

Megan Meier Foundation, meganmeierfoundation.org:

Megan's Story

Megan Taylor Meier was born on November 6, 1992. She loved swimming, boating, fishing, dogs, rap music, and boys. But her life had not always been easy.

She was heavy and for years had tried to lose weight. She had attention deficit disorder and battled depression. Back in third grade she had talked about suicide, and ever since had seen a therapist.

But things were going exceptionally well. She had left the Fort Zumwalt School District and had just started eighth grade at a new school, Immaculate Conception, in Dardenne Prairie, MO. She was on the volleyball team, and had a new crush -- Josh Evans.

Josh was 16 years old and had contacted Megan through her MySpace page. Even though she had never met him, she begged her mother to allow her to add him as a friend. For the next six weeks Megan and Josh - under Tina's watchful eye - became acquainted in the virtual world of MySpace.

After school, Megan would rush to the computer. Megan had a lifelong struggle with weight and self-esteem, and now she finally had a boy who she thought really thought she was pretty.

And then on Sunday, Oct. 15, 2006, Megan received a puzzling and disturbing message from Josh. It said: "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."

Frantic, Megan shot back: "What are you talking about?"

The following day was rainy and bleak. At school, Megan had handed out invitations to her upcoming birthday party. When she got home she asked her mother to log on to MySpace to see if Josh had responded.

Why did he suddenly think she was mean? Who had he been talking to?

Tina signed on. But she was in a hurry. She had to take her younger daughter, Allison, to the orthodontist.

Before Tina could get out the door it was clear Megan was upset. Josh still was sending troubling messages. And he apparently had shared some of Megan's messages with others.

Tina recalled telling Megan to sign off.

"I will Mom," Megan said. "Let me finish up."

Tina was pressed for time. She had to go. But once at the orthodontist's office she called Megan and asked: "Did you sign off?"

"No, Mom. They are all being so mean to me."

"You are not listening to me, Megan! Sign off, now!"

Fifteen minutes later, Megan called her mother. By now Megan was in tears.

"They are posting bulletins about me." A bulletin is like a survey. "Megan Meier is a slut. Megan Meier is fat."

Megan was sobbing hysterically. Tina was furious that she had not signed off.

Once Tina returned home she rushed into the basement where the computer was. Tina was shocked at the vulgar language her daughter was firing back at people.

"I am so aggravated at you for doing this!" she told Megan.

Megan ran from the computer and left, but not without first telling Tina, "You're supposed to be my mom! You're supposed to be on my side!"

On the stairway leading to her second-story bedroom, Megan ran into her father, Ron.

"I grabbed her as she tried to go by," Ron says. "She told me that some kids were saying horrible stuff about her and she didn't understand why. I told her it's OK. I told her that they obviously don't know her. And that it would be fine."

Megan went to her room and Ron went downstairs to the kitchen, where he and Tina talked about what just happened, the MySpace account, and made dinner.

Twenty minutes later, Tina suddenly froze in mid-sentence.

"I had this God-awful feeling and I ran up into her room and she had hung herself in the closet."

Megan Taylor Meier died the next day, three weeks before her 14th birthday.

Later that day, Ron opened his daughter's MySpace account and viewed what he believes to be the final message Megan saw - one the FBI would be unable to retrieve from the hard drive.

It was from Josh and, according to Ron's best recollection, it said, "Everybody in O'Fallon knows how you are. You are a bad person and everybody hates you. Have a shitty rest of your life. The world would be a better place without you."

Tina and Ron saw a grief counselor. Tina went to a couple of Parents After Loss of Suicide meetings, as well.

They tried to message Josh Evans, to let him know the deadly power of mean words. But his MySpace account had been deleted.

Six weeks after Megan died a neighbor down the street, one they didn't know well, called and insisted that they meet that morning at a counselor's office in northern O'Fallon.

The woman would not provide details. Ron and Tina went. Their grief counselor was there. As well as a counselor from Fort Zumwalt West Middle School.

The neighbor from down the street, a single mom with a daughter the same age as Megan, informed the Meiers that Josh Evans never existed. She told the Meiers that Josh Evans was created by adults, a family on their block. These adults, she told the Meiers, were the parents of Megan's former friend, one with whom she had a falling out.

She said her daughter, who had carpooled with the family that was involved in creating the phony MySpace account, had the password to the Josh Evans account and had sent one message - the one Megan received the night before she took her life.

"She had been encouraged to join in the joke," the single mother said.

The single mother said her daughter feels the guilt of not saying something sooner and for writing that message. Her daughter didn't speak out sooner because she'd known the other family for years and thought that what they were doing must be okay because, after all, they were trusted adults.

On the night the ambulance came for Megan, her daughter received a call. It was the woman behind the creation of the Josh Evans account. She had called to tell the girl that something had happened to Megan and advised the girl not to mention the MySpace account.

That same day, the family down the street tried to talk to the Meiers. Ron asked friends to convince them to leave before he physically harmed them.

In a letter dated Nov. 30, 2006, the family tells Ron and Tina, "We are sorry for the extreme pain you are going through and can only imagine how difficult it must be. We have every compassion for you and your family."

The mother declined comment.

The police report - without using the mother's name - states:

"(She) stated in the months leading up Meier's daughter's suicide, she instigated and monitored a 'my space' account which was created for the sole purpose of communicating with Meier's daughter.

"(She) said she, with the help of temporary employee named ----- constructed a profile of 'good looking' male on 'my space' in order to 'find out what Megan (Meier's daughter) was saying on-line' about her daughter. (She) explained the communication between the fake male profile and Megan was aimed at gaining Megan's confidence and finding out what Megan felt about her daughter and other people.

"(She) stated she, her daughter and (the temporary employee) all typed, read and monitored the communication between the fake male profile and Megan

"According to (her) 'somehow' other 'my space' users were able to access the fake male profile and Megan found out she had been duped. (She) stated she knew 'arguments' had broken out between Megan and others on 'my space.' (She) felt this incident contributed to Megan's suicide, but she did not feel 'as guilty' because at the funeral she found out 'Megan had tried to commit suicide before.'"

Tina says her daughter died thinking Josh was real and that she never before attempted suicide.

"She was the happiest she had ever been in her life," Ron says.

After years of wearing braces, Megan was scheduled to have them removed the day she died. And she was looking forward to her birthday party.

"She and her mom went shopping and bought a new dress," Ron says. "She wanted to make this grand entrance with me carrying her down the stairs. I never got to see her in that dress until the funeral."

There were no criminal charges filed in connection with Megan's death.

"We did not have a charge to fit it," McGuire says. "I don't know that anybody can sit down and say, 'This is why this young girl took her life.'"

The Meiers say the matter also was investigated by the FBI, which analyzed the family computer and conducted interviews. Ron said a stumbling block is that the FBI was unable to retrieve the electronic messages from Megan's final day, including that final message that only Ron saw.

The Meier's do not plan to file a civil lawsuit. Here's what they want: They want the law changed, state or federal, so that what happened to Megan - at the hands of an adult - is a crime.

The aftermath of this situation is painful.

The Meiers divorced. Ron says Tina was as vigilant as a parent could be in monitoring Megan on MySpace. Yet she blames herself.

"I have this awful, horrible guilt and this I can never change," she said. "Ever."

Ron struggles daily with the loss of a daughter who, no matter how low she felt, tried to make others laugh and feel a little bit better.

Ultimately, it was Megan's choice to do what she did, he says. "But it was like someone handed her a loaded gun."

This is an abridged version of a story that was posted in the St. Charles Journal on Tuesday, November 13, 2007 by Steve Pokin.