

Smalley shares heartwrenching effect of bullying

by Herb Garbutt
Oakville Beaver Staff

What Kirk Smalley does is not easy. You can see it in his face. He looked drained after his 45-minute presentation at Wednesday's YMCA of Oakville's Community Breakfast for Peace.

Usually the Perkins, Okla. man speaks to students at schools for twice as long. But whether it's the travel schedule that will take him to seven states and provinces before Christmas or recounting the heartbreaking details of the worst day of his life for the 976th time, it clearly takes a toll on him.

He relived it the previous night for a group of parents at Oakville Town Hall. In three hours, he will do it again for students at Garth Webb Secondary. The following day, he'll do it twice, at White Oaks Secondary in the morning and St. Thomas Aquinas in the afternoon.

Having told the story so many times, you might expect that he would have become numb to the experience of telling a room full of strangers about the day his 11-year-old son Ty committed suicide on his bedroom floor. But his voice trembles as he talks about 'his baby' and he fights back tears. Audience members, too, wipe away tears.

Why does he do it? Why torture himself this way?

Afterward, as the crowd is clearing out of the Oakville Convention Centre, Smalley pulls out



The YMCA of Oakville's annual Peace Breakfast featured guest speaker Kirk Smalley, whose son, Ty, was bullied, and committed suicide at the age of 11. Smalley did a series of speaking engagements, at Town Hall and White Oaks Secondary School, during the week.

| photo by Eric Riehl - Oakville Beaver (Follow on Twitter @halton_photog or facebook.com/HaltonPhotog)

his cellphone. He opens his e-mail and flicks his finger from top to bottom across the screen over and over. The messages scroll by like a news ticker hopped up on energy drinks. On and on they go. Each one is from a student who

contacted him after hearing Smalley speak.

"All of them said, 'I was going to kill myself until I heard you speak,'" says Smalley, without the joy in his voice you would expect from someone who has helped save so many lives.

"I got so many I had to create a folder for them."

It is this last part that prevents Smalley from fully taking pleasure in the work he has devoted his life to. The number of students who have heard his message is approaching a million. But he knows there are so many more he hasn't spoken to yet.

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Smalley woke up on May 13, 2010 and left for work on his construction job at 4:30 in the morning. His wife Laura and son Ty left for school a couple of hours later.

Ty, the smallest kid in Grade 6, was in the gymnasium with his best friend when they were approached by another student who had been bullying him for a couple of years — shoving him in garbage cans, stuffing him in lockers, calling him shrimp and Tiny Tim. It started again.

Ty finally had enough. He fought back.

"A bully gets to plan his moves," Smalley said. "He knows when the teachers aren't looking. A victim just reacts."

Ty was suspended for three days. His mom took him home, but had to go back to work.

"Do your homework and do your chores," she said. "We'll talk when I get home."

Laura arrived back home around 2:30 that afternoon. At 2:39, Smalley's phone rang. He looked at the ID and saw it was his wife.

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