Documenting a Son’s Suicide

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Zach Harrington

Do stigma and shame kill? That tragic idea is explored in the documentary Broken Heart Land, which follows the Harrington family of Norman, Oklahoma, as they grapple with the suicide of their gay 19-year-old son, Zach. Although his death occurred just a week after a toxic and public debate in the town about LGBT equality, his family had known about and embraced Zach’s sexuality. What they hadn’t known was that he had HIV.

“We realized,” writes his mom, Nancy Harrington, in a POZ opinion piece, “that Zack had been HIV positive when people spoke at the City Council meeting quoting erroneous statistics about HIV/AIDS in the LGBT community, further stigmatizing and marginalizing our son.” The experience turned the family into activists.

“We learned in the worst way possible how important it is for parents and families to bring up the tough topics,” she writes. “We need to be telling our young people who are HIV positive, ‘You matter, we love you.’”

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