

## His Story

by

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August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016, the day I will forever remember. It was a bright, sunny day, and Kevin woke up happy and full of energy. Sometimes it's the very small things in life that bring us the most joy. He was having his wisdom teeth extracted as they had been plaguing him for a while. We joked with each other and laughed because he was wearing a bright turquoise sleeveless shirt and sneakers, and his "locks" looked really good, neat and clean. I asked him why he was wearing a sleeveless shirt, and his response was, "Mom, come on, I'll be sitting in a dentist's chair." I teased him about how handsome he looked. I was driving, he was relaxed, music was playing, and life was good. Sadly, I didn't know it would be the last time we would share a sweet moment expressing love and happiness together – mother and son.

From 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Kevin attended an elementary school where he was the only black boy because he was in the minority to majority school program. My focus was for him to have the best education available to him, plus I was able to volunteer at the school since it was close to my job. I did not realize how isolated my son was. As he grew older, his confidence began to fade, and he just didn't feel good about himself. Throughout elementary and middle schools, he had no friends. I can recall him telling me one day that I was his only friend. I hugged him and cried; I just did not know what else to do. He just could not conform to society, and I could not understand. He was bullied by his classmates and even some of his teachers. He did not fit in at school or at church. As his mother, I was right there beside him -- supporting him, loving him, fighting for him, and praying for him. But it was not enough.

In 2015, just before Christmas, Kevin told me that he had been visiting a non-denominational church and had joined the choir and was connecting with the young adults. He said he received a phone call from someone at the church who was responsible for the finances informing him that the church was doing some "house cleaning." They determined that he was not contributing as he should and could no longer sing in the choir. He never returned to that or any other church.

Around 9:00 p.m. on the day of our final ride, two officers rang my doorbell and told me to contact the medical examiner in Gwinnett County. My son Kevin had committed suicide in a church parking lot. He used a gun to end his life.

Kevin was smart, witty, pleasant, kind, and always smiling. He was different in so many good ways. He was my "Bohemian" child who loved locking his hair and wearing whatever he wanted regardless of what others said or thought. I recall him saying, "Render your hearts and not your garments." He loved playing the cello, listening to all kinds of music, and enjoying nature. He had an Associate's Degree in Liberal Arts and was working towards a Bachelor's in Journalism at Kennesaw State University. He had one son. Despite his efforts and achievements, Kevin never felt that he was enough and was always hard on himself. He was diagnosed with manic depression and bi-polar disorder as an adult. I want Kevin to be remembered as a loving son and father, a cheerful giver, and a gentle soul. He did the best he could with

what he was handed. He was selfless and became an organ donor; thirty-four people benefited from his tissues and organs. It pleases my heart that I have these good memories of him.

After Kevin's death, his therapist informed me that he did not want to live and was ashamed of his mental illness. My support for my son never wavered, but it was not enough. I regret that I did not encourage him to be more of himself—A child of God, born in God's image and likeness. He needed family, friends, his teachers, and the church. He needed all of us. We failed him. The church failed him.

It is for this reason I believe that God has placed me in this place, at this time, to support my brothers and sisters in Christ in whatever way I can. Jesus said to love your neighbor as yourself. We are commanded to love all people, regardless of how different they look, their gender, their color, their culture, or their faith. Let us see ourselves as expressions of God.

My prayer is that each person knows a world that accepts them as they are—All God's children. How can we love God who we cannot see and despise God's children who we can see? My son could not be saved; however, let us together try to save someone else's child.

Ephesians 2:19: "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of His household."