

# Mallick: Meet the boy the bullies broke

By Heather Mallick Star Columnist, Tuesday Oct 18 2011



*Ottawa city councillor Allan Hubley poses with his son Jamie in this family photo released on Monday Oct. 17, 2011. Hubley says bullying was part of the reason his 15-year-old son took his own life.*

What a shockingly beautiful boy Jamie Hubley was. The ruddy hair, the smokin' wide grin, that shy downward look — I'm wild and bold but, um, maybe not so much, the look seemed to say — as he sang Lady Gaga's new song, "Born This Way," on YouTube.

Jamie was only 15, which is why I'm journalistic ethics-wise allowed to refer to him by his first name, as if he were a friend of mine. And how I wish he had been. This kid could have helped my sadness, I could have helped his, he would have brought credit and affection and candour to everyone who knew him, but now he's dead, no chance now.

When brightness falls, it falls so hard. Watch Jamie singing. He doesn't get the low notes quite right. It makes your heart crack.

The Ottawa schoolboy died Saturday of human cruelty, profoundly depressed after years of being bullied for being gay. He killed himself. I'm astonished to read that he was being hounded even in Grade 7 — students tried to stuff batteries down his throat on the school bus after he chose figure skating over ice hockey — but then I remember Grade 7 and what little animals we were.

We were allowed to behave like rodents then, sharp-toothed and scurrying in packs, looking to munch on whatever was available, including each other.

The starter efforts at talking openly about teen suicide give the best advice extant, that time is a healer, that this too shall pass. Jamie wrote in his online suicide note: "It's just too hard. I don't want to wait three more years, this hurts too much. How do you even know it will get better? It's not."

You can't tell a 15-year-old to wait three years. To him, it sounds like 30, which to a teenager is practically dead anyway. And when I look at middle-aged people, including many in public life, who can't admit publicly that they're gay, it's clear that time heals nothing. We all fear bullying.

Foolishly, I thought this was generational and that kids were taught to be different now, more humane. As schools become multiracial, girls dare to speak up in class and be smart and everyone's online and typing out the contents of their souls, I assumed that kids like Jamie, who wanted to sing or act rather than just go into thick-necked grunting mode for the course of their adolescence, would find a place to flourish.

I was wrong. The kids who called Jamie names in the hallway, who tore down his posters for a Rainbow club at A.Y. Jackson Secondary School (this was the school he moved to in an effort to escape bullies), the teenagers who mocked him online, we all went to school with those kids. Maybe we were those kids. Maybe we still are.

There a little dark creature inside all of us, a homunculus as it was known in the Middle Ages, or a tiny human. He is filled with meanness. I always imagine him looking like one of the black pond tadpoles I remember from childhood, little slippery lumps of menace. (In fact, of course, they were harmless and the neighbourhood boys should not have set them on fire.)

Well, there's a little hate generator in every one of us and he's the source of the bullying we see in politics, school, workplaces, hockey rinks, talk radio, yell TV, tabloid newspapers and especially online. We live in a bullying culture, in which I suggest you not be gay or a native Canadian or unemployed or in any non-powerful group. Don't go online if you're vulnerable.

But who spends the most time online, aside from the old Angry Pajamas of extremist politics? Teenagers, naturally.

If it helps to personalize it, picture your inner nasty as the icon you see on the doors of public toilets, but armed with a pitchfork. Instantly recognizably as Average Guy, he doesn't just live inside the kids who helped drive Jamie to suicide, he lives inside all of us.

The trick of being civilized is that we silence him when he pokes our mean gland. And he's not necessarily male. Females are talented bullies with a real eye for where the shiv will do the most emotional damage. No? Rent *Mean Girls* and see what I mean.

High school is the distillation of our lives, with a term limit, filled with cliques and home to the best and worst of our traits. Remember those hallways lined with lockers, which I recall happily but now realize must have seemed to the bullied kids like a gauntlet they had to run over and over, five days a week. What I wonder is if Jamie's tormentors understand even now what they did and why.

As Jamie wrote in his last post on his Tumblr blog, "To the people who didn't like me (many) a big f --k you. Go ride a unicorn."

And then he adds, "But we love you anyway."

Even as he headed for death, he had to add, in a clause from a naturally kind heart, some forgiveness for his tormentors.

I cannot get over this.

I'm hoping the schoolmates who mocked and tormented Jamie can't get over it either. They're not going to be better people until they confront their own cruelty.

We won't stigmatize bullying until we force the bullies to understand what they do what they do, that an ugly voice emerges from the black dot inside you, urging you on to call kids like Jamie a "fag."

Depression was Jamie's constant, the kind of depression that is implacable in the face of total family love, medical care, counselling and loyal friends. Jamie's father, Allan, wrote in his public statement that for most of his life, Jamie was "a happy and confident child." Later, though, he asked "a question no child should have to ask — why do people say mean things to me?"

Hubley pointed out that cyber-bullying has created a new problem. There is no longer any refuge. "Children often feel there is no safe place to go; even when they are at home they can still be victims."

Jamie knew his tormentors were reading his blog. "You bent me until I broke. Happy? You win," he wrote just days before he killed himself. A student at his school wrote on the new R.I.P. Jamie website, "I had seen him earlier that day [the day of his death] and he had cuts all over his wrists, his arms, even his face."

This matches Jamie's single sentence entry, "Cut my face." At this point he was in such despair that he no longer minded handing the confessional gift of his pain to those who were out to hurt him. A day later he quoted from another blog, a list of wounds that would not be the list of a depressed university student or a dentist or rape victim. It is quintessentially high school. It includes being "the first one to ask to hang out, the only one to try, not being invited."

"F--- high school and f--- having shitty friends." These words aren't the whole truth of Jamie's life but only the last miserable segment of it.

Look at his face as his handsome father proudly poses with his hand on the shoulder of his beloved child. Jamie, in a dress shirt with black bow tie, had clearly been in the spotlight. The photograph radiates love and happiness and is the portrait Allan Hubley chose to represent the bond he had with his 15-year-old darling.

What chills me is that Jamie's bullies probably thought this picture was funny. I hope they're not laughing now.

If they are, they haven't learned to suppress their inner dark voice, the little hate lump urging them to deflect the hate that might come their way.

"You can't break when you're already broken." That was the title of Jamie's blog and the last words he saw. He was gay and bullies broke him.

Now we will have to reassemble our memories and our morals so that maybe no one like Jamie breaks again. But I suspect there will be other Jamies.