



Brandon's Story

May 30, 1996 - December 6, 2018

This is not only Brandon's Story; it is a story of mental illness and its strong association with suicide. Over the past decade, the rate of suicides has continued to rise and is now the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. Some populations are at even higher risk. It is the second leading cause of death for young people between the ages of 10 to 24.

Research suggests that nearly 90% of individuals who die by suicide have experienced mental illness such as bipolar disorder, major depression, schizophrenia and substance use disorders. (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 9/11-12/2018)

Brandon was a sweet, bright and happy child, he graduated with high honors from Middle and High School and was very pumped to continue his education at Rutgers. He did possess obsessive-compulsive behavior in the form of hand washing (dating back to pre-school), but in addition, while away at college, he developed several mental illnesses over the years. He never had to study much for a test before becoming a freshman; however, college was a complete game changer for him. Was it more difficult than anticipated or was his learning impaired by the mental illnesses? Despite evaluation, testing, hospitalization, help, love, and medication, he chose to take his life at the age of 22. As a parent, it is difficult, maybe even impossible, to recover from such a loss. Once your child reaches 18, you are cut off from knowledge of their medical information. If your child is suffering from a mental illness, ask them to sign a waiver granting you access to information, understand their illness, show your dedication and support for their healing and be a part of their treatment process.

It was 4:30 a.m. on Thursday, December 6, 2018, when I woke to the sound of the doorbell ringing, repeated knocking at the door and voices. We live in a somewhat-rural area in Hunterdon County, so this caught me by surprise. I peered down the hall and saw lights being shined into the house. I then ran to our bedroom

window overlooking our driveway. I did not see Brandon's car; instead, a large, black SUV was parked outside. Immediately, my stomach sank to the ground. While Brandon's stepfather dressed, I ran down the stairs and opened the door. There stood two Lebanon Township Police Officers. Before they had a chance to speak, I burst out, "Where is Brandon?" "Was Brandon in a car accident?" "Is he ok; is he hurt?" and continuously repeated those questions. The officers asked if they could come inside to talk. By then Brandon's sister was awake at the top of the stairs. Not knowing what was about to unfold, I asked her to wake her brother and to both come downstairs.

As we all gathered around the sofa, I repeated my questions: "Where is Brandon?" "Was he in a car accident?" "Is he alright?" The officer replied that his car and his body were both found in West Virginia. I recall screaming out, continuously, "No, this can't be true, this can't be true" not taking a breath for air between crying hysterically and exclaiming disbelief. The officers provided the phone number of the Fayetteville County Sheriff's Department. We placed the phone on speaker and dialed the number. The Fayetteville County Sheriff first contacted the Rutgers University Police Department—Brandon was carrying his Rutgers's Student ID. The Sheriff was then re-directed to the Lebanon Township Police Department. Details of the tragedy began to unfold.

Brandon left home sometime before 6:00 p.m. as if he was headed to his Wednesday evening class. Instead, he drove for seven hours or longer to Lansing, West Virginia. Sometime after midnight, he parked his black Nissan along side the New River Gorge Bridge--one of the longest and highest steel arch bridges in the world; the third highest in the U.S. He left his vehicle running, windows down and hazards on—a beacon signaling a distressed motorist. His vehicle was found at 1:59 a.m.

There is a 100-foot walk to the bridge catwalk. Once on the catwalk he continued walking another 100 feet. With his wallet, phone and ear buds in, he jumped to his death from the catwalk, some 200 feet down, landing in the service road beneath the bridge. He was pronounced dead at 2:52 a.m. on December 6, 2018, from blunt force injuries on impact sustained from the fall; he did not suffer.



New River Gorge Bridge, West Virginia

Almost a year to the day prior, Brandon was hospitalized for suicidal ideation. He drove to New York and spent two days looking for a cliff to jump off of. Determining he may be injured badly but not killed, he turned around and came home. Once his father and I were made aware of his actions, Brandon agreed to hospitalization for a week in an intense in-patient facility followed by outpatient group therapy and

individual therapy. His discharge diagnosis in March 2018 was bipolar disorder and depression. For several months, a social worker came to our home weekly; then periodically for assistance and support.

Brandon had a history of obsessive-compulsive behaviors. This developed in pre-school. The children were told to sing "Happy Birthday" in their heads twice when they washed their hands or brushed their teeth. By college this turned into a 15- minute exercise. He was, though, rarely sick and cavity-free throughout most of his schooling. Brandon was also a fairly smart child. When he discovered a box of numbers on the back of his composition booklet in kindergarten, he wanted to know what they were all about, so I explained the multiplication table to him. He had it memorized in no time flat.

Brandon had a love for math and science, a tolerance for Spanish, but was not a fan of language arts. He was a good student, despite being a man of few words when it came to writing assignments. In sixth grade he was in the top 2% in the nation in the Math Olympics—quickly solving math problems in his head. This came very easy to Brandon. He did challenge his math teachers, though, about having to show his work if he knew the answers off the top of his head. He then learned "showing your work" was part of "following instructions", also an important part of the exam. Brandon graduated Middle School with honors and talked about being the next "Bill Gates". He held high expectations for himself.

In High School, Brandon hung out with his same group of friends and enjoyed hosting sleepovers on fight nights or holding video game marathons. I recently asked a friend if he thought Brandon showed signs of depression in high school. He responded: "I never saw Branson as being depressed in high school. Introverted for sure, but we all were. That's why I feel we were such good friends cause we understood each other and felt comfortable hanging with each other." In 2014, Brandon graduated from Voorhees High School with High Honors, a 3.8 GPA. He received the President's Education Awards Program in Recognition of Outstanding Academic Excellence. He received the HSPA Award for Math (the Highest Math HSPA Score), he was an AP Scholar, and he scored perfect SAT Math scores twice. He also took Honors Trigonometry from the Johns Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth. He was headed to Rutgers University School of Arts and Sciences to major in Statistics and minor in Digital Communication, Information, and Media.

Brandon chose to attend Rutgers University after High School graduation and shared a dorm room with his friend. His friend provided some insight on College life: "freshman year he (Brandon) was friendly, we even hung out with other people in our dorm. He was just like he was in high school. I guess he started to go to class less later on, maybe beginning sophomore year. At that point definitely wasn't that interested in class. Even so, he went to important things like exams; he would just study last minute. He didn't like to go out that often, but chatted with people every day through video games and would be very talkative and have a lot of fun though". Brandon's freshman year was somewhat "disastrous" in term of grades. We tried to rationalize that perhaps it was due to a change in environment and his OCD was not a good match for the college dorm. We moved Brandon and his dorm mate to a studio apartment where they only had to deal with their own mess in summer 2015.

After fall 2015 did not show an improvement in grades, he was taken for a comprehensive neurodevelopmental assessment in January 2016, a.k.a. the Quotient ADHD system examination. Brandon's

evaluation suggested that he had an underlying anxiety disorder associated with obsessive compulsive behaviors, that he may have Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder; he had difficulty with executive functions such as organization, planning and prioritization. His social awkwardness suggested he could have an underlying development disorder such as Asperger's. It was recommended that he have a Quantitative EEG performed to determine the nature of his underlying neurologic difficulty and how best to help him with these problems. His Quantitative EEG Analysis Interpretation concluded 90% accuracy on AD/HD. Support Services and counseling were recommended. Accommodations were available to him at Rutgers—since he was past 18 years, it could only be arranged if he worked with Health Services directly. I am not sure if it was pride, embarrassment, or something else altogether, but he chose not to seek assistance from Health Services. From 2016-2018 Brandon started seeing a psychiatrist for problems related to obsessive-compulsive disorder and attention deficit hyperactive disorder. He was prescribed Ritalin (20 mg) for one year then Prozac (40 mg) was later added for OCD. While on Ritalin, his semester GPA's went up, 3.8 followed by a 3.7. Ritalin had a positive impact on his grades. He stopped taking Ritalin at the end of that school year.

In March 2018, Brandon was hospitalized for a week for suicidal ideation with a plan to jump off a cliff. He was discharged with a diagnosis of Bipolar disorder and depression without psychosis. He was prescribed Abilify and all other medications were stopped. Brandon attended outpatient therapy and was to continue seeing his psychiatrist. He stopped seeing his psychiatrist, going to classes (unless a test was involved), quit his job and developed his suicide plan in fall of 2018. On December 6, 2018, Brandon chose to take his own life by jumping from the New River Gorge Bridge.

When Brandon went looking for that cliff in New York to jump from early 2018, he came home because he was not sure if he would be killed or badly injured, I told him that if he did that I would have spent the rest of my life looking for him. I hugged him; cried and said, please do not do this again. Brandon did not show affection too often. It may have come via offering to drive his sister to her drum lessons, helping me with groceries or driving me to an appointment. But I took those of signs of his love. On December 6th his brother found his laptop computer with his last Google Search for the Tallest Bridges in the U.S. and how to pump your own gas. When he parked along the New River Gorge Bridge on December 6, 2018, he left his car running, windows down and hazards on. His car and body were found within an hour. It was sending a message, I believe: Mom, you do not have to spend the rest of your life looking for me; I am right here.

I have to believe he entered into a different state of mind on the bridge catwalk and that he was driven there by his mental illnesses. Not being consistent in taking medication due to the side effects, he was predisposed to suicidal ideation. Or, we may never know why.

There was a note; in fact 3 notes, written over a year ago when Brandon was hospitalized after his first suicidal ideation--part of an exercise while he was in the in-patient program found behind his nightstand: "Dear Mom + Dad, Thank you for supporting me even when I am not in my best state." "Dear Young Brandon, Don't skip class, study, do your work, don't put your goals off to the last minute. Also, invest in Bitcoin." "Dear Future Self, Hopefully your job is work from home and your apartment is good enough. If you have a car, that is great. Don't do drugs if you have not already started."

Suicide itself is not a mental disorder, but one of the most important causes of suicide is mental illness – most often Depression, Bipolar Disorder (Manic Depression), Schizophrenia, and Substance Use Disorders. (teenmentalhealth.org).

“In Memory Of” Brandon W. Tremayne will continue to remain open for donations to HOPE AT RUTGERS UNIVERSITY for program that are dedicated to mental health and suicide awareness while continuing to pay homage to Brandon. <https://inmemof.org/brandon-w-tremayne>

#brandonsstory #suicideawareness #mentalhealthawareness #heartbroken
#suicideprevention #depression #bipolar #aspie #breakthestigma#itsokaynottobeokay
#ElevateTheConvo #thestoryofbrandonssuicide #therealstoryofbrandonssuicide



1) Health Outreach, Promotion, and Education (HOPE) works to advance health and wellness at Rutgers University through community engagement and innovation. The program coordinates a large and active peer education program in which students are trained to facilitate interactive outreach and workshops on issues that directly impact students' lives.