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*"Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak whispers o'er the fraught heart
and bids it break"*

- William Shakespeare

Boy Interrupted (working title)
Proposal for a feature-length documentary

On July 4th, 1971, Scott Perry was found by his mother, asphyxiated in a car in the barn on his family's summer property - a suicide. He was 22 years old. He left behind his heartbroken and mystified family, including his brother, Hart Perry, and girlfriend Martine Gerard.

On the night of October 2nd, 2005, Evan Scott Perry jumped to his death from his New York City bedroom window. He was 15 years old. He left behind his heartbroken parents, film-makers Dana Heinz Perry and Hart Perry, as well as his beloved brothers Nicholas and Michael and many young friends.

"Boy, Interrupted" is the story Evan's (and Scott's) bi-polar illness, life and death, and its impact on his family, friends, teachers, doctors and community. It is the story of how one family deals with illness, loss and grief. It also examines the issues and stigma related to mental illness and suicide amongst children and adolescents.

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It wasn't until our family experienced two generations of mental illness and suicide that we really began to consider examining the circumstances of the deaths of these two beautiful, gifted boys. These young men had everything to live for - smarts, compassion, good looks, athletic prowess, privilege, friends and family, talent and education. Everything but peace in their own brains; brains and hearts that were flooded with the agony of mental illness. Hart Perry's response to his brother's suicide, 35 years ago, was to make an abstract film about the sculpture that was created for the gravesite in Scott's memory by renowned international artist and family friend Martin Chirino. That film was entitled "The Rest is

Silence", the quote from Hamlet that is inscribed on the Perry family gravestone. Evan rests there now too, a brilliant youth cut off mid-sentence by his own hand, just like his uncle and namesake. Our grim, but necessary task is to now make another film, one that directly confronts the pain and mystery of their loss.

Each year, over 10,000 young people commit suicide. It is the 2nd leading cause of death amongst adolescents and young adults. This film attempts to address the tragedy of lost potential and to possibly suggest solutions to the clearly devastating effects of mental illness on families of all social backgrounds.

"Boy, Interrupted" is also a story about love.

Despite his struggles, Evan was as deeply loved as a boy could be. This squeaky wheel got the grease - this elephant in the room dominated the family. We explored every possibility in treatment we could find and afford - one of the problems was that there weren't many resources available at the time. Although this has improved since, we have generally found that treatment of mental illness is still more art than science.

Evan had been diagnosed as bi-polar five years prior to his death, at the age of ten, following many incidents and several hospitalizations. Even five or six years ago, bi-polar illness was practically unheard of in children. Since then, it has widely become accepted as a valid diagnosis, although, to this day, little expertise exists.

Interviews with family, friends, doctors, teachers and counselors form the narrative spine of the documentary. Evan's growing up was closely documented by his parents from literally the moment he was born. These "home-movies", seemingly so casual and innocuous before his death, provide a visual record of his development over the years, and are inter-cut with the story we now understand to be a harrowing journey through this devastating illness.

Those who have not experienced the pain of bipolar disorder themselves cannot truly understand the desperation that might drive an intelligent, successful, talented and loved individual to the ultimate act of self-destruction. Not to mention the trail of broken hearts left in their wake.

"Boy, Interrupted" not only examines the psychic despair of the subject, but also that of the survivors. How do we face the days, one after the other, after finding our son's broken body in the airshaft? Wasn't it something we always kind of expected? Is it possible to survive and even thrive creatively? Were we grateful that he wasn't permanently injured, a la Terri Shiavo, but rather dead on impact, even though we prayed for him to live while waiting for the paramedics to

pronounce him? Do we feel responsible in some way? Is it possible that we might even feel some relief after years of walking on eggshells? And can we make peace with his action, even though it seemed like an outright rejection of all the love, care and advantage we offered him his whole life?

Suicide has historically been taboo - a shame of sorts on the family, and in fact a mortal sin to some. How does a family make peace with it and go on? This film attempts to answer these questions. We never doubted our commitment to our son's struggles, health and well-being. Evan had been hospitalized three times by the age of 11, following several serious suicide attempts. All we could do was wait and sweat. The shoe (and boy) finally dropped.

We make no attempt in this film to justify his actions, or our own. The goal is simply to weave together a portrait of the experience, for better or worse. We wish to make no judgment, nor do we look for approbation. This film represents an essential human story - birth, love, loss, grief and the pursuit of redemption. And, believe it or not, we look for humor and celebration of a life in the telling of it. Evan was great kid. He had enormous influence on everyone he touched.

Interviews with friends and family will attest to the joy, humor and questioning of the status quo he brought to the forefront in his brief life. We hope that this film will stand as a vibrant portrait of a wonderful, complicated young man - struggles and all - that will inform and enrich viewers with a clear-eyed look at the alarming reality of mental illness and suicide.

Dana Heinz Perry