

Bullied to death: The tragic story of Amanda Todd

Wednesday, October 17, 2012 - A Heart Without Compromise; Advocating for Children by Jerome Elam

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Jerome Elam



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October 17, 2012 - Amanda Todd was only one month away from her sixteenth birthday when she took her own life.

Bullied to the point where she believed her life no longer had meaning, she succumbed to the insurmountable pain that her life had become and released her grasp on the world that had caused her so much torment.

How did this beautiful, bright and talented young woman cease to believe her life had value?

It all started with a simple mistake made by a naive teenager who just wanted to be loved. Amanda lived in the suburban town of Port Coquitlam, just outside the city of Vancouver, Canada, but her ordeal had begun almost four years earlier and miles away.

At twelve years old, Amanda Todd was a normal outgoing teenager who enjoyed spending time with her friends. During a video chat with several of them, an anonymous user asked Amanda to flash in front of the webcam and, in a moment of teen naivety, she revealed her breasts. She had assumed the person who had made the request was another teen, but as time progressed Amanda realized she was dealing with a much darker force. The anonymous user tried to blackmail her and asked her to put on a "show" for him, and if she refused, he would send the video of her breasts to everyone she knew. Soon the police were knocking on Amanda's door with the news that the video of her exposing herself had been distributed over the Internet.

The anonymous user soon turned into a stalker and relentlessly hounded Amanda online, sending the video to all of her Facebook friends. She began to experience depression, anxiety and panic disorder, and turned to drugs and alcohol to escape the mounting pain in her daily life.

Amanda changed schools but the stalker followed her, creating a Facebook page using an image of her breasts as an avatar. She became the target of bullies, and as desperation mounted, Amanda began cutting herself.

Again she changed schools hoping for a "fresh start," but when a boy that she liked from her old school contacted her, she agreed to meet him. The two had sex and sometime later Amanda was shocked to find the boy had lied to her and had a girlfriend who had found out about the two of them.

Gathering a large group, the girlfriend cornered Amanda, telling her, "No one around here likes you!" The girlfriend severely beat Amanda and left her in a ditch until her father arrived to take her home. She drank bleach when she arrived home to escape the ever-increasing pain in her life.

After taunts on Facebook about her attempted suicide, Amanda changed schools yet again but the darker side of social media began to haunt her as she was tagged in photos and called a "porn star" by students.

As hope became nothing more than a mirage to Amanda Todd, she posted a video on YouTube in a plea for freedom from the hell she had been imprisoned in. Four years earlier Amanda Todd was young and full of life but a dark force crept into her soul that she could not defeat. On October 10th she was found dead in her home in Port Coquitlam.

The Vancouver Sun discloses that the online stalker who victimized Amanda is a "suspected" pedophile that police have traced to the United States. In an interview with the Sun, Amanda's mother Carol comments, "The police investigated and investigated, it got traced to somebody in the United States, but they never found him. Those people are very good at hiding their tracks."

Diane Sowden advocates for children in Canada and she has formed a group called "Children of the Street Society" that dedicates itself to giving parents as well as social agencies more power in the battle against bullying. In an interview with the Vancouver Sun about the death of Amanda Todd, Sowden, citing police statistics, states "Over the past five years, child pornography offenses in Canada have increased 900 per cent, They also show Canada ranks second in the world behind the United States in online hosting of child sexual abuse images." This brings the dangers of "sexting" by young teens into strong relief as predators troll the Internet in search of their next victim. Amanda Todd may have just been the prey of such a twisted individual, and the dangers our children face often reveal themselves when it is all too late.

As a survivor of teen suicide I can remember the exact moment I decided to take my own life. I was twelve years old and my stepfather had been molesting me since the age of five. My efforts at speaking out about the hell I was trapped in did nothing more than exacerbate the physical abuse I was already subjected to. A bottle of my mother's sleeping pills, stolen from her medicine cabinet, washed down with a fifth of vodka, left me feeling the tether to my unbearable pain slowly slipping away.

I awoke in a hospital emergency room to wide-eyed doctors who had declared me clinically dead three minutes prior. The journey that had carried me to the point of taking my own life had several months' previously reached a point of no return.

There is an overwhelming a sense of peace when victims of suicide reach that place where they see the end of their lives as a certainty. A heightened sense of the beauty and appreciation of the simple pleasures in life emerges, but the suicide victim believes that this is only ascertained with the impending sacrifice they have embraced.

Amanda Todd lived the last few weeks of her life to the fullest, going to the mall with her friends and on the surface appearing to be happy, her surrender to the darkness invisible.

I will speak from personal experience and painfully say that in the last few weeks of her life there was nothing Amanda Todd's family or friends could have done to prevent her death. Various interventions

could have been tried but in Amanda's mind she was already past the "point of no return."

Victims of suicide or bullying seldom if ever divulge the incredible pain that they have inside, and it is only when it reached the extreme that the extent is revealed. In the case of bullying victims they feel that telling a parent will only make the problem worse and that intervention is pointless, and bearing the burden of their pain is their only option.

Bullying or cyber bullying can strike at the heart of the most vulnerable among us, and if early intervention is not made, a victim may be placed on a path that is irreversible. The key to preventing a suicide lies in the early stages of the process, before the last vestige of hope slips from the mind of the victim.

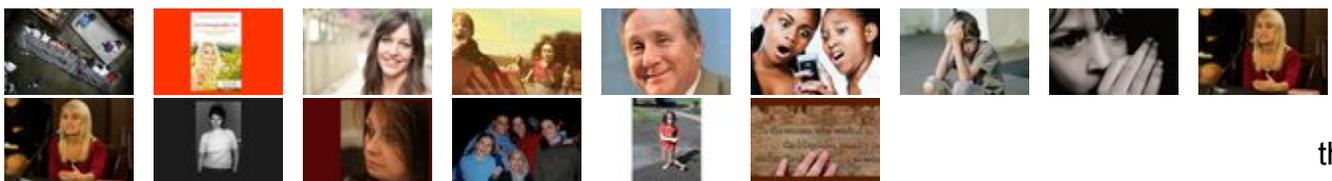
The number one tool in preventing your child from becoming a victim is to educate yourself on the signs that they are being bullied or are contemplating suicide. Indicators include: Depression, sadness, anxiety, anger, or fear, lack of interest in friends, school, and activities, or a drop in grades, or both, and comments that reflect emotional distress or disturbed online or in-person relationships.

Organizations that provide resources and help are available online and by phone, and here are just a few: Stopbullying.gov (<http://www.stopbullying.gov/>), the National Bullying Prevention Center (<http://www.pacer.org/bullying/>), Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use (<http://csriu.org/cyberbully/>), the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>) and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (<http://www.afsp.org/>). Anyone can save a life by taking just a few minutes to educate themselves about bullying and suicide. Even if you feel your children are not at risk, it is important to give them the tools to recognize the signs of bullying and suicide because one of their friends may need help and not know how to ask for it.

Amanda's mother Carol has turned her grief into action and started a foundation to fight against the very tragedy that claimed her daughter. The Canadian government has been spurred into action by the death of Amanda Todd, and legislation is in process to keep the next child targeted by bullies from suffering the same fate.

The responsibility for the death of Amanda Todd lies with all of us because as a society we failed her. We let bullies and a suspected pedophile steal the life away from a beautiful, bright and talented young girl. Let the death of Amanda Todd not be in vain. Let it be a call to action for every one of us to get involved in bringing an end to bullying. I hope you will join me in honoring the memory of Amanda Todd and take just a few minutes every day to make sure she is the last one whose plea for help has to echo in our conscience.

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Raised
in
the



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south,
I joined
the
United
States
Marine
Corps

at the age of seventeen and spent the next eight years seeing the world. After my enlistment was finished I attended college and graduated to work in the Biotechnology sector.

I have struggled against many things in my life including childhood sexual abuse and somehow I found a way to survive. Writing is my passion and it keeps me in touch with the wealth everyone holds deep inside their hearts and minds.

I am married with two beautiful children, and they have made my life complete. I have written all my life and enjoy creating lyrics as well as novels. I enjoy spending time with my children and teaching them about music, art, nature and the value of family.

[Contact Jerome Elam](#)



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Images from St. Peter's square, St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, Rome (September 2012/Jacque Kubin)

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