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Penn State teen killed in frat hazing was treated like 'roadkill and a rag doll,' parents say

Timothy Piazza and the other pledges being hazed in February hoped that the men of Penn State's Beta Theta Pi fraternity would ultimately welcome them as brothers.

Instead, when Piazza's night of binge drinking took a deadly turn, his family says, his would-be brothers treated him "like roadkill."

The family has been outspoken about their 19-year-old son's final hours since 18 fraternity brothers were charged in his death. "It was horrific. This — this wasn't boys being boys," the teen's dad, Jim Piazza, said on the "Today" show on Monday.. "This was men who intended to force feed lethal amounts of alcohol into other young men ...

"And what happened throughout the night was just careless disregard for human life. They basically treated our son as roadkill and a rag doll."

The parents' mission in life is now to change the culture, at Penn State and on other campuses: "The Piazza family feels strongly that their son's death should become meaningful. They hope it will become a catalyst nationally," said Thomas R. Kline, an attorney representing the family, so that no other parent will have to bury a child destroyed by fraternity hazing and alcohol poisoning.

They have established the Timothy J. Piazza Memorial Foundation to raise money to help people in need of prosthetic devices, and to grant scholarships. Piazza's career goal had been to create prosthetic devices.

On Feb. 2, Piazza and the other initiates to Beta Theta Pi had just run the gauntlet, a series of stations where they had to chug wine, vodka and beer. During the night, Piazza fell down a flight of stairs.

After the fraternity members found him at the bottom of the stairs, one wrote on a group message that Piazza "might actually be a problem. He fell 15 feet down a flight of stairs, hair-first, going to need help."

But they didn't seek medical help for more than 12 hours, authorities concluded. Instead, they poured water on Piazza, slapped his face and put a backpack full of books on his back to keep him from rolling over.

[She wanted to criticize Black Lives Matter in a college speech. A protest shut her down.]

During some of it, Piazza was throwing up and twitching.

He had a fractured skull and a lacerated spleen. For hours, blood was seeping into his abdominal cavity.

Fellow pledge Kordel Davis said he told the fraternity brothers that the unconscious Piazza should be taken to the hospital.

“They said ‘No, you’re overreacting. You don’t know what you’re talking about,’ ” Davis recounted in an interview on “Good Morning America.” “I said, ‘I do know what I’m talking about. He could have a concussion.’ ”

Piazza tried to get up and at one point walked toward the door, but he fell and hit his head.

A grand jury concluded that “the Penn State Greek community nurtured an environment so permissive of excessive drinking and hazing that it emboldened its members to repeatedly act with reckless disregard to human life.”

Eight fraternity members were charged with involuntary manslaughter. Other charges included hazing, aggravated and simple assault, alcohol-related violations and evidence tampering.

Penn State President Eric J. Barron announced beefed-up regulations for fraternities and sororities. Beta Theta Pi, once heralded as a national model for others, was permanently banned from campus.

Beta Theta Pi released a statement this weekend that read, in part, “There are no words to describe the pain we feel for Tim and his family. We are so deeply sorry. We are heartbroken. We are outraged.

“As husbands, fathers, sons, nephews and grandsons, Betas around the world have written and called in to express their anger, disappointment and sorrow. We share their feelings and are left speechless as to how something like this could happen.”

William J. Brennan, an attorney for one of the defendants, Joseph Ems Jr., 20, of Philadelphia, who was charged with reckless endangerment, said “This is a tragic and unspeakable situation.” He said he did not want to comment on a pending criminal case, but that “Joey Ems and the Ems family feel tremendous compassion,” for the Piazza family, and offer their condolences. “Timothy Piazza and his family are constantly in my client’s thoughts and prayers.”

Piazza was found lying unconscious on the floor of the basement the morning after the party, according to grand jury investigation findings released by Centre County District Attorney Stacy Parks Miller this month, but for more than 40 minutes no one called for help. One member’s phone had records of Internet searches at the time, according to the findings, such as, “true or false, a person with a serious head injury or concussion should be kept awake,” and “cold extremities in drunk person.”

When a fraternity member finally called 911 a little before 11 a.m. the next morning, first responders rushed Piazza to a nearby hospital. He was then transported to Hershey Medical Center, where the extent of abdominal bleeding was so extensive that a second surgeon was summoned, according to the grand jury investigation findings. Neurosurgeons removed part of his skull to relieve pressure caused by the swelling of his brain.

Piazza died early the next morning.