life. You made me question a lot; you had some answers too. You broke habits and helped me realise that I belong somewhere. You belong in our hearts, Chester.

That kid in me would surface over and over again with every news or release of a new track. Oh, how I have spent countless nights revisiting the music that played an integral part in shaping who I am today. Chester, you are a blessing to our unheard voices; you are a hero to a generation that's constantly under a microscope.

Thank you for being in the better part of the best part of my life. Rest in peace.

– Kazi Akib Bin Asad