

A Mother's letter to  
Her Gay Son  
Bruce David ....

Bruce: A Photo History

**WARNING:** The following letter may make a suicidal homosexually oriented adolescent believe that a wonderful - and needed - kind of love is possible and available from their parents, and that such a love will be there - or will still be there - should they come out to their parents. Such hopes, however, may be crushed should you come out to your parents and then be "made" into a "throwaway kid" with only the streets as a *home*. A significant number of parents are not able to overcome the hatred for homosexuals they have learned from their society, and their feelings will be rendered with statements like: "It would have been better to hear that he/she was a murderer than being gay or a lesbian." OR: "It would be better to have learned that my son was dead than hearing this!" Remember that Cher - who was around gay and lesbian people most of her life and would have been deemed "very accepting" of gay and lesbian people - totally lost it when her daughter, Chastity, came out to her as a lesbian. It is therefore wise to discuss issues related to "coming out" before making such decisions. Should you also be contemplating suicide, even if homosexuality is 'just' part of your many problems, there are many resources available - people to talk with - on the Internet or in most North American cities.

Introduction.

Bruce's suicide note was a shocking testament to the horrible truth... he was forever lost to us and had silently suffered years of painful confusion. A simple explanation — he was gay and he was committing suicide. He wrote it for our understanding and to say 'good-bye' with love, but reading it was like drinking acid. As keeping his homosexuality a secret became his 'poison', his suicide has become mine. You don't lose someone like Bruce without losing a great part of yourself.

I'd never imagined before Bruce's death how losing someone could go beyond what I'd experienced in losing my father. I thought I'd felt the deepest grief and sense of loss I could ever know. But as much as it left an empty place in my heart, I accepted it. We prepare all our lives for our parents' demise, and usually suffer the loss over and over in our minds before it even happens. We think about it, we dread it, we realize it's as inevitable as our own deaths. So there is some mental preparation and natural understanding that each generation has its time. Of course, not always. People die young; many have, but not for me... not till Bruce.

Losing your child hasn't a drop of '*anything natural*' to it. Nature builds in this need to nurture and protect your children. They hurt... you hurt. Their pains, their sorrows and their well-being you feel with them like no other person you love. Whatever happens to them happens to you. Then there's the matter of how you lose your child. Suicide is devastating. There's nothing 'natural' about it. It's not the result of the body breaking down by disease; it's not an untimely accident even.

When it's a choice a person makes to end their human existence to escape from seemingly unsolvable problems, then it's a mistake.

Now, seven years later, I begin Bruce's story with a letter that I hope reaches him, wherever he is... somehow.

September, 1999 My dearest Bruce,

I know you had to be in the deepest kind of pain to do what you did. You went so far away from all of us to a place you knew someone else would find you ...eventually. I know you planned it that way to spare any of us who loved you from finding you ourselves. I still get sick inside when I remember. So horrible... so all alone. Your beautiful face and tall, lean body was found smashed, broken and decaying on a precipice 450 feet below in the loneliness of the enormous Grand Canyon. My heart still breaks when I think of you and your tragic end, dearest child of mine. You had to hate yourself to do that, had to be so lost in despair and hopelessness. I am so sorry, so sorry, my child, that I couldn't help you or save you, that I didn't see through the pretence you were living, and that I believed you were all right. What happened to you is my greatest and deepest sorrow. I am haunted by the helplessness I've felt since then. Had you been murdered by someone else, or had an illness or accident take you, there would have been something tangible to blame for your death, something that could free my mind of the torment I've experienced. But suicide? How does a mother make peace with her child's suicide? And because your pain drove you to it, how then can I be angry with you, the murderer of my own son being the same? Driven to it in your helplessness to do anything else? When I think of you alive, I remember how proud I always was, and still am, that you were such a wonderful human being besides a considerate and loving son. It wasn't just me who adored you, others also thought so highly of you, sincerely said what a great kid you were! That you were 'who' you were, makes your loss so hard to bear, even now. You destroyed our future when you destroyed your own. How did you ever think we 'could handle it' better than you could? You were suffering, yes, but you had no idea what suicide does to the victims who are left behind as you were immersed so in your own pain. Our lives have been scarred with the worst kind of loss, guilt and regret that doesn't quite 'ever' heal. Yet how can I be angry with you for doing it when you were hurting so much? I simply still can't.

Your letter exposed a tortured, depressed state of mind to which no one was privy, the weight of your secret bearing down so heavily on you. It's still so hard to understand that your being gay was the cause of your suicide. So what!! As your reason, it's made your death even more tragic. My dear, dear Bruce, we didn't know, we didn't see! No one knew what was devouring your spirit, or understood the seriousness of your bouts with depression. Please forgive us all for being so blind. Not long ago I read a sad story where a gay teen wrote he was 'waiting for his mother to ask him if he was gay', because he couldn't bring himself to say it. They were very close and he believed she must have known, must have understood, so he took her silence to mean her disapproval. That wasn't the case, she actually had no idea, but it was 'what he believed'. It made me wonder... were you waiting for me to ask you if you were gay? Or did you think I knew, but disapproved? That possibility now hits me like a ton of bricks! If that's what you thought... then all the more your sorrow and mine, and I'm so sorry if I let you down, but I didn't know! I live with so much regret, my son. You suffered from a dreaded secret that destroyed you. I can

understand your fear in coming out, but not the decision you chose through that fear. It isn't logical that it had to end the way it did, not to me. It had to originate from outside yourself, and you took all the hatred, fear and misconceptions that belonged to others and turned it inward, poisoning your own mind and spirit. And like the disease 'hatred' is, it destroyed you. Sadly, you weren't exposed to an open, healthy outlook on gay sexuality to help bring you to self-acceptance. The small city you were raised in was not liberal minded like Toronto, granted, homosexuality was not visible, but your best friend had a gay big brother who came out, and Tony and I had gay friends, and you knew they were loved and respected. So why were you afraid to at least trust me? I can tell you now it doesn't matter to me who you want to love, but 'now' is too late, Bruce... even when you did explain in your note... it was already too late! You didn't get it, Bruce. You didn't get that I valued and loved all the parts of you and always would, no matter what. The love didn't come with conditions... if you were this, if you were that, if you did this, if you did that price tag. You were my kid. It wouldn't have made any difference to me! I would've stood by you no matter what! It just kills me that you didn't know that! Or maybe I didn't matter at all in this! Maybe the truth is just as you said... you couldn't deal with it. But that's because you couldn't share your feelings and fears. Being all alone in a private war with yourself, I can understand that you believed dying would relieve you of your battle. But it's such a shame you could forsake your life based on not finding yourself a heterosexual. You didn't chance anyone else's condemnation Bruce; you condemned yourself.

What you wrote to us all tells volumes about your caring, love and sensitivity for all those you loved. All those words straight from your heart trying to make it all right. No blame or hatred, no lashing out... just a sad reflection of your situation with hope for our understanding and God's acceptance. Your gentle soul shines through your words and the beauty of who you were make your loss even more horrific for me. I still feel sick whenever I remember that night in Flagstaff when I read it for the first time and realized you were dead. So devastating to know you were gone... forever, that it was no longer a fear in the back of my mind, but an excruciating reality. Disbelief even in the face of proof! I can only recall the pain of that moment and the days and months that followed; I cannot describe it adequately. Adding to the pain of losing you, I suffer yours over and over again since I've come to know the little you told, with so much still a great puzzle that plagues me and haunt my days.

The most contradictory aspect of your humanity lies in the fact that you were so nonjudgmental in your love of others, yet you judged yourself so harshly. You poured out caring and understanding and inwardly battered yourself. How terrible it must have been for you to feel you could not share your own pain with anyone. You obviously feared rejection, and this pains me still. If there is someone out there who knew the reason for the crisis you were going through, they never said. You said in your note that we would be able to deal with it better than you could. Bruce, you neither realized what you meant to us, nor could you have understood the impact your suicide would have on us. While you took 'control' of your life and exercised a choice, we've been left helpless to do nothing other than accept your horrible decision to die. It's the bitterest pill we've had to swallow. Knowing everything too late... to help... to offer love... to keep you alive. Everything changed with your death, Bruce. All of us, in different ways, are affected. Learning about your hidden truths made me realize how little we really know about the people we love in our lives, no matter how close to us, and that is very frightening to me. I was cheated of truly

knowing you, my own son, and we can only know what someone is willing to share. And the ironic thing is that I always believed I knew you so well because you told me more about yourself than your brothers ever did, openly voiced your hurts and disappointments when you were growing up. You were such an expressive individual, not given to bottling up your feelings. You were a wonderful communicator, and an attentive listener. And I loved that you would talk with me so much, and unfortunately, it lulled me into believing I knew 'where you were at' with yourself and life in general. So I worried less about your well being, and it turns out, you were the one in 'real' trouble. Things are not always as they seem, are they? I remember too, how you could talk your way around me to make me see and understand what you wanted. I could be dead set against something, and if you were committed to an idea you would talk and talk, until I was convinced you knew what was best for you, and I'd give in to your logic. You had such firm convictions, that I respected your judgment on matters affecting your life, your future. I also trusted your word. I'd always believed you, Bruce, and you earned my respect as you grew into adulthood. I know now that the negative feelings and mood swings you were having over the last year of your life weren't normal growing pains with the usual confusion that comes with being a young adult having to make life decisions.

Were you hoping we'd find you and stop you? I will never know any of your thoughts other than what you wrote to us. All else is still a mystery and we will never know it all, not in this life anyway. Sometimes when I think of your journey, I imagine different scenarios as you drove to your final destination. I imagine you're determined and sure; I imagine you're confused and unsure but unable to turn back and have to explain; I imagine you're wondering why no one is stopping you from doing this at all! I torture myself sometimes thinking you may have thought we didn't care enough to find you in time. All the days of your journey there, Bruce, we went crazy trying to find you, praying for your safety and waiting for your phone call to tell us where you were and that you were okay. After your abandoned car was discovered nine days later, it took three more days to find you, or what was left of you... your lifeless, broken body that was so badly decaying they would not let me see you. I begged, Bruce, I pleaded, I demanded that it was my right to hold you, kiss you good-bye, one last time, but they kept saying "No" with a myriad of reasons they felt were in my best interest. They were so emphatic, so unswerving, that I eventually became apprehensive and scared and gave up. But their deciding for me invalidated me as a mother who had the right to see her son's remains and say good-bye to more than the air, crying out my love and prayers for your peace to the heavens, having you just disappear from my eyes forever. I know they were reacting to my overwrought emotional state and doing what they believed best for me at that point, but they were wrong... it was 'wrong'. I should have just crashed through those doors to you instead of giving up. You were my own child, so much a part of me, and then you're suddenly dead, and I'm expected to hear the facts from strangers and turn around and just go back home! To them, it was over... for me, it was just the beginning of my life without you in it, traumatic and unreal. There was no closure for me. And the most frustrating thing was that you were just on the other side of the door, just yards away. But no one was listening to me. I felt very much alone in it all and it was a bitter experience. I begged for something to connect with you, and they cut a piece of your T-shirt, washed it and gave it to me. It was one of your own tie-dyes, turquoise and purple. I shared little pieces of it with the family like they do with relics from a saint. And until your ashes were shipped to me, it was all we had to make it real.

Months later, I requested all the police and coroner reports and the few personal effects they still had at the police station. I read everything trying to reclaim a connection to you and your final hours. I felt driven to know everything I could... to be a part... to understand... to experience. I needed to go through that process desperately. All your essence and all my memories are deep inside of me and will be forever. I needed to connect the dots and fill in as many blanks as I could... like trying to solve a mystery. Of course, so many parts are still missing, but I have come to terms with that and accept what I'll never know and that I cannot change the past.

I believe we are all in some way responsible for yours and countless others deaths — from the homophobic attitudes that our society in general embraces, to my own failure to have provided a proper sexual education beyond the boundaries of heterosexual love; and including detrimental comments or jokes you would have been exposed to by those you knew, who did not know they were affecting you. And yet, it could've had the opposite effect, you might have loved yourself enough anyway to come out fighting and not giving a damn how people reacted to you. At your age, though, usually what others think of us is how we think of ourselves because we see ourselves through others' eyes. I just keep wishing you didn't give a damn, Bruce.

Bruce, you would've had all the people who truly counted behind you. I know you never felt this way about yourself, but you were truly wonderful and totally lovable. Oh why could you not tell someone? I try and try to understand your reasoning and decision, but I can't help but think if you had come out, talked about your feelings and fears, and understood our love was unconditional, I think that you would have accepted yourself. We could've faced any obstacles together, but keeping it locked up inside like that you had no support, no one to dispel your imagined worries or understand your concerns. And you know, Bruce, I've heard more than once from helping professionals that no one could have changed your mind if you were determined to die. Well, I guess that's true given that we didn't know what was going on in your mind, but if only I'd sensed what it was strongly enough to speak to you, I believe you'd still be alive. I regret not having more insight. I believe you would have wanted to go on living if you knew all the people you cared about said "So what... big deal... doesn't matter to us, we love you and nothing can change that." I believe that we all could've made a difference, Bruce. Knowing you, knowing how very much like me you were, I believe that.

Just twenty-one, you'd hardly tasted life. All the human experiences that are beautiful, joyful, enriching, so many opportunities to grow and experience whatever you desired, all impossible now.

There are no words to adequately express how very much I miss you.

Sometimes, I look up at the sky and imagine you're out there somewhere, surrounded by all love in the universe, feeling the inner peace you so fervently longed for in your human life. Another dimension, but close to me. I look for you in my dreams. I feel you in the awesome beauty of nature... sky, water, trees, flowers, birds flying free... your spirit is everywhere lovely. I am so grateful for having had you for any time at all. Thank you for choosing me to be your mom, dearest Bruce, for all the love and caring your generous, gentle heart gave so well to me. I'm so proud to have been your mom. You brought me great joy, and I thank you for all the times you made me feel so loved and special and important to you. Every tender moment, your

warmth, smiles, hugs and kisses, the laughter and fun... treasured! All the precious cards you wrote so touchingly... cherished! No matter where you are, in whatever form, in whatever dimension, you're here in my heart for me. Be at peace in the light and wait for me.

Spirit, boundless and free  
Part of the universe  
A star in the night  
Forever a part of God's mystical plan

With all my love forever,  
Mom

Roz Michaels

Postscript: May, 2002

Bruce is gone and there's no way to bring him back. I know that. What I think about now, besides Bruce and missing him terribly, is how homophobia-related suicides continue to be a fact of life. Kids and young adults are driven to believe suicide is preferable to being gay.

I've shared our personal story with the hope that anyone in a situation similar to the one Bruce experienced might see that keeping one's feelings secret can be deadly. Bruce may be alive today if he had been able to reach out to someone. Because of utter fear, he opted for silence, but an internal dialogue existed and it became his judge and jury, the sentence being death.

When we have negative feelings about ourselves, those thoughts cannot be dealt with inside our heads. Sometimes, we can be so harsh with ourselves that we lose sight of reality, our fears growing out of proportion into an unmanageable crisis. For almost ten years now the senselessness of his death has haunted me. I know that Bruce is dead because he lived a lie and acted a role based totally on fear and lack of information. I know that he'd be alive if he'd been trusting and courageous enough to come to me and tell me. But he didn't, as you know, and I will regret his decision for the rest of my life.

If you have been keeping deadly secrets because of your fear, and you have had thoughts of suicide, I urge you to seek help. Let someone into your head and heart. Keeping it secret and feeling negatively about it is a deadly combination. Don't assume the world will be loveless and non-accepting. Please talk to someone who can understand your feelings and your fears. There are many support groups and individuals you can talk to anonymously. But also understand that not everyone will be helpful. Therefore try again with someone else if communicating fails with some

individuals. Suicide solves absolutely nothing! It is very permanent and not a solution. Furthermore, its aftermath is a sad and painful legacy to leave to those who love you. Give your life a real chance first. Please. You belong here. Your life is worth living.

If you're a parent and your child has printed Bruce's note and my letter and left it for you or given it to you, or it could be other information related to homosexuality, you need to have an honest look at why this was done. It could be their way of letting you know they're gay or lesbian. If so, I hope with all my heart you'll be open to beginning a supportive and accepting dialogue with them and that you will offer unconditional love. Your child could possibly be unsure or upset about being homosexual and needing to express fears or doubts. Let them know that no matter what, their well being and happiness is your only concern.

I've wished so many times that I had not been so blind or that Bruce had been able to believe in himself, or me, or someone. I'm reminded of his loss every time I hear or see hatred or intolerance based on one's homosexual orientation. It's inexcusable and it kills. It's the opposite of love, no matter what the excuse behind it, be it religious doctrine or societal conditioning.

If you're now blessed with the opportunity to make a difference in your child's life or someone else's life, you can help them by standing with them in love, and believe me, you are fortunate to be able to do so. Make sure they know you're in their corner. In spite of how you thought in the past about homosexuality, remember, with every new moment, we have the chance to grow in our hearts and our humanity. Seize that moment, embrace your child, listen to them, be their best friend and tell them how much you love them while you still have the chance. Do for your kid what I couldn't do, do it for them, do it for you, do it for me and Bruce.

After Bruce died, someone sent me this poem that I have carried next to his picture in my wallet. His love, gentleness and humanity was 'who he was'. I've always read it as though I'm hearing his voice speaking to me from heaven. It's inspiring.