

# bullycide

IN AMERICA



Moms speak out about  
the bullying/suicide connection

COMPILED BY BRENDA HIGH



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*By Brenda High, Michelle Calco, Summer Clinton, Tammy Epling, Debra Johnston, Cathy Swartwood Mitchell and Rochelle Sides. Special Submission and Contributions by Judy Kuczynski, Robin Todd, Adrianna Sgarlata and The Readings.*

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## *Foreword*

*An Excerpt*

By Judy M. Kuczynski MS

This is a book of real stories about real kids. Kids who took their own lives because they thought it was their only way out of a hopeless situation. It is about the tragic choices they made in an effort to end the pain - when they believed there was no other solution.

It is told by mothers who are willing to share their own personal pain as they watched their children suffer and struggle. It is about their own efforts to advocate for their children while they continue to deal with their own devastating loss and the aftermath of bullycide.

The mothers who tell their stories in this book do not need researchers or experts to make the connection between bullying and suicide. They know firsthand that as long as we intellectualize this phenomenon and debate it, it will remain an impersonal subject of speculation, avoidance, paralysis, guilt, and blame rather than one of responsibility and change.

I invite you all into the reality of these stories, and the struggle revealed by these mothers to transform the pain and senseless loss of a beloved child into something that gives hope and life to all young people, and their families.

## **Bullycide...A Lesson and A Warning!**

*An Excerpt*

*A parent's perspective... by Brenda High (Jared's mom)*

**The Mission** - Bullycide in America is designed as a tool to raise awareness, inform and educate all people that bullying and its tragic consequences are a real phenomenon. Through this education we will enact change for future prevention.

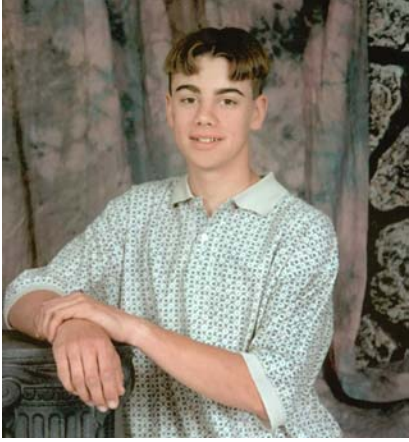
**Bullycide** - What is Bullycide? In this book we will examine many stories of bullycide, all a little bit different, yet all connected. What was it that caused these wonderful children to take such drastic measures? Were there consistent elements that played a role in these tragic events?

**The Lesson** - Sometimes it is only through the hard lessons of others that we learn what path we should take in our lives...but it doesn't usually start out that way.

**The Warning** - When you look at the pictures of our children, you will notice that they were normal children, with normal faces. They had normal personalities with normal feelings and emotions. They were just kids in every way.

You have undoubtedly heard it said, in many contexts, "if it could happen to me, it could happen to you". This is as true as true can be. No one is immune. No child, no family, no community. Bullying exists everywhere, in many forms. And its tragic consequences are very real.

Although this book is filled with sad stories, it is also a book about hope. It is our desire to help others, and educate those who read our stories, so that they do not have to endure the same sad fate someday. In talking to the other parents who have contributed their stories to this book, I have found we've all learned common lessons, among them, patience, endurance, empathy and understanding. Our crying eyes have dried a little, and our shaking hands have stilled a bit. We are now ready to share our stories.



## Part I "Like Thieves in the Night"

*Selected Passages*

By Brandon's mom, Cathy Swartwood Mitchell

**Brandon Chris Swartwood - 2/21/82 - 12/16/00**

*...One night, as Brandon stood by me, he said, "I feel dead inside." On a cold December morning, only three weeks later, I was standing by Brandon's dead body, knowing, that despite all my efforts to save my beloved son, the bullies' job had been done too well.*

### ***The Aftermath***

...For several years, I tried to work. I had no focus, no energy and enough anger to do a mass killing of those responsible. Thank God, I had enough maturity, morals and maintained enough sanity, barely, to refrain from seeking revenge. I say "barely" on the sanity thing because I was crazy with grief and anger.

...So there I sat, for the first time in my life, in jail. I had a prescription bottle of pills in my jean jacket. I was an emotional wreck. I emptied the entire bottle into my hand as I contemplated my situation.

## Part II "Fighting the System"

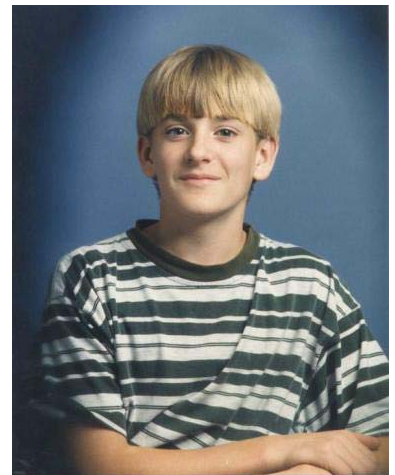
*Selected Passages*

By Jared's mom, Brenda High

**Jared Benjamin High - 09/23/85 - 09/29/98**

*..."Brutus" commenced to brutally assault Jared by picking him up and throwing him on the floor and pushing him against the walls...Several times Jared yelled for help calling, "Teacher, Teacher!"*

*But no one was there to help*



### ***Looking back - Looking forward (10 Steps to Stop Bullying)***

Put yourself into the shoes of a victim of bullying. Every day a child is bullied is an eternity to them. We worry about terrorists coming into our country and doing us harm. A victim of bullying walks into their school each day knowing their terrorist could strike any moment and destroy their wounded spirit again, and again. How long can a child play on the freeway dodging cars before the experience finally becomes too much and they go over the edge?



### Part III Girl to Girl Bullying

*Selected Passages*

By Corinne's mom, Rochelle Sides

**Corinne Wilson - 09/30/91 - 10/06/04**

*The bullying came to a head on Oct. 6, 2004. ...one of the girls slapped her and called her a "whore." They said they wished she were dead and that she should "go home and kill herself."*

*The day my husband and I should have been listening to our daughter perform at the rodeo...we buried her instead*

#### ***Relational Aggression - Girl to Girl Bullying Examined***

...It started slowly with rumors, secrets and exclusion; it progressed to harassment and violence. Like most victims of relational aggression, Corinne blamed herself for her bully's behavior. She internalized her pain and kept the bullying to herself in an attempt to maintain a relationship with her bullies, as many girls do. As a result, it damaged her self-esteem and caused severe depression, which ultimately led to Corinne taking her life. Instantly I realized what I was seeing — what had happened.

### Part IV

#### Hazing—another Form of Bullying

*Selected Passages*

By Matt's mom, Tammy Epling

**Matthew Alexander Epling - 2/10/88 - 7/16/02**

*Little did Matt know that lurking around the corner was a parked car, and three upperclassmen were waiting for them. ...The upperclassmen restrained Matt and his friend and said, "Welcome to high school". Then they proceeded to pour syrup on them, and smash eggs on their heads. Matt fought back and stood up for himself and his friend...The main attacker told Matt, "Stop fighting. This is how it is!"*



#### ***A Personal How-To Guide To Effecting Change***

Hazing has a few different components than bullying, but at the core, they are both about "power and control". One person has power and control, one person does not. Bullying, harassment, and hazing - they are all sick twisted cousins. It is sometimes hard to define when hazing is an assault and when repeated hazing became bullying. In order to make a wider base we wanted to incorporate all of the aspects of bullying, harassment and hazing together into a comprehensive anti bullying plan

## Part V What It Feels Like

*Selected Passages*

By April's mom, Summer Clinton

**April Himes - 4/27/86 - 2/14/00**

*I called April out of her room and told her what I was told. She yelled, "I can't believe you called the school." She went back in her room and slammed the door. After about ten minutes she...asked me to repeat what the vice principal had said. I again repeated what I was told. She was crying...and yelled, "I hate you." Those are the last words I heard from her.*



### ***The Pain of Depression - What It Feels Like***

A person that takes his/her life by suicide is not thinking of themselves or anyone else. A depressed and suicidal person is not thinking - the brain is not functioning well enough to have any real thoughts. There are only feelings. It's all about emotions. You feel sad, upset, unloved, disparity, hopeless, helpless, alone, gloomy, weighted down and rejection.



## Part VI Recipe for a Disaster

*Selected Passages*

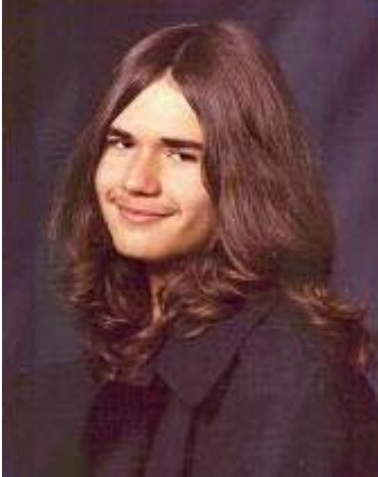
By Kristina's mom, Michelle Calco

**Kristina Arielle Calco - 12/26/89 - 12/4/05**

*For whatever reason, in the wee morning hours of Sunday December 4th, Kristina lost her focus. The stage had been set and with such a frail and sensitive soul, she just could not bear the pain that had consumed her. In that one tiny infinitesimal instant, Kristina made the choice to kill herself.*

### ***Recipe for a Disaster: Bullying to Depression, Depression to Suicide***

Take one part shy & sensitive, impressionable, naïve young girl and add a lack of self-esteem. Slowly stir in puberty. Add typical teenage pressures including friends, grades, sports, extracurricular activities and being perpetually on Instant Chat. Add a daily dose of teasing, ridicule and torment by a group of boys and then garnish with what turns out to be a sexually charged and romantic online relationship with a boy from another high school. Add to this a seeming inability for intervention in any way, shape or form. Shake well and then let sit.



## Part VII Death by Computer

*Selected Passages*

By Jeffrey's mom, Debra Johnston

**Jeffrey Scott Johnston - 12/21/89 - 6/29/05**

*With the keyboard as his weapon, the bully violated the sanctity of my home and murdered my child just as surely as if he had crawled through a broken window and choked the life from Jeff with his bare hands. It was not a death that was quick and merciful. It was carried out with lies, rumors and calculated cruelty portioned out day by day.*

### *Special Submissions*

#### *The New Wave - A Warning About Cyberbullying*

By Adrianna Sgarlata, Director, Bully Police Virginia; Miss Virginia 2006

*Selected Passages*

The problem of cyberbullying is compounded by the very nature of its existence in the electronic world, where words can have a shelf life of months, years, and even decades. The tradition of home as a refuge from bullies on the school playground is over. The Internet is a new playground, and there are no off hours.

#### *Judging the Methods of Suicide*

By Jared's mom, Brenda High

*Selected Passages*

I didn't want to write this chapter, but I believe it needs to be written. There will be those who will read these stories and almost certainly pass judgment on three of the mothers in this book based on one thing, the method of suicide our children chose...

Blaming a gun for a death, by suicide, school shooting, murder or any crime will not change anything in our society. Prevention doesn't come from analyzing the method of death, but from analyzing the root causes of death...do you kill a weed by cutting off the top of the leaves or do you go in and dig out the root?

*"JUDGE not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again..." Matt. 7:1*

## *Influences of The Media on Bullying*

By Corinne's mom, Rochelle Sides

*Selected Passages*

Thirty murders. Forty beatings. Does this sound like figures from a police report? No, unfortunately they are the number of violent acts a group of sixth-graders observed while watching one hour of prime-time television.

...As parents and members of a community, we constantly ask our selves, how does TV and film affect our children? We know that TV has become increasingly more violent and graphic. How much has it increased?

## *Shame and Blame; The Code of Silence*

By Tina's mom, Judy Kuczynski

*Selected Passages*

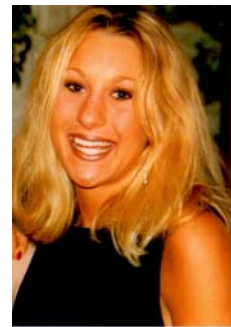
...**A code of silence** is a part of the protective boundaries established and enforced by peer groups, gangs and families. This can be seen as a major influence in the dynamics of domestic abuse. Group members (family members) are censored and threatened for violating the secrets of the inner workings of the group (family).

...**Shame** is attached to certain acts and attitudes. Among those postures is appearing to be a victim in any way. This is the same attitude that holds victims responsible in some way for being raped. When victims believe that no one can protect them from retaliation they see no reason to tell or report incidents committed against them. Victims become isolated when they believe that nothing can be done to change their situation. They become isolated, depressed, and filled with despair.

...As parents, we are the only ones who will advocate for our children. As we learn more about this problem, we will come to understand that the shame and guilt belong to a society that turns the other way **and blames** the victim.

Tina was a pretty, friendly high school sophomore. In junior high she had been in the "popular" group but in high school she was the target of abuse and humiliation. Everyday she found a different threatening note on her locker. The day I saw it, it said "Die Bitch!"

Tina left that school before Christmas of her junior year and went to the local community college instead. Tina was 16. A year later, when she would have been a senior in high school, she was killed in a car accident.



**A Proclamation of  
BULLYCIDAL AWARENESS DAY  
Be It Resolved...**

**WHEREAS**, on April 20th, 1999, a school shooting took place at Columbine High School in Colorado - the terror ended in the death of fifteen students, a teacher, and the suicides of the shooters; several students were wounded; *Columbine was real*; and

**WHEREAS**, on April 16, 2007, the Virginia Tech shooting, the nations deadliest school shooting - the terror ended in the death of thirty-two individuals, including the suicide of the shooter; several students were wounded; *Virginia Tech was real*; and

**WHEREAS**, these tragedies left an unforgettable mark in U.S. history, and in our hearts and memories; bullies, victims, terrorists - *the cause and effects are related and are real*; and

**WHEREAS**, educators, parents and community members recognize the warnings and lessons to be taken from these tragedies and the importance of being proactive in preventing the beginnings of such destructive behavior that is in our schools today; *bullying...school terrorism...is real*; and

**WHEREAS**, many children are faced with terror, daily, through harassment, assaults and verbal threats in our schools, on the playground, on school busses; for many children school is a battlefield; thus, a source of terrorism; and

**WHEREAS**, educators must come together with parents and community members to safeguard schools for our children, and, through our recognition of the serious issues that face them each day, offer our children a school environment that provides a positive, safe and secure learning climate – where all children feel they belong, and know that they are respected for who they are - promoting excellence in citizenship; and one that includes a bully prevention program to help ensure fair and effective discipline; and

**WHEREAS**, educators, parents and community members have publicly expressed concern about the war in our schools – the bullying of our children; it is important that we acknowledge and heighten awareness about this serious issue, and the negative effects of bullying, including the long-term damage it can cause; far too often bullying results in “bullycide” a suicide attributed to bullying; and

**WHEREAS**, it is the personal responsibility of all citizens to protect our children; it is time for us to stand up, speak out and take action against bullying; and

**WHEREAS**, in remembrance of Columbine High School, Virginia Tech and the loved ones that have been lost to the tragic effects of bullying, and bullycide, we must persevere in our year-round battle against bullying, and **it is appropriate that we designate September 29, 2007 and September 29<sup>th</sup> thereafter, as Bullycide Awareness Day.**

**Written by Robin Todd, Bully Police Arizona Director**

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## Lyrics to Wanda's Song

Chris Reading, Eric Reading, John Paul Lourence  
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Wanda was the one girl we claimed we never knew  
Lincoln High School's homely-coming queen  
She barely graduated with the class of '92  
Voted most unlikely to succeed

Rumor had it Wanda never knew who her daddy was  
At least that's what we spread all over town  
I guess we always thought that we were building ourselves up  
With the sticks and stones we threw to break her down

All the years we thought it didn't matter  
Cuz we never saw her cry  
And Wanda never asked us

### Chorus

*Why, do you hurt me, and treat me like you do  
What have I ever done to, deserve this, from you  
Would you do the things you do  
If you were me and I were you*

Looking back I see the pain that we put Wanda thru  
And just where all the fun and games were leading  
We didn't realize the damage sticks and stones would do  
Cuz it was deep inside Wanda was bleeding

The paper said her death was self-inflicted  
But was it suicide?  
Cuz the note she wrote said ...

### Repeat Chorus

### Bridge

For every action there's reaction  
Broken hearts don't just happen  
If you put yourself in their position  
There's no good answer to the question ...

### Repeat Chorus

**Tag:** Wanda was the one girl we claimed we never knew

*Listen to the song online at [www.TheReadings.net](http://www.TheReadings.net)*