



Megan Meier was thirteen when she died. She had been bullied most of her life, especially in middle school.

When Megan was in third grade she was diagnosed with ADD and with depression. She was placed on medication to help with her disorder. These medications made it very difficult for her to maintain a normal weight, and she found herself getting heavier and heavier. Seventh grade was the hardest for Megan. Many students bullied her and were mean to her because of her weight. When she went into the cafeteria to eat lunch, some boys in her class would walk behind her making elephant sounds to mock her. She stopped eating at school.

Even though many others were not friendly to her, Megan put “being a good friend” at the top of her list. When someone she knew was having a bad day, Megan would bring them a chocolate bar to help them cheer up. She spent a great deal of time listening to her friends and doing things that she thought a good friend would do.

Megan was like all other thirteen-year-old girls. She read fashion magazines and wanted to wear the “kewl” clothes that other, thinner, girls would wear. But those clothes weren’t designed for heavier girls. Frustrated and sad, she wore less fashionable clothes and just watched others walk into school wearing the clothes she wished she could wear. What she couldn’t do with clothing, though, she did with other fashionable ideas. She learned how to wear makeup to play up her beautiful eyes. And she chose black and white polka dots as her theme (white dots on a black background). She wore black and white polka dot ribbons in her hair and black and white polka dot nail polish designs on her toes and fingers. (When her school objected to the nail polish, she kept them on her toes, hidden under her socks. 😊)

Seventh grade was so horrible that Megan’s parents, Ron and Tina Meier, enrolled her in a new private school for eighth grade. It was an immediate improvement. Everyone had to wear uniforms, so no one had fashionable clothes that Megan couldn’t wear. She made new friends easily and got involved in sports. She was losing weight because she was more active and happier. Everything was looking up. She was happy for the first time in years.

In October, six weeks before her 14th birthday, she approached her mom, Tina, and asked if she could have a MySpace. (Her mom was pretty strict about the Internet.) Tina said Megan could have a MySpace as long as Tina controlled the password. She would log Megan on when she

wanted to use it and also used monitoring software to supervise any postings and communications. Megan was so grateful that she was allowed a MySpace that she didn't mind her mom's rules. She designed her MySpace to show off her interests and had lots of pictures of her pretty face highlighting her beautiful eyes. As many teens before her had already learned, heavier teens can mask their weight online. Online Megan was thin, funny and popular. It was where Megan could be the girl she wanted to be. Where others could look beyond her weight and into her heart to see how special she was.

Megan would log on every day and check for friend requests and new messages. She would check out the profiles of other teens too, and looked for ways of improving her "space." And it paid off. "Josh", a cute sixteen year old boy who was moving to her small town and was being home-schooled contacted her. He said he was looking for friends in his new town and thought Megan had "pretty eyes." For weeks Josh became the focus of Megan's MySpace communications. He was the first person she wanted to "talk" with every day when she came home from school. He was becoming her best friend and she had a huge crush on him. And he was 16! That was a big ego-booster for a thirteen year old.

Her mom knew all about Josh, but also knew it was innocent and she was monitoring their communications. She was pleased that Megan was happy finally, after all these years. Megan had it all, a new school, new friends and a 16-year-old cute friend who seemed to appreciate how special Megan was.

Megan was planning a special birthday party that year. She was inviting all her new friends and had planned everything down to the last detail with her mom. They had worked on the invitations together and she would be handing them out in school the next day. When Megan logged on, she saw a message from Josh telling her he didn't want to be her friend anymore, and that he had "heard" about her. He had heard that she was a "bad friend."

This hurt Megan. But it worried her even more. Had some of the old bullies found Josh? Was the bullying and cyberbullying going to start again? If it did, would it reach the new school? Was the pain going to begin all over again?

She asked him what he was talking about. What had he heard? Who had he heard it from? But he wouldn't tell her. He was just mean. And Megan was hurt and scared about what this meant. She was afraid of her life going back to her horrible experience in seventh grade.

Megan's mom told her that Josh might have been having a bad day, and they could work it out tomorrow. Megan went to bed, but couldn't stop thinking about it. She didn't get much sleep

that night, even though she was excited about giving out the invitations to her party. But by morning, things seemed sunnier and she thought maybe her mom was right, after all.

She handed out the invitations and talked about her upcoming party with everyone she met. By the time she got home from school, she was feeling happy. Then she logged into her MySpace.

Josh had logged in before her and had started a verbal assault, starting by calling her names. She was accused of being a slut, and taunted for being “fat” and then things went downhill fast. The attacks become more hurtful and more personal. “Josh” threw everything he could at her. And she tried desperately to defend herself. And then tried fighting back. But Josh, by this time, wasn’t alone. Others had joined in, and hateful messages after hateful messages were hurled at her. Each message landed painfully in her heart.

One, after another, she couldn’t fight them off. She was in tears, sobbing while typing furiously trying to defend herself. Trying to fight them off, to no avail.

When her mom heard her crying, she walked into the room. Megan explained what was going on and Tina (her mom) told her to log off. She had to take Megan’s sister to a medical appointment, and Tina told Megan they would handle it when she got home again in a few hours. Megan reluctantly agreed to log off, and Tina left.

Several times Tina spoke with Megan, checking in. each time Megan sobbed into the phone telling Tina how horrible it was. Tina was upset that Megan hadn’t logged off as promised. She was frustrated that she wouldn’t be able to get home for another hour or so. She insisted that Megan log off. And each time, Megan promised that she would. But she didn’t.

By the time Tina got back home with Megan’s sister, more than 2 hours had passed. Megan was hysterical. And Tina was, understandably, angry that Megan had broken her promise and things had gotten out of control over the 2-3 hour period she was gone. They argued, and Tina sent Megan to her room, while she talked the problem over with Megan’s father. Megan shouted over her shoulder as she stormed up the stairs. “You’re supposed to take my side,” she sobbed as she slammed her bedroom door.

Tina and Ron didn’t know what to do. They talked about Megan’s breaking the rules and what this could mean to her emotional health. Suddenly, Tina felt a chill down her spine. She ran up the stairs and swung her door wide open. There she found Megan hanging from the clothing rod in her closet.

The world quickly spun out of control. A neighbor, trained in CPR, was sought. But all of his efforts and those of the EMTs and hospital emergency room staff didn't make any difference. She was pronounced dead the next day.

The Meiers found themselves planning a funeral for Megan, instead of her birthday party. Everyone was numb with the loss.

A few weeks after the funeral, the phone rang. It was a mother from the neighborhood. She said she had something serious to tell Tina. It appeared that "Josh" wasn't a cute sixteen-year-old after all. He was the brainchild of Lori Drew, the mother of one of Megan's former friends. Lori's daughter had been one of Megan's bullies the year before in school. She was one of the 7th graders the Meiers were trying to protect Megan from.

Lori and her babysitter, Ashley, had created a fake MySpace profile posing as Josh to lull Megan into confiding "him." Tina was devastated. It was horrible losing her daughter. But knowing that her death was instigated by the cruel hoax of another mother and neighbor was too much for Tina and Ron to handle. This was particularly confusing, since Lori knew Megan has been under treatment for depression. (Lori had to administer the anti-depression medication when Megan has taken a vacation with the Drews when she used to be friends with their daughter.)

Many teens have been harassed by others. And too many have chosen suicide rather than face continued torment. But this is the first time that a mother was responsible for the harassment that led to the death of a teen. Megan's friends and family mourn her and think about her every day. And so do so many others.

What can we do about it? We can continue to ask for justice. And we can take a stand, today, to stop cyberbullying wherever and whenever it occurs.

It may be too late to save Megan's life, but it is not too late to save the lives of others. One of our Teenangels (Teenangels.org) said that "cyberbullying hurts your heart." Long after the bruises of offline bullying have healed, the words images and hate live on in cyberspace, on cellphones, text-messaging devices and on gaming sites. The attacks can be relived moment by moment when the victim visits the site of the attacks, or receives a message containing more hate.

You never know if it's your best friend or worst enemy, or even a mother down the street.

By taking the Megan Pledge and helping others take it, you are making a difference today. Right now. And your help might ease the pain of the next victim and prevent cyberbullying everywhere.

Thank you for your caring, for your help and for your leadership. Together we can fight hate, wherever we find it online.

Thank you,

Parry Aftab
Executive Director,
WiredSafety.org

Home of StopCyberbullying.org and the Megan Pledge.