



Sharing their son's story could save a life

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The year could not have ended more horribly for U.S. Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., and his wife Sarah. To their great credit, however, their openness about their son's death by suicide might save lives and chip away at the stigma tied to mental illness.

The Raskins last week posted online their 1,700-word obituary for Tommy Raskin, 25, who died on New Year's Eve after battling depression. It's an important essay because it underscores that depression and other mental illnesses do not play favorites — they can befall anyone.

Tommy Raskin, his parents wrote, “grew up as a strikingly beautiful curly-haired madcap boy beaming with laughter and charm” who was “enveloped in the love not only of his bedazzled and starstruck parents but of his remarkable and adoring sisters ...” and many relatives and friends.

He attended public schools in Montgomery County, Maryland. In high school, he was captain of the Forensics Club and a member of the debate club, and co-founded a peer-to-peer tutoring program. “He hated cliques and social snobbery, never had a negative word for anyone but tyrants and despots, and opposed all malicious gossip ...,” his parents wrote.

Raskin went on to Amherst College, where he majored in history. He procured summer internships at places such as the CATO Institute and the Institute for Policy Studies. A vegan, Raskin wrote “a compelling senior thesis on the intellectual history of the animal rights movement.”

After graduation, he went to the Friends Committee on National Legislation, working on Middle East policy, and in 2019 began attending Harvard Law School. He completed the fall 2020 semester, during which he served as a teaching assistant in one class.

He was bright, passionate, highly educated, well liked and giving — but later in his 20s, began to suffer from depression.

“(A)nd despite very fine doctors and a loving family and friendship network of hundreds who adored him beyond words and whom he adored too, the pain became overwhelming and unyielding and unbearable at last for our dear boy, this young man of surpassing promise to our broken world,” his parents wrote.

On the last day of 2020, a year when “hundreds of thousands of Americans and millions of people all over the world died alone in bed in the darkness from an invisible killer disease ravaging our bodies and minds,” they wrote, “we also lost our dear, dear, beloved son ... a radiant light in this broken world.”

Their son left a note that said, in part, “Please forgive me. My illness won today.”

The Raskins are to be commended for sharing their son’s story — the whole story.