

## Stalking a Silent Killer

**After Gavin Craig and Kelty Dennehy lost their lives to depression and suicide, their families vowed to crack the code of silence around an insidious disease**

In the middle of August 2001 -- two weeks before he planned to end his own life in a nondescript motel in Washington, D.C. -- Gavin Craig headed home to Vancouver. For his parents, Heather and Lloyd, this was a joyous occasion, a rare opportunity to see their youngest son on home turf. In the two years since he first enrolled at George Washington University, they had been in constant contact, emailing on a daily basis. But it had been a long time since the gifted student had set foot in the rambling house on Summit Crescent. For years, this had been home base for his gang of physics brainiacs, geeky smart kids who worshipped Led Zeppelin and Stephen Hawking with equal abandon. Together they launched the Rock Trivia Club and Butt Ugly Shirt Day at Seaquam Secondary. This was Gavin's gang, and he was the effervescent leader: the one with the number pi scrawled all over his overalls, who counted on his fingers using the binary method, played a mean bass guitar and never met a math sequence he didn't love. Now, the 25-year-old grad student, about to enter his final semester of a master's program in speech-language pathology, had arrived home with three classmates, determined to show them the people and places he held most dear. Over five days, he did just that: they headed up to Whistler to hike Rainbow Trail, hung out at the house with Gavin's older brother Matthew and his sister-in-law Tracy, and generally just goofed around. When it came time to head to Seattle for the flight back to Washington, they all piled into the Craigs' van and had a farewell dinner. At the end of the evening, Gavin gave each of his parents a long hug. "Physically," says his father, Lloyd, "he looked fabulous. In fact, I said to Heather, 'I don't remember seeing him so good.' "

When it came to reading their son's emotional barometer, the Craigs were exceptionally vigilant. At 19, Gavin -- a straight-A student at Simon Fraser University -- dropped a physics course. When his mother asked why, he said simply: "I can never be as smart as the professor." In retrospect, Heather sees this as the first sign of a spiral of self-doubt. The following fall he headed off to McGill in Montreal, and soon fell into a deep depression. "Gavin was classic," says Heather. "He was anxious, he wasn't sleeping and by Christmas he'd lost 20 lb."

In early January 1996, the Craigs flew their son home and took him straight to the family doctor, who said: "You're not the first person who couldn't handle university." The next day, Gavin saw a psychiatrist who told him not to worry, he would be fine. But he wasn't. Soon, Gavin began eating all the pills in the house -- 292s, Gravol, Aspirin. When he ingested paint thinner, his parents had him admitted to a locked ward, but he was discharged -- without drugs -- after a week. Less than a month later, Gavin drove his Mazda into a tunnel wall. Says best friend Gord Ross: "It was explicitly planned, like a physics problem. The velocity, everything. Sometimes Gavin was too smart for his own good."

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