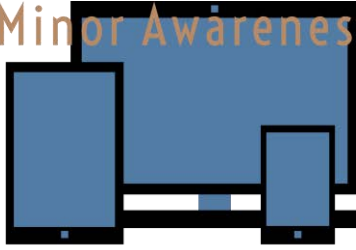


Matthew E. Minor Awareness Foundation



Putting Children's Safety on Social Media, First

<https://www.matthewminorfoundation.org/>

Making Matthew Proud: A Father Turns Grief into Giving Back

By Caitlin Sweet-DHS-USCIS



Todd Minor says the evening of March 7, 2019, started like any other evening. He was resting on the sofa in the living room, and his wife Mia and eldest son Todd Jr. ("TJ") were going about their nightly routines. But Todd realized he hadn't heard his youngest son, Matthew, turn the shower on like he would any other school night.

Pictured, left: The Minor family on their 2018 Christmas vacation at a cabin in Deep Creek, Maryland. Clockwise, from left: Todd, Mia, TJ, and Matthew.

When the family checked on Matthew, they found him in his room, unresponsive with something wrapped around his throat. Todd immediately began performing CPR on his son, which he had learned while serving in the Army 16 years before. For 15 minutes Minor compressed his son's chest and blew air into his lungs, until the EMTs arrived to take over and sweep Matthew away to the hospital.

The Minors went to the hospital that night behind the ambulance and waited for hours before they learned that Matthew had died. Matthew had died at home, and had never had a chance at recovery. Todd talks about this delay in time and information at the hospital as one of the most painful parts of losing his son. He wonders why they allowed them to have hope when Matthew's fate was immediately clear. That night,

Matthew helped save some other lives; he donated his heart and other organs to other children in need and to science. Not many parents would know if their 12-year-old wanted to donate their organs, but in a twist of fate, just a few months prior, Matthew had asked his dad if Todd was an organ donor and Todd had said yes. Matthew said then that he wanted to be an organ donor too.

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Pictured, above: Matthew Emmanuel Minor's grave in Maryland Veterans Cemetery.

On the night he died, he was playing a popular internet game called The Choking Game. According to a 2008 CDC Report, 82 children between the ages of 6 and 19 died in the United States between 1995 and 2007 playing the game, with most of the deaths being boys between the ages of 11 and 16. The objective of the game is to cut off oxygen to the brain to create a moment of euphoria—long enough to experience the high of oxygen deprivation but not so long as to do any permanent damage. According to [Time](#), anecdotal evidence suggests some version of the game has been around since at least the 1930s. But today, with the advent of YouTube and viral videos and challenges, children can film themselves playing the game. Suddenly not only is the game being glorified on a large platform, but kids can also learn how to play and be encouraged to try it out with the click of a button.

The months following Matthew's death have been agonizing for the Minors. Mia, his mother, struggled to find motivation to continue treating her multiple sclerosis. Matthew's brother "TJ" has had a lot of nightmares, and everyone in the Minor family has flashbacks to that night. Matthew's room remains untouched. Sometimes Todd likes to sit in his room and read the letter they received from their church after Matthew died. The year before Matthew's death had Todd fighting a cancer diagnosis and the entire family grieving the death of Mia's father. The Minors sometimes feel like they are just waiting for the next tragedy to come.

Pictured, right: Matthew helping out with an educational event at summer camp in 2016.

But Todd, in grieving his son, has also found a purpose. The Minors launched a foundation in their son's name this summer. They want this foundation to outlive them the way Matthew Minor was supposed to, and they want to try to prevent other families from experiencing this tragedy. The foundation is bringing awareness to this game and other dangerous internet challenges that put adolescents and children at risk, and provides safety trainings and resources for parents and schools looking to prevent these tragedies. The foundation has a second and more ambitious goal as well: to create a place where parents facing this type of devastating loss can go to find resources on how to move forward. The foundation offers resources around grief counseling and finding others who have been through similar experiences, and provides, if possible, a helping hand in the midst of the worst time in a parent's life. The Minors have also established a safety fund within the Prince Georges County Maryland school system in Matthew's name to help fund safety briefings within the country school systems. Todd's vision is to have chapters of the foundation open all over the country. "Matthew was a giver who helped others and we want to follow in that legacy of giving to others," Todd says. The Minors hope that this foundation becomes the something that would have made Matthew proud.

The day before Matthew's funeral, the Minors held a memorial service at his school, and classmate after classmate stood up to talk about how Matthew was the kid who helped them learn the ropes at the school, who defended them from bullies. Todd says that Matthew wanted to grow up and serve his country, just like his father did. He says that Matthew loved cars that sounded like they had big engines, and also loved music and ice cream, and that Matthew was most happy when he was with his family, playing with his cousins or eating half smokes at Ben's Chili Bowl, a D.C. institution owned by his aunt. Todd will miss the way Matthew was always trying to make his family live more fully. It was Matthew who found a brochure for zip lining on a recent vacation and convinced the whole family to go together. It was an adventure that ended up being the highlight of the trip

Todd, a Share-point/ECN Administrator in the External Affairs Directorate at USCIS-DHS has also been using this time to ruminate a bit on what it means to be a part of the workplace. Before this tragedy, he tended to view work as something that had little to do with his personal life. He realized recently that there were very few people at USCIS whom he could remember having deep conversations with. "You can only make an organization feel more like a family and like a good work culture and work environment by sharing some of yourself," he says. "You can't be at work and not interact and then feel that the organization isn't the way you want it to be. You have to get out there and try." Todd is trying to be that change that he wants to see and finds that in opening himself up to his coworkers he is getting back so much more than he did before.

In the first few weeks after Matthew's death, Todd would lie awake reliving that March evening, obsessing over what small things could have changed the outcome of that night. And sometimes that does still happen. He feels anger and injustice occasionally when looking at a happy family, followed by guilt and then a wave of sadness. The grief is still there, the anger is still there. But today he lies awake at



Pictured, above: The Minor family on a 2018 family vacation to Missouri. Matthew (far right) encouraged the family to attend the extreme zip lining attraction.

night thinking about how he can design a better website for the foundation, how he can enhance the foundation's fundraising, how he can reach even more people, more communities, more schools. When Matthew died, it felt like the world should have stopped turning. But it didn't, and so the Minors are starting to move again as well, and doing what they can to honor their son as they go. "Matthew was my buddy," Todd says, while admitting he might not have told him that quite in that way when he was alive. He hopes more than anything that he can prevent other families from such painful tragedies, and that he and the Minor family honor Matthew in a way that would have made Matthew proud.

Pictured, below: Matthew, showing off his signature exuberance for life on a ride at the family's annual car & bike show in Tappahannock, Virginia, 2016.



Pictured, below: Matthew E. Minor on the Mountain Coaster in Deep Creek, Maryland, winter 2018.

