

Mother says bullying led to son's suicide

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By Lori Prichard

SALT LAKE CITY -- By all accounts, Austin Kennedy was a good kid. He is described as fun loving, vivacious, and full of energy. That is why so many were stunned to learn Austin had committed suicide, found in his closet by his mother on the morning of July 2.

Melissa Bailey, Austin's mother, is convinced the 15 year old committed suicide because he was persistently picked on by kids at school, as well as those who live at their apartment complex in South Salt Lake. She even wrote it in his obituary that he had gone to such an extreme because he had been bullied.

"We thought it had stopped. He just didn't tell me anymore," Bailey said. "He wasn't afraid to be himself and he was bullied constantly. He just couldn't, couldn't take it anymore."

Bailey discovered her son's body early that Saturday morning. He had hung himself in his closet. "We thought it had stopped. He just didn't tell me anymore. He wasn't afraid to be himself and he was bullied constantly. He just couldn't, couldn't take it anymore." - Melissa Bailey

"I kept trying to shake him, telling him to wake up. I was screaming, 'Wake up! Wake up!' " she recalled. "If this can stop another kid, or save another kid, that's all I need. That's all I need."

Some of Austin's classmates say they witnessed the boy being picked on but didn't quite know what to do.

"Everyone at our school saw him being bullied. No one really knew how to stop it. You know, I've said stuff to kids like, 'Hey leave him alone,' but it never seemed to work," said Nastasya Messinger, who went to school with Austin.

"He just tried to pull through every day. He tried to survive," said Jose Simental, another classmate.

KSL spoke with Highland High Principal Paul Schulte where Austin attended school last year as a freshman. Schulte said he did not recall specific instances where Austin was bullied. He said Austin was a good, respectful kid. But he was eccentric, often calling attention to himself by singing loudly during lunchtime or in the hallways.

However, KSL obtained Salt Lake City police reports detailing some of the documented problems Austin had experienced at school and on the school bus.

In 2008 when Austin was attending Clayton Middle School, police records show he was hurt after getting off the school bus near the apartment complex where he lived. Another boy "chased him into the laundry room and pushed him into the washer."

In November 2010, Austin was followed home by two boys after getting off of the school bus. In his report, Salt Lake Officer Tyrell Jeffries wrote: one suspect "punched Austin in the face. ... Both suspects then kicked and kneed Austin." He told the officer the boys were after him because of old gang ties.

That same year, Austin's mother contacted police after he said that he had been assault by up to six other kids on the school bus. Police questioned Austin, who said that the others were making fun of him for what he was wearing, then they jumped on him. However, the school bus driver told police he believed Austin started the fight.

In January 2011, the Highland High School resource officer arrested a boy for punching Austin twice in the face for "no reason."

A Facebook page created in Austin's memory shows students knew he was being picked on whether on or off school grounds.

One poster wrote: "I think we all knew the warning signs. Austin sought attention from all of us and none of us gave it adequately."

Another wrote: "I wish you would've known that despite the bullies. A lot of people cared about you, even those you didn't really know."

"There were a lot of signs that we saw. But I don't think anyone thought twice about it." Messinger said.

Bailey hopes this needless tragedy will touch others, especially those who tease and taunt other kids.

"The night before he died, he said, 'Goodnight, I love you. See you tomorrow.' There was no tomorrow," Bailey said.