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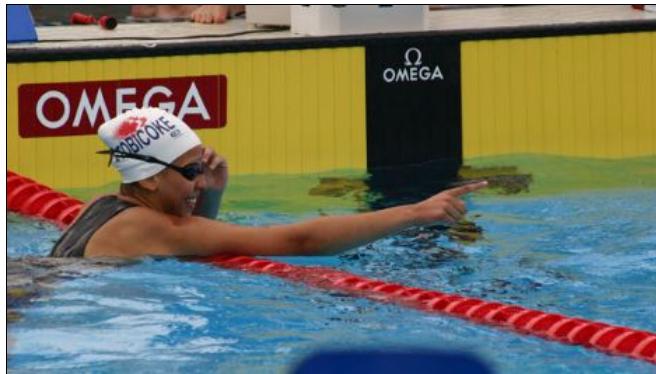
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WORLD NEWS

BORDERLINE WALK HONORING MEMORY OF SASHA MENU-COUREY RAISES AWARENESS

Published: May 15, 2013

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Courtesy of: Mike Menu

PHOENIX, Arizona, May 15. SASHA Menu-Courey, once a Canadian National Championship qualifier, tragically took her life on June 17, 2011 after spending years battling a little-known mental disorder.

The scholarship athlete and outstanding student had Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), a disorder that affects approximately 14 million Americans. The main characteristic of this disorder is finding extreme difficulty controlling one's emotions.

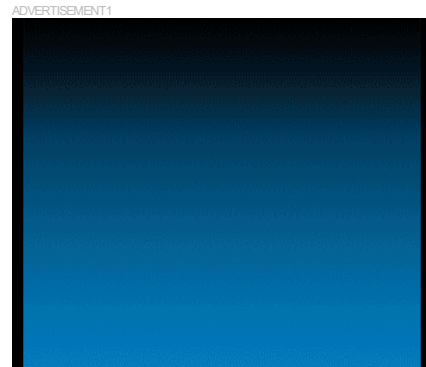
Following the completion of her sophomore year swimming for the University of Missouri, Menu-Courey went into treatment for her disorder at psychiatric hospital McLean Hospital, located just outside of Boston, MA. During her treatment, Menu-Courey ended her life by ingesting an extreme amount of pain medication.

As part of their grieving process, friends and family discussed ways to raise awareness of BPD while honoring the memory of Menu-Courey. They titled the movement "Sashbear," in reference to a commonly used nickname for the vivacious swimmer.

"Sashbear started when my family, another friend of Sasha's and her family came together to help Sasha's family. We would meet at Sasha's house and the plan to raise awareness came up a lot, so we went with it," Canadian National team member Paige Schultz told *Swimming World*. "[We] decided that we wanted to make something of Sasha's name. We got together and decided that we were going to get bracelets made in her memory. [The bracelets] were sold for a donation. That money went into the mount Sinai hospital fund in Sasha's name that her family had set up."

In the two years since its inception, Sashbear has grown from bracelet sales to include frequent school talks about BPD, advocating for adequate treatment for the disorder (including early intervention) and now a 5k "Borderline Walk."

On Sunday, May 26, the Sashbear Foundation is hosting its first ever "Borderline Walk" at Sunnyside Park in Toronto. It will run from 8-10 am, with participants walking a 5k along the boardwalk overlooking lake Ontario by Sunnyside beach. [Click here for more information or to register for the walk.](#)



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The Borderline Walk is sponsored by Herzing College, located in Toronto Eaton Centre, and supported by CAMH.

"The Borderline Walk is an important step to raise awareness, eliminate stigma and increase much needed funds to support research and treatment of BPD," said Dr. Shelley McMain, Head of the Borderline Personality Clinic at CAMH. "Lynn Courey and Mike Menu and the Sashbear Foundation are leading the way by rallying community support for those with BPD who struggle to find adequate care and resources."

"The motivation was and still is to erase the stigma and get talking about it. Also to help fund the training of professionals in the Dialectical Behavior Therapy therapy, which is the best method to treat BPD. We're making a difference," Schultz said. "We like to say, 'We're making waves.' Its an amazing feeling."

Swimming World talked to Menu-Courey's parents, Mike Menu and Lynn Courey about the motivation behind the walk and their future goals for the [Sashbear Foundation](#). Read on for their detailed answers:

Question: Could you tell me a little more about the motivation behind having the walk?

Answer: We want to raise awareness about Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). According to NEABPD BPD afflicts up to 5.9% of adults (approximately 14 million Americans) yet few know anything about this disorder which is rooted on extreme difficulty controlling one's emotions. While effective evidence-based treatments exist for this disorder such as Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) these treatments are difficult to access due to availability and/or cost. So far the Mental Health system and the media have not done justice for this disorder and have often contributed to stigmatizing it further. For example, in one of the TV series *Criminal Minds* episodes the serial killer was described as having Borderline Personality Disorder, similarly the case of Jodi Arias in Arizona where she allegedly killed her husband. Let's think about it - there are 14 million people with BPD in the US, are they all dangerous criminals? How stigmatizing is this for people living with BPD and those close to them? We want to help change this image and show the true facts about BPD and the outlook. People living with BPD come from many walks of life. Sasha was a talented swimmer and student on a full scholarship with a 4.0 average on her first semester, worked as a research assistant and was offered an internship in Psychology.

Q: What has gone into coordinating the walk and what do you hope the outcome of the walk will be?

A: In the fall of 2012 we organized with Sasha's age-group club Etobicoke Swim Club (ESWIM) the Sasha Menu Courey relay meet in Toronto. The objective of this event was to raise awareness on mental illness and to promote a healthy mind in a healthy body among athletes. On the tails of this event which was hugely successful with over 130 relay teams participating we started thinking about a walk when reminiscing about the bike rides Sasha, her dad, her sister Kayla and friend Felixe used to take on the Toronto boardwalk along Lake Ontario. Then a lot of words came into our heads: boardwalk, border of Lake, Borderline, water, swimming, making waves, exercise, and hope. During our next sashbear.org team meeting (which we hold once a month) we discussed the concept and planted the seed for a walk in the spring of 2013 during May which is BPD awareness month. As this is our first walk we learned there is a lot of detailed preparation that needs to be done, permits, insurance, registration, non-profit status, media promotion etc... And we could not have prepared for this walk without the help of our Sashbear.org team members and our sponsor Herzing College. Since so little is known about this disorder we are going to make this a walk of awareness with information messages along the walk worn by volunteers to share with both participants and other people that may be walking in the park at that time. We hope this will help make the walk both a fun and educational event!

In her last days Sasha shared with us that she was hoping to write a memoir to help others going through similar struggles. We hope the walk will be a way to honour her wishes to make a difference by disseminating information about BPD that emphasizes the need for increased support, education and funding about this disorder.

Q: Do you hope to continue this walk in the coming years?

A: Absolutely, we hope this will become an annual event and to work with other partner organizations such as NEABPD/Family Connections to expand this to walks across different cities in North America, and perhaps elsewhere. After all this is a worldwide issue.

Q: What has raising awareness for BPD done for you and your family and the memory of Sasha?

A: For us, all of these efforts are part of our journey of grieving and recovery following the devastating loss of our daughter. It is important for us that Sasha's death was not in vain. We cannot change the past and we believe that too many preventable obstacles along the way contributed to Sasha's downfall and that sharing this story can help others have a different outcome. Bullying, lack of diagnosis therefore treatment after her first suicide attempt in 2007, stigma, a sexual assault incident on campus, lack of accessible/affordable and timely treatment, lack of education about how to deal effectively with strong emotions (on others and within ourselves), these are some of the obstacles that we feel are important to share. One step at a time...

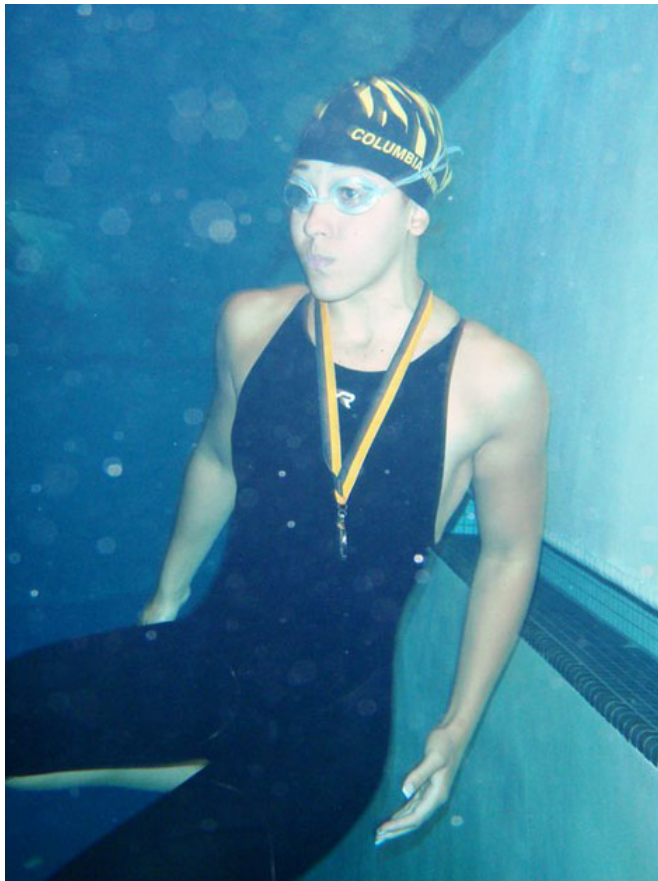
Q: What are some of goals for everything you do in Sasha's memory?

A: One of the most important goals is to promote early intervention, the earlier the better. During her 2-month treatment at McLean Hospital in Boston Sasha wrote in her daily journal that "DBT was as essential as breathing air". During this period we learned enough about the treatment to know that it is critical for this information to be heard by all parents, teachers, students, athletes, co-workers, etc. We are talking about scientifically-proven effective ways to communicate with someone whose emotions are intense and where it is all too easy to make things worse with the best of intentions. We believe strongly that the concepts of validation, coping skills and mindfulness need to be taught to help everyone go through difficult times effectively and create a more compassionate world. For athletes we feel it is very important to learn effective coping skills they can rely on in cases where they are not able to participate in their sport due to injury or other reason -- in our opinion the sudden lack of endorphin and serotonin can have significant impact on their mental well-being especially in cases where they have learned (consciously or otherwise) to use their sport (i.e. intense exercise) as an important coping mechanism to regulate their emotions. We also feel it is important for coaches, parents and peers to create a supporting environment that encourages athletes to talk when they are struggling.

In schools we are giving talks at about BPD and how to control emotions and help support others who are struggling by emphasizing validation. The feedback from our presentations has been excellent from both students and staff and validates that our message resonates beyond BPD.

While we focus on early intervention and education we cannot forget those who are struggling now. We are co-facilitators in NEABPD's Family Connection program at CAMH which is a peer-led support group designed to support and educate families and friends with a loved one living with Emotion Regulation disorder -- this program is extremely useful.

We feel that we cannot wait until the health system is able to support all those living with Emotion Regulation Disorder (aka BPD). While Health systems are increasing their capacity to help we must educate the general population to help themselves -- and we believe there's a lot that can be done in this area.



For further information about the walk, please contact Brian Banks,
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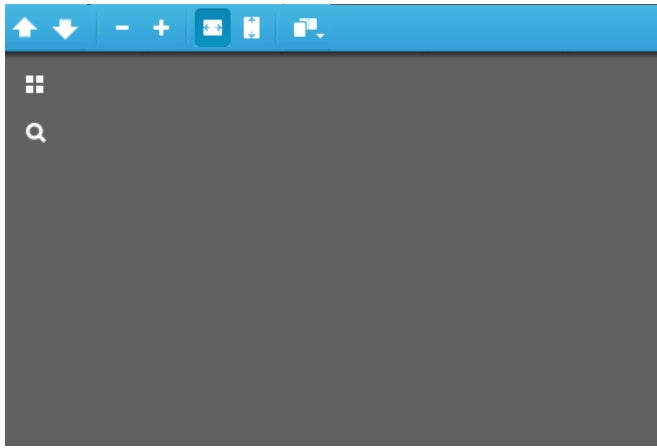


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