

## A YOUNG MAN'S TROUBLED FALL INTO DARKNESS

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When Kevin Blaine Mullins was 15, his mother died in a murder-suicide. Troubled and lonely, Kevin lost interest in school, fought with his father and began using drugs. Early last year, he was treated for a cocaine overdose. On Dec. 12, Kevin, 20, was found shot to death in his Lexington apartment. Police found \$47,500 worth of cocaine nearby.

Trying to pinpoint when Kevin Mullins turned from a bright, enthusiastic child into a bitter young man is like trying to pinpoint the second that dusk turns to night. One minute there's a heavy, gray light, and the next it is dark.

John Mullins could see the change in his son, but he couldn't stop what was happening. Kevin was determined to destroy himself with drugs.

It wasn't a family secret. Kevin Blaine Mullins lived and died in the public eye.

When he was 15, his mother was killed in a senseless murder-suicide. Later, while being treated for drug addiction at Possibilities Unlimited in Lexington, Kevin brought criminal charges against the director who tried to help him.

A year and a half after his release, Kevin nearly overdosed. He attended another treatment program only to end up dead five months later.

On Dec. 12, Kevin was found in his Lexington apartment, shot several times and dead from a bullet in his chest. Police think a robbery was in progress and found \$47,500 worth of cocaine. Kevin, a month shy of 21, paid with his life.

### A talented child

John Mullins is trying to put the pieces in order. He has buried his eldest son, and what he remembers is the sweet, talented child who loved to draw.

"He had a mind that you wouldn't believe. The art teacher told me that when most children draw a man and a tree, they are the same size. But when he drew it, the man was always smaller."

As a child, Kevin loved to go camping, spending the night in the wilderness with his father. But in his early teens, he began to withdraw and behave differently. Kevin's mother suggested that he might be using drugs.

His father couldn't believe it.

"I didn't think that it would be possible for a kid of mine to ever do drugs in front of me and I not know it."

The situation worsened when Kevin's mother, Wanda Willoughby Mullins, was fatally shot on the back porch of the family's home.

### Mother's death

On Sept. 25, 1982, Mullins finished housing tobacco from his 75-acre farm in Franklin County. He invited his tenant farmer, Willie Joe Smithers, to the house for a card game.

Smithers played with the Mullinses and their friend George Tolson for an hour or so and then excused himself and left.

About 10 p.m., Tolson left, slamming the back door behind him. Mullins said he thought he heard firecrackers outside. His wife went to investigate. Seconds later, she was shot in the chest.

"I heard 'bang bang,' " Mullins said. When he reached his wife, she was dead.

Tolson, too, lay dying. After shooting Tolson and Mrs. Mullins, Smithers went home, killed his wife, Francis, and then shot himself.

"I still to this day don't know why he did what he did," Mullins said. "It was just a freak thing."

Wanda Mullins' death pushed Kevin, then a confused teen-ager, over the edge into a world of drugs.

"It was a turning point," Mullins said. "There is the possibility that he may never have gotten as involved as he did had this not happened to her."

Finding out

Kevin Mullins never got over the shock of losing his mother. Years later, he would tell his grandparents how much he missed her.

"He could talk to her, confide in her," said his grandmother, Juanita Willoughby. "He was going to be a lawyer because he wanted to find out what happened to his mom, why she got killed."

But instead of studying, Kevin grew bored with school. His grades at Franklin County High School slipped from A's and B's to D's and F's. He began associating with a rougher crowd. Mullins was notified that his son was "cussing teachers out."

"He got detention hall a couple of times for being tardy. . . ."

And his son became belligerent.

"It got to the point that he would cuss you out just to look at you."

Then there was an incident in which Kevin stole a check from a teacher, forged her signature and bought stereo equipment in a Frankfort electronics store. The owner called Mullins, who made Kevin return what had not been used. Then to keep his son out of jail, Mullins paid \$300 for a car stereo Kevin had installed.

The evidence started piling up, but Mullins was reluctant to accept that his child had a problem.

"Of course I said, 'He's 16, 17 years old. He's an adolescent.' "

Eventually, though, several of Mullins' friends called him with their own suspicions. And one day, while Kevin was at school, Mullins decided to find out for himself. He opened the door to his son's room, and went inside.

There, tucked into the back of the stereo, Mullins found what he was looking for: a bag of marijuana. There were packets of white powder hidden inside the wall sockets. Mullins also found pills and four driver's licenses that would enable a young man to pass for an older one.

"He had a talent about nobody knowing how old he was," Mullins said. "He had several sets of driver's licences that he used in his drug using. He had one set that I found that stated he was 25. He had another that said he was 21. Another that said he was 18 and another that said he was 17, which is what he was at the time."

When Mullins confronted his son, Kevin didn't take it seriously.

"He laughed and made a big joke out of it," Mullins said.

"You think I'm dumb enough to do that?" Kevin asked his dad.

Mullins said he didn't know what to do, so he grounded Kevin.

"And I thought even at that point, that maybe he was in the beginning stages."

Then Kevin's maternal grandparents, Ray and Juanita Willoughby, offered to take him into their Frankfort home. Mullins agreed, hoping that perhaps they would have more control over the teen-ager.

But within weeks, Mullins discovered that Kevin had quit school, which made the father furious. And Mullins suspected that Kevin might be using drugs in the Willoughbys' house.

"I found out that a lot of things were going on which I'm sure they didn't know about because they wouldn't have allowed it either. They had worse denial than I did."

The Willoughbys said that to their knowledge Kevin did not use drugs.

"All I know is that during the time he lived with us, Kevin was every bit a gentleman," Willoughby said.

Soon after Kevin went to live with his grandparents, Mullins received another phone call from a friend. This time there was proof.

"His daughter had told him she had done drugs with Kevin," Mullins said. "The next day I went to the only place I knew to turn to, which was Possibilities Unlimited in Lexington."

'Typical druggie behavior'

"I really didn't know how to get him there without tricking him," Mullins said.

So on a Saturday night in October 1984, Mullins called his son and invited him to dinner at Red Lobster Restaurant in Lexington. After they ate, Mullins drove Kevin to Possibilities Unlimited for therapy.

"When I pulled up to the front door, he asked, 'What is this?'"

"I said, 'We're going for a little counseling.' And he said something to the effect that, 'Dad, if you had problems, why didn't you talk to me about it?' Like the counseling was for me!"

Possibilities Unlimited, founded by psychologist George Ross, is often a last resort. When young people enter Possibilities Unlimited, they stay. Not just for an hour, or a month, but for about two years.

There are six phases of treatment designed to make teen-agers stay off drugs forever.

In the early stages, patients spend their days at the center and their nights with the family of another youth in the program. They are never left alone, not even to use the bathroom.

Patients in the first phase may not watch television, listen to radio, or read magazines and newspapers. Instead, they take part in five rap sessions a day in which they talk about their problem and practice honesty. Parents see their child once a week in an open meeting Friday nights.

As patients progress, they are able to go home and go back to school, train for a job, listen to music and spend more time alone. The treatment takes between four and 14 months, and there is a six-month follow-up.

Ross said that at least 30 percent of the young people he treated left the program strong enough to resist drugs for the rest of their lives. Twenty percent may suffer a relapse, but the vast majority then stay free of drugs.

Another 20 percent, however, "are hell-bent and determined to destroy themselves," Ross said.

"I didn't have Kevin there long enough to determine if he was one of them."

Kevin initially made some progress.

"We got him to the submitting stage," Ross said, which is the point at which patients admit they have a problem and ask for help.

In fact, Mullins said he thought at times that Kevin was enjoying himself.

"And at times, he hated it," he said. "It was the same for me."

"I was making two trips a day to take him there and pick him up. There were a couple nights a week we went to counseling, and some nights by ourselves."

"It was one of the hardest things I ever went through, but if I had it to do over, I'd do it again."

After four months of treatment, Kevin reached a crisis: He turned 18 on Jan. 9, 1985. During a visit home, he told his father he was an adult now and wasn't going back.

"I said, 'Look, son, I think we both know that you need the help. It's not like I'm putting you somewhere and letting you go.' I said, 'I'm with you 100 percent.' And he raised a poker at me and I feared for my life because he was acting very strange, something I hadn't seen. I said, 'If that's what you want, here I am, hit me.' And he threw the poker down and grabbed me."

The fight tore cartilage in Mullins' knee, and he could barely walk. "My leg was kaput," he said.

But it was Kevin's reaction that frightened Mullins the most.

"After he saw that I was having a problem, he became another sort of person. He went into his room and ripped his shirt off. He found an old shirt that he had with a rock image, he turned the radio on full blast, and he just sat there."

"That was the point that I chose to try to get him some help."

Mullins then forced his son to return to Possibilities Unlimited.

"He actually never agreed to go. If anybody's at fault in a situation where you are detained, then I am," he said, "because I feared for his life, as I feared for my own."

Kevin, in turn, called his grandmother and begged her to get him out.

Mrs. Willoughby was afraid for Kevin. And she believed him when he said his drug tests had come out clean.

So she told Lexington police that Kevin was being held against his will at the center. Officers visited Kevin on several occasions and asked whether he wanted to leave. At first he said no. Later he left.

"I got him out," Mrs. Willoughby said. "He called me to come and get him."

Kevin then brought criminal charges against Ross. In September 1985, after an eight-day trial with Kevin and others testifying, Ross was cleared of all charges of unlawful imprisonment.

A few months later, three more members of Possibilities Unlimited were on trial. But charges were dropped when Kevin didn't show up.

"That just showed me where he was as a person," Ross said. "That's typical druggie behavior."

The overdose

After Kevin left Possibilities Unlimited, Mullins tried one last time to help his son. He asked Kevin to live at home under his terms, which meant no more drugs.

Kevin refused.

"He was 18 years old. The law says he's an adult, and I had to accept that," Mullins said.

Kevin moved in with his grandparents, where he was allowed some freedom. Mrs. Willoughby said it was during this time that her grandson received his high school equivalency diploma and talked about becoming a lawyer.

He also talked about his mother.

"He was such a loving child," Mrs. Willoughby said through her tears last week. "He had a lot of love for everybody, and he missed his mama so much."

His grandparents supported Kevin and helped him buy a Trans Am.

Before long Kevin had acquired two Corvettes and a Porsche. He told his grandmother he got the money to buy them by trading cars.

By the spring of 1986, Kevin had moved to Richmond and enrolled at Eastern Kentucky University for one semester.

In July, the Willoughbys co-signed a loan for Kevin that helped him start his own store, Blaine's Unique Fashions, in Richmond.

"He had a head on his shoulders," Mrs. Willoughby said.

That Christmas, Kevin returned home and saw his father for the first time in almost a year.

"He convinced everybody that he was a great little guy," Mullins said. "And believe it or not, Christmas (that) year, I was beginning to think it was true."

Instead, Kevin was living a double life. On Feb. 18, 1987, it caught up with him. Kevin was rushed to the emergency room of Pattie A. Clay Hospital, where he was treated for an overdose of cocaine.

Police searched Kevin's apartment and found 2 ounces of cocaine, 11 hits of LSD, valium, marijuana, scales, razor blades and three used syringes. Kevin was charged with a felony and a misdemeanor for possession.

Circuit Judge William Jennings, who heard Kevin's case, said Kevin testified that he had been hallucinating and was out of control.

"At one point, he said he had broken all of the syringes he had in the house. But within an hour, he was trying to glue them back together," Jennings said. "If memory serves me correctly, he kept looking at himself in the mirror, and he kept thinking he was shrinking away. And he would go stand on the scales, and he felt that he was disappearing."

"It was about the scariest thing I have ever heard of somebody going through," Jennings said.

Because it was Kevin's first offense and because he seemed to be sincere at the time of his sentencing, Jennings set aside a two-year prison sentence. He ordered Kevin to enter the Jefferson Alcohol and Drug Abuse Center in Louisville and placed him on probation for three years.

"I sent him to what I thought was a program that would turn him around. I thought it had, but it hadn't."

After Kevin finished his drug treatment in July, he returned to his grandparents' home and apparently to his old way of life.

Kevin assured his grandmother that he never had used drugs and that he had been set up in the past.

"I believed him," she said, "because he was always so smart.

"I just gave him a lot of love, and I don't know what happened."

To pass the time, Kevin talked about reopening his store, which had closed in February, or his dream of being a lawyer or even becoming a car salesman.

He was supposed to be attending five Narcotics Anonymous meetings a week, but his probation records in Frankfort don't show whether Kevin actually went, parole officer Dusty Rhodes said.

Daine Hague, director of the drug abuse center in Louisville, said: "If people after they leave here don't go to self-help, then the odds are very slim that they will make it. The young ones have trouble with that."

Kevin was only 20 years old.

Kevin's death

Two weeks before he died, Kevin moved into a two-bedroom apartment at The Landings in Lexington. He lived with his girlfriend, Lora Page Mason, a dancer at the Camelot East lounge.

On Saturday, Dec. 12, Miss Mason returned home just after 11 p.m. to find Kevin shot to death on the living room floor.

An autopsy showed that Kevin did not have drugs in his system at the time of his death.

Nevertheless, police say Kevin had been involved with drugs "for some time."

"I know him to be a large-scale drug trafficker," said Sgt. Fran Root. "So it doesn't seem relevant if he was a user or not."

Ross, too, said Kevin "may have kept himself clean, but he certainly wasn't straight."

Although Ross was unable to save the son, he did help the father. Mullins is able to get support from other parents who have been through a similar experience.

"I made a lot of mistakes," he said. "But show me a person who hasn't . . ."

Although he lost Kevin, Mullins learned not to blame himself for what happened. Kevin, he said, was determined to live his own life and make his own choices.

"I remember one time we were in a rap session," Mullins said, "And Kevin made the statement to me that he wanted to be the biggest drug dealer in Kentucky.

"At the time, I felt like he was just trying to hurt me. But maybe he was just being honest."

- Caption: Herald-Leader file photo Possibilites Unlimited founder GEORGE ROSS at 1985 trial Kevin Blaine Mullins: "He had a mind that you wouldn't believe." (nr)

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