

## Richland mom speaks out against bullying

Monday, October 1st, 2007 - Excerpts

By Sara Schilling, Herald staff writer

April Himes was sensitive, compassionate and fun. She loved being outdoors and going camping. At Thanksgiving, she'd help her mom, Carol Clinton of Richland, make dressing for the whole family.

"She could make a great pecan pie. I miss that," Clinton said. "Thanksgiving is hard."

That's because April is gone.

The 13-year-old killed herself in 2000 after being repeatedly teased and bullied at school. It's been seven years, but the pain still sounds fresh in Clinton's voice when she talks about her daughter.

She agreed to tell April's story in a book about the link between bullying and suicide in hopes of educating others. "**Bullycide in America: Moms Speak Out About the Bullying/Suicide Connection**" was compiled by Brenda High of Pasco, whose teenage son, Jared, shot himself in 1998.

High started the group Bully Police USA and has lobbied for anti-bullying laws nationwide. The book has chapters written by several moms of "bullycide" victims throughout the country. It's available for purchase online.

"If it could happen to us ... it could happen to you. If people can read the book and see the danger signs and know what to look for, then we've done our job," High said.

For Clinton, writing about her daughter's death wasn't easy. She stopped and started. She thought about giving up. April, who had been treated for depression, missed a lot of school her eighth-grade year because of bullying, her mom said. April and her family had moved from Kennewick the end of the school year before.

Kids at school taunted April, Clinton said. One boy reportedly said she'd be prettier with a bag over her face. April hung herself in her bedroom on Valentine's Day.

Clinton said school officials didn't do enough to help her daughter. But she doesn't blame the kids at school who bullied her.

They didn't understand what they were doing, she said. She hopes the book will change that for other kids.

"It was the last thing I could do for her. She would (never) hurt anyone's feelings. She was really sensitive. If she thought she could help somebody else, she would," Clinton said.

"It may sound silly, but (as) I've been writing, I felt I spent these last nine months with her. I just felt close to her during this time."

## **Cape mother tells of son's tragic bully encounter**

### **Moms talk about bully/suicide link in book**

By Jason Wermers - [jwermers@news-press.com](mailto:jwermers@news-press.com) - **NewsPress.com**

Monday October 01, 2007 - Excerpts

A Cape Coral mother is sharing the story her son never got to tell in a recently published book.

Debbie Johnston, a first-grade teacher at Hector A. Cafferata Jr. Elementary, often speaks about her son Jeff, who was 15 when he took his own life in June 2005, after enduring more than two years of cyberbullying at the hands of a classmate. Here are words Jeff was able to share, during happier times, as a seventh-grader at Trafalgar Middle School. His mother taught eighth-grade science there at the same time.

"I'm number six in a line of seven," Jeff wrote in 2002. "I'm William's big brother and my Dad's number-one son. I'm uncle to Alex, Danny and Amanda, and my mother's right-hand man. ... I'm a loyal friend, and a good secret-keeper. Sometimes, it's easier to describe who we are by examining what we mean to the people around us."

The situation turned sour not long after he wrote this essay. A classmate accused Jeff in phone calls and Internet postings of being a "stalker," said everyone hated him and a girl in whom he had shown a romantic interest "was just playing with" him. "In an open journal, the bully recorded the details of each milestone in his mission to demean and dehumanize Jeff," Johnston wrote in the book, "***Bullicide in America: Moms Speak Out About the Bullying/Suicide Connection.***"

"Like the serial killer that is compelled to taunt and goad the authorities with the details of his crime, the bully brazenly published what he was doing on his Web site. No effort was made to conceal his identity."

The Internet attacks continued throughout Jeff's eighth-grade year, and he found himself increasingly isolated at school. The situation appeared to cool off when Jeff went to Ida S. Baker High in Cape Coral for his ninth-grade year, while the bully attended another school. But Jeff wrote in an e-mail his mother later found in his computer's trash can that he would "never get over eighth grade."

Brenda High, founder and co-director of Bully Police USA, compiled the book. She formed Bully Police after her son Jared killed himself just six days after he turned 13 in 1998. High, of Pasco, Wash., said she told a police officer inquiring why Jared would kill himself, "he's never been the same since he was beat up at school."

Since then, High has made it her mission to help get stronger anti-bullying laws passed in states around the country. Part of that effort is the "Bullicide" book, in which she borrowed a term coined by author and journalist Neil Marr to describe youths who commit suicide after being bullied.

"I got the idea to tell not just my story, but a lot of moms' stories," High said. She had befriended Johnston at an anti-bullying conference in Florida.

"Debbie's fantastic," High said. "I love all my moms. She is great. Her chapter is very well-written. She probably should write her own book some day."

Johnston has made it her mission the last two years to get an anti-bullying law passed in honor of Jeff. The measure would not allow physical location or time of access of a computer-related incident to be raised as defense in any disciplinary action or prosecution under this law. The Florida Legislature has not passed the bill the last two years, despite support in the House. That is because it has run into an obstacle in the Senate Education Pre-K-12 Appropriations Committee, which has blocked the legislation from going to the full Senate in both 2006 and 2007. Johnston hopes to overcome that hurdle in the 2008 session.

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## Beauty battles ugly trend

Miss Virginia 2006 would rather be remembered for her work against bullying than for winning the crown.

[BY KIM O'BRIEN ROOT](#) | *September 17, 2007 - Excerpts*

Many know her as Miss Virginia 2006. But Adrianna Sgarlata was once a victim of bullying. As a child, the then-bespectacled fifth-grader was called names by classmates who also threw spitballs at her. She faked stomachaches to stay home from school.

Fast-forward more than a decade. When deciding on a service platform as a pageant contestant, Sgarlata thought back to her childhood. Soon she found herself the executive director of the state chapter of Bully Police USA, a nationwide anti-bullying organization.

In 2004, she successfully lobbied to have anti-bullying laws passed in Virginia.

Her year as Miss Virginia over, Sgarlata is back to being a graduate student at George Mason University in Northern Virginia. But she still makes time to visit schools across the state to spread her anti-bullying message and to encourage kids to speak up.

Q: How did you get involved with Bully Police USA?

A: As a Miss America contestant, you have to have a platform. I started realizing how big bullying had been when I was young. It made a big impact on my life, and I knew other kids were going through it at school on a daily basis.

Q: You wrote about cyberbullying for Bully Police USA's new book, "**Bullycide in America**." What is cyberbullying?

A: Bullying that occurs over the Internet. It occurs in a lot of different forms. You saw what happened to Miss Teen South Carolina. (Last month, 18-year-old Lauren Caitlin Upton became a YouTube sensation after giving a confused, mangled response to a live pageant question about Americans' knowledge of geography.)

When something like that happens, and someone puts it on YouTube, in effect they're laughing at her. It's victimization over and over and over again. It can be on a social networking site. It can be on e-mails, instant messages.

Q: How would you rather be remembered: As Miss Virginia or the person who got a child to speak out against bullying?

A: Bullying, by far. Again, Miss Virginia was such a special time in my life.

But I never wanted to be Miss Virginia so I could have a title attached to my name. I wanted to do it so I could have a positive effect and affect change in somebody's life.

## freep.com – Detroit Free Press

*Saying no to bullying - After son's suicide, mom tells his story to help others*

September 15, 2007 - Excerpts

**BY PATRICIA MONTEMURRI**

What happened to Tammy Epling's son could easily be dismissed as a practical joke or rite of passage roughhousing.

After his last day of eighth grade in 2002, Matt Epling was cornered by some high school kids, who poured syrup on him, smashed eggs on his head and roughed him up as part of a "welcome to high school."

Six weeks later, Matt committed suicide in his family's East Lansing home. His parents believe their creative, athletic, accomplished son was humiliated by the assault, felt betrayed by people he knew who lured him into the situation, and felt law enforcement gave his complaint little heed.

Tammy, 42, a preschool teacher, has described her family's tragedy in an upcoming book, "**Bullicide in America: Moms Speak Out About the Bullying/Suicide Connection.**" The book recounts the personal stories of seven mothers who've lived through a child's suicide because of bullying.

Tammy and her husband, Kevin Epling, have channeled their energy into raising awareness about bullying's impact and what schools, parents and young people can do to prevent it. They have backed state legislation that requires school districts to have policies addressing bullying, known as Matt's Safe School Law.

"When you go through grief, you can let the grief take you. Or take the grief and do something positive," Tammy explains.

The Eplings reported the assault on Matt. Even after repeated calls by Kevin, it was three weeks before they heard from police again. Matt's suicide happened on July 16, the day before a scheduled meeting with investigators. One of Matt's attackers received one-year probation for the assault.

"We don't want this to happen to anyone else," Tammy says. "Matt always gave so much." With a law that requires schools to establish anti-bullying policies, "he'll keep giving."

Says Kevin: "We're trying to get people to understand that bully prevention is really crime prevention."

The Eplings have spoken to community groups, school associations and police.

One of Matt's former classmates, a high school swimmer, told Tammy the team did away with annual initiation pranks because of what they learned from Matt's death.

As a teacher, Tammy says she knows that young kids can be taught simple ways to forestall bullying.

"I always make sure I address it when I see it," Tammy says. For young kids, she says, it's as simple as teaching a hand signal and the command "Stop. I don't like that."

The Eplings say young people understand the impact of bullying. The Eplings say adults too readily dismiss bullying as kids being kids. Yet, those adults can look back and remember uncomfortable incidents of bullying from their childhood.

"If it doesn't hurt, why are you carrying around that memory in your head?" asks Kevin, a manager of multimedia at Michigan State University. "The kids really get it. They want somebody to help."