



## Sheryl Rooth: Bullying doesn't begin or end at schoolyard gate

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Megan, the quiet girl next door, unassuming and shy. Life wasn't always easy. Megan had attention deficit disorder and battled depression. But she also had dimples when she smiled and brown hair that shone in the sunshine and two parents, Tina and Ron who loved her.

Like many teens, she wanted to have a boyfriend and be popular. She'd struggled with her weight and lost 20 pounds. Her self-esteem, while still fragile, was getting stronger, especially when she met Josh on MySpace,

Josh was 16 and Megan practically begged her mother to let her add him to her MySpace page. Tina monitored the account and watched the relationship blossom. They never met in person or talked on the phone.

Every day after school Megan would race home to check her MySpace account for a new message from Josh. Everything was fine until Oct. 15 when Megan received a puzzling message from Josh.

"I don't know if I want to be friends with you anymore because I've heard that you are not very nice to your friends."

On Oct. 16, her 14th birthday approaching, Megan received many vulgar and nasty messages on her MySpace from the kids she thought were her friends. The most heartbreaking of all was the one from Josh that ended with "The world would be a better place without you."

It was the last message that Megan saw. She was found by her mother. Megan hanged herself with a belt in her closet and died the following day.

Josh Evans never existed. It is now alleged his page was created and fuelled by Lori Drew, the mother of a former friend of Megan's. She was an adult who should have known better. And on June 6, a grand jury indicted her on four counts including conspiracy and accessing protected computers without authorization to obtain information to inflict emotional distress on Megan. She faces 20 years in prison.

Megan could have been your daughter or mine. I remember being 13 so very well.

Everything at that age is so dramatic and overblown. If my secret crush didn't talk to me that morning, it would send me into a tailspin for the day, but only a day. What Megan had was more than any child should have to bear.

When you have a child, you put their well-being first at all times. You ensure their safety, you give them confidence, you give them the tools to lead a good life. You hope that when they reach an age to start spreading their wings, they will remember what you've taught them.

And you hope that the other adults in their life would be compelled to do whatever they can to keep your child on the right path.

A year ago, I introduced you to Facebook, the social networking utility that was sweeping the world. I still check in from time to time, but not like I used to.

It's not that the utility has played out for me; I still find it very interesting and the voyeuristic appeal is still there.

Social networking sounds so hip and sophisticated doesn't it? When you were a kid, social networking consisted of meeting up with your pals after school to play an impromptu street hockey game or talking with your best girlfriends for hours on the phone after your parents had gone to bed. You knew all the latest gossip, you were

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always in the communication loop and your parents actually knew who you were spending time with.

When did it become a game of life and death?

Bullying doesn't begin or end at the schoolyard gate. It could be in your home and you need to know about it. For help, visit [www.LondonABC.ca](http://www.LondonABC.ca).

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