

Chicago Featured Local News

Mother of young suicide victim to unveil documentary this week

By **Erick Johnson** July 21, 2021

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Jamal Clay

Her son was only 19 years old when he committed suicide on May 27, 2020. One year later, Rafiah Maxie is still grieving and searching for answers after her son Jamal Clay took his

own life in her home in Olympia Fields. But rather than drowning in grief, Maxie is channeling her pain to help others who have lost loved ones to suicide.



JAMAL CLAY, 19, was an honor student before bullying and challenging times led him to take his life in 2020. He is pictured with his mother, Rafiah Maxie, who will host a documentary screening about his life on July 24 at the Marcus Theater in Chicago Heights.

Determined to honor her son's legacy and teach others the negative impact of bullying, Maxie will host a screening of a new documentary at 3 p.m. on Saturday, July 24, at Marcus Theaters, 1301 Hilltop Ave. in Chicago Heights. Titled "We Cry Your Tears: The Jamal Clay Story," the documentary chronicles the life of a struggling, quiet teenager who was bullied before his life came to a tragic end in 2020, leaving his mother devastated and overwhelmed with grief and questions.

Tickets are \$10 and can be purchased on Eventbrite under "We Cry Your Tears: The Jamal Clay Story." Proceeds will go toward the Soul Survivor of Chicago, a non-profit organization.

Nashville filmmaker Yoshie Lewis created the documentary along with the production company Pretzel Pictures. Lewis has a history of creating documentaries that give a voice to women's stories. Her PBS documentary "Perfect 36: When Women Won the Vote" garnered a Telly Award for Educational television and continues to be aired nationally. Maxie said she hired Lewis after interviewing several candidates from the website ProductionHUB.

Jamal was a smart boy who excelled academically while at Indiana Elementary School in Park Forest. Maxie said it was there where several boys began bullying him.

Jamal and the boys went on a three-day, end-of-the-year school trip where he had to shower with several other boys. Maxie said her son was self-conscious about his weight, and she had asked officials on the trip to allow him to wear a T-shirt while showering. Maxie said the officials said no, and Jamal's body image was made fun of while he was in the shower.

After the trip, Maxie said her son told her what happened and wept in front her, saying he hated himself and his life. Maxie said she immediately drove to the school to find out more information about the alleged incident, but when she returned home, she discovered that Jamal had attempted to hang himself in the closet with a karate belt. He was transported to Ingalls Hospital in Harvey and later transferred to Wyman Gordon Behavioral Center where he was given a psychiatric evaluation.



For the next several years, Maxie kept a close eye on her son as he went through counseling. In 2020, Jamal suddenly became a quiet figure who kept to himself for days. In May, Jamal's sister found her brother hanging in the garage of the home in Olympia Fields. Maxie was devastated and overwhelmed with grief. To this day, she doesn't know why her son took his own life after years of going through red tape that forced her son to receive little counseling.

In the last year, Maxie herself has received heavy counseling from a psychiatrist and a grief counselor as she struggles with depression, guilt and pain after her son's death.

"There are days that I don't want to do anything," Maxie said. "It takes a lot of strength to get up every day and move on."

Maxie posted several videos on [YouTube](#) to honor her son's memory. One included an emotional music video that shows Jamal dressed in a suit in his casket.

Blacks in Chicago and Cook County died by suicide more than any other ethnic group, according to a **Crusader** analysis published in a story in May. The story examined six years of data from the Cook County Medical Examiner's office.

In that story, it was reported that suicides among Blacks increased in all age groups, as other ethnic groups saw declines in suicides.

The story also reported that in 2020, suicides among Blacks in Cook County nearly doubled last year to 98, the highest in five years. Overall, 451 residents in Cook County died by suicide, the lowest since 2016, when there were 436 fatalities.

A total of 381 Blacks have taken their own lives during those five years. Male suicides numbered 293, and female suicides numbered 88.

Among the 98 Black suicide victims in 2020, 75 were males and 23 were females. Half of the 98 Black victims lived in Chicago, and 43 were just 29 years old or younger. And 39 of them were Black males. Jamal was among the 10 teenagers under 19 who took their lives.

The data spotlights the plight of young Black males whose lives are already threatened by drugs and gun violence. There is concern that the pressures of living in isolation and unemployment during the coronavirus pandemic may have caused the spike in suicide rates among young Blacks in Chicago and Cook County.