



## **Mat's Ride – Amanda's Story**

**June 18, 2011**

For those of you that are new to the ride, I am Mathew's older sister and he was my only brother. I would like to share a story with you, in hopes that it will touch your heart...

It was an average day with the sun shining between the clouds. I was busy getting everything ready for a night of celebration and time with friends. Everyone arrived and we were having a great time; listening to music and playing cards. Then suddenly my doorbell rang. To be honest my first thought was it may be my neighbour asking to turn down the music. I got to the door and without hesitation, turned the handle and swung open the door. I was shocked by who stood in front of me, it was my parents.

In that moment my life was about to drastically change, the biggest challenge of my life was seconds away from knocking me off my feet. I looked into my parents eyes, I saw emptiness and sorrow. I knew that something horrible had happened. All I heard was my brother's name and the words 'I'm sorry...' At that moment I felt my heart die, my breath stopped and I fell to the floor. I just learned that my baby brother took his own life.

That night and many more were spent in a downward spiral of pain & sadness. Then it was the day of Mat's funeral. I didn't want to let go or say goodbye. I stood at his casket holding his hand praying that he would wake up. But I had to let go and I had to say goodbye. A few months had past when my pain and sadness fed new emotions. I felt anger, frustration, but most of all guilt. I began to blame myself.

Why wasn't I there to stop him? I should have seen this coming. Why didn't he talk to me? What kind of older sister was I? I didn't protect him when he needed me the most. I was also filled with anger, I was mad at myself as well as him. How could he do this? He should have talked to me, I would have dropped everything to be there for him. Why didn't he say goodbye?

These thoughts and emotions ran circles in my head for what felt like forever. Months had now turned to years, the anger & frustration disappeared; I was left with empathy and forgiveness. I had accepted that my baby brother was gone and he wasn't coming home. He wouldn't be here to share in the joys of life. I would not be an Auntie, my kids would miss out on having an amazing Uncle. I wouldn't see him get married or have children. Life was going to be different then what I had dreamed of.

I had decided that it was time for me to forgive him. I went to his graveside, at first I stood there

silent not knowing what to say. Then the words rolled right off my tongue... 'Mat if you are there, I want you to know that I'm not mad, I forgive you. I'm sorry that you felt alone, I wish I could have helped you see the light in life. I will miss you every day of my life. I promise to keep you alive in my heart and share your story with others in hopes to save them from the darkness.'

It has been six years since I had to say goodbye to my brother. Six years that my family has dedicated to raising awareness of youth depression and suicide. We share Mat's story with you in hopes that it will touch your hearts and you will be inspired to support our youth. Together we can eliminate the stigma that surrounds mental illness.

I share my story today to touch those of you faced with the darkness of depression. I ask you to please reach out for help, you are never alone. I encourage you to always hold onto the light in life. It may be small and dull at times but never let it go out... the best is yet to come.

Amanda Gilbert  
~Mathew Gilbert's Loving Sister~