

Ways of Life: A teen with a legacy of ‘kindness and generosity’

Their son died by suicide at 19. The Rosados tell their story to honor his memory and help others who may be struggling.



Matías Rosado’s family and friends say they’ll remember the teen for his radiant smile and his kind heart.
(Photo courtesy of the Rosado family)

by Ken Garfield

Matías Rosado was 10 years old when he moved with his family from Avon, Conn., to Waxhaw for his dad’s job. It was a smooth transition. Two days after they got here, Matías was on the baseball field, making friends, finding his place. Matías loved sports, especially ice hockey. He started playing when he

was 7. Before agreeing to the move, the Rosados made sure Charlotte had youth hockey teams.

Matías' father, Rafael, is a lawyer with Honeywell. His mom, Rachel, works from home recruiting lawyers for a law firm with offices in New York and Connecticut. His younger brother, Mason, 17½, is going off to prep school in western Massachusetts, where hockey is a big thing. He is fiercely determined to be a Division I college hockey goalie. The two brothers always got along well, spending hours skiing and playing hockey and baseball.

Matías (pronounced *Matt-EE-us*) seemed bound for success and, in fact, was already successful in many ways, including academics and athletics. He was handsome. His smile radiated. He grew to be 6 feet 4 inches tall, 200 pounds. He never said a bad word about anyone. His mom figures she yelled at him three times in his entire life.

It was at the end of his eighth-grade year at Marvin Ridge Middle School when things began to turn. He started putting too much pressure on himself to succeed in school. He'd often stay home Friday nights to study. Even though everyone wanted to be his friend or girlfriend, he'd say no when kids invited him to hang out. Social anxiety began to creep in.

It was in his 10th-grade year at Marvin Ridge High School in 2017 when he had his first panic attack. The trigger was a hockey tryout. If you're among the 2½ million Americans who have such attacks in a given year, you are wincing in recognition. It's an overwhelming feeling of impending doom, as if you don't know where your next breath is coming from. Panic attacks are often part of a person's social anxiety.

His second panic attack came in the autumn of 2018 during his junior year at Marvin Ridge High. This second one, his parents say, was more worrisome. Matías began seeing a therapist. From the start of all this, his parents were quick to act. They did everything they could.

By this point, depression was setting in with the social anxiety. Still, Matías flourished in school. He graduated in 2020 Summa Cum Laude from Marvin

Ridge High School, where his lowest grade ever was an 89. Teachers loved having him in class. He especially excelled in math and tutored his friends. He went off to UNC Chapel Hill in August 2020 for his freshman year. Two weeks later, due to Covid, UNC Chapel Hill sent everyone home.

This was a turning point, his parents say, as it has been for so many battling anxiety, depression and loneliness during the pandemic. Matías only had a handful of close friends, and they weren't home. The isolation was deepening his depression. In November 2020, the Rosados found him cutting himself in his bathroom. He had become dull to the world, numb. He started seeing a psychiatrist. It still wasn't enough.

On March 5, Matías tried to take his life, but was discovered during the act. Thus began an intensive effort to try to help Matías find some peace.

Matías was immediately hospitalized for three days to get his body healthy. He then went to the Mindy Ellen Levine Behavioral Health Center in Davidson for 10 days to stabilize his mind. From there, he went directly to a residential treatment center in Tennessee for six weeks.

At the start of May, he came home to Waxhaw and entered a partial hospitalization program in which he went to therapy five days a week for 5½ hours each day in conjunction with medication. He progressed from there to an intensive outpatient program, three days a week for three hours a day. He began seeing both a therapist and psychologist. Throughout all this time, he showed signs of progress. His family felt hope for the first time in a long time.

Through all the treatment, Matías was a willing participant. He wanted to shed his depression, to know a life without pain. It was in one of his group sessions that Matías met a young woman. She was 18, and, like him, struggled with depression. They met on May 4, better known as Star Wars Day to fans like Matías. They went stargazing on their second date. Matías wrote in his journal that he never knew how people fall in love, but now he did. The Rosados said Matías was smiling more, that he seemed happy, or at least happier, and more purposeful. It didn't last.

On Friday, July 16, about 2½ months after they met, Matías and his girlfriend spent the evening at the Rosados' home playing cards and watching one of the "Star Wars" movies (again). Matías' girlfriend was leaving the next day for vacation. He seemed fine with that. On the following Monday, he was due to go to an appointment with a dean at UNC Chapel Hill to talk about re-enrolling, having withdrawn after his first suicide attempt. He was also about to start a new treatment plan.

Matías spent most of Saturday, July 17, at home. Around 5 p.m., he told his parents he was going to deliver takeout orders for DoorDash. He often did that to earn spending money. His parents were tracking his location. At the time, the Rosados thought that maybe he wanted to get out and see the sunset. Instead, he ended his life.

Matías Enríque Rosado died on July 17, 2021. He was 19.

At the celebration of life service, everyone spoke of his generosity and kindness. Matías' mom told the gathering of family and friends that when he was in third grade, he asked friends to bring unwrapped gifts to his birthday party so he could donate them to kids who really needed it. "Matías never asked or wanted," his mom said. His girlfriend told the gathering that Matías saved her life by showing her the possibilities that lay ahead. Others talked about his smile.

The gathering behind them, their son Mason returning to school in Massachusetts, the Rosados now face the challenge of living with this loss.

Family, friends, neighbors and work colleagues have all been kind and understanding. The Rosados have reached out to other families in Charlotte who lost a child to suicide. Perhaps they can give each other solace, and a hug. As many bereaved families do, the Rosados are finding comfort in telling their story, hoping it helps others before another life is lost to mental illness and suicide.

The family has already launched the Matías Rosado Foundation for mental health and wellness. The mission is to support, educate and advocate for mental

health. They believe the science has not caught up to this deadly illness and that the mental health care system needs more resources to help those in need. At one point, the Rosados made 25 calls to find a psychiatrist who was taking new patients.

The Foundation will also support youth sports because they are a bright light and a refuge from the storm in so many kids' lives, including Matías'. Learn more at www.MatiasRosado.com.



The Rosado family at their Waxhaw home. (l-r) Mason, Rachel, Rafael and Matias.
(Photo courtesy of the Rosado family)

The Rosados understand they are not alone. More than 47,500 Americans died by suicide in 2019. It's the second leading cause of death for Americans ages 10 to 34. Those who fear for a loved one or for themselves should call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. The website is www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

You can also take a person to the nearest ER or seek help from a medical or mental health professional.

Among the warning signs:

- sleeping too little or too much
- acting anxious, agitated or recklessly
- displaying mood swings
- talking about being a burden to others

If you fear for someone, do not leave them alone. Remove firearms, sharp objects, drugs and alcohol from their surroundings.

Throughout their son's journey, Rafael and Rachel Rosado gave all the love and help they could. It's that love they hold onto now.

"Everyone wants to know how or why Matías died," Rafael says. "That was just one day in 19 years of a remarkable life. His legacy is one of kindness, generosity and love. That's what we choose to focus on. That's how we will move forward to honor his memory."

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