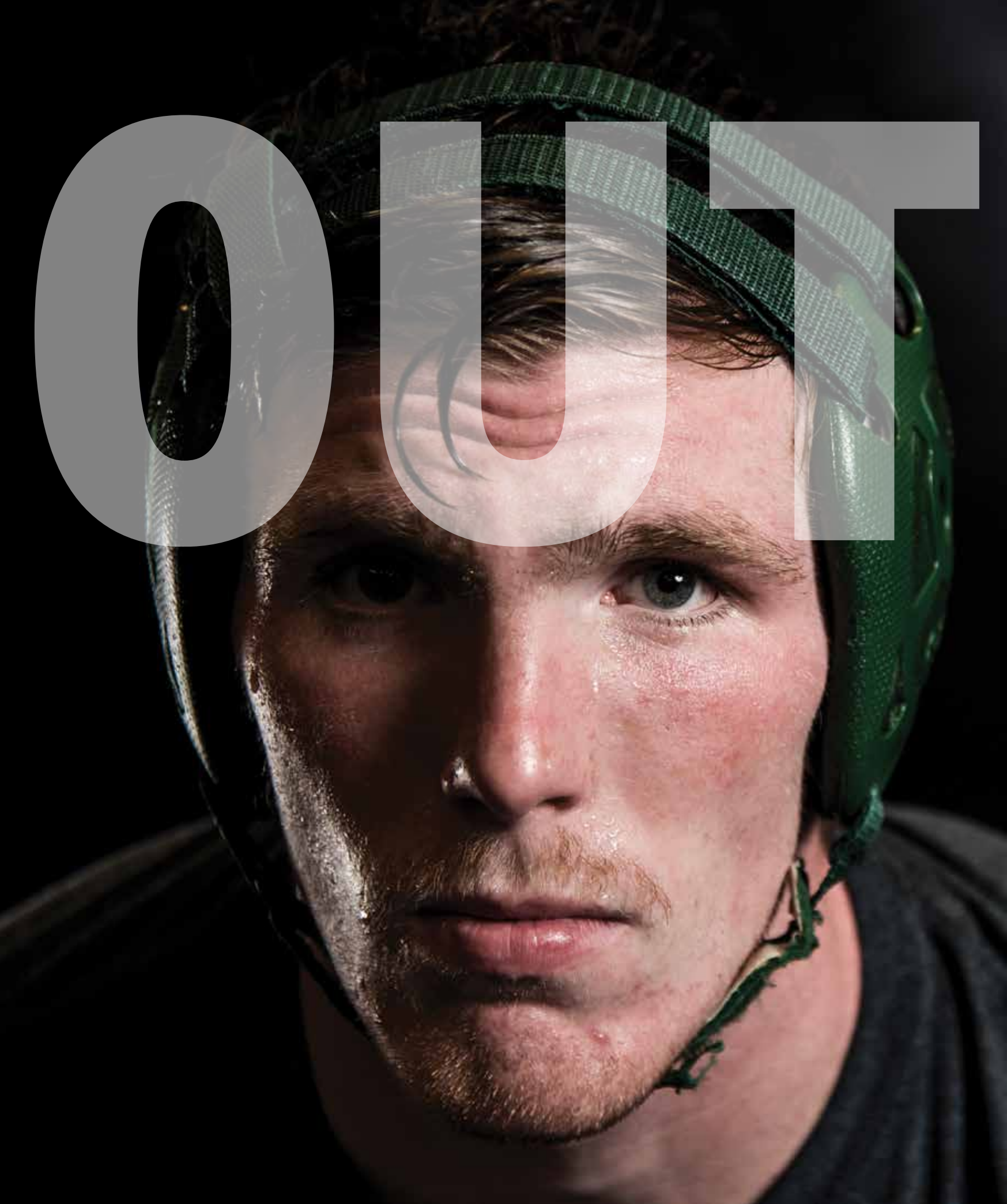


ALL OUT



Before Alec Donovan became the NCAA's first publicly gay wrestler, he had to win a lifelong match with a private pain that other gay athletes understand too well

BY BRIAN BURNSED | PHOTO BY JAMIE SCHWABEROW

The stranger on the phone wants to kill himself. He is young, a high schooler. He is attracted to men. His family doesn't know. Neither do his friends. Carrying his secret is suffocating — maybe it would hurt less if he didn't breathe at all.

But he had read a story online about a brave young man, Alec Donovan — “Gay New Jersey high school wrestling state champ comes out on college recruiting trip” — who told the world that he knew how it felt to suffocate every day, every minute, and yearn to end that pain. So he ended it — by coming out. He offered to help others enduring the same torment. So the stranger decided to take his offer.

Alec's hand trembles as he holds the phone to his ear. He is in gym class when the call arrives on this spring day at Brick Memorial High School, but the period is idle, so Alec dashes off to find the only man around who he trusts can help. Earl Mosely, the school district's anti-bullying coordinator, pauses to process what the breathless 18-year-old standing in his office is hearing. Mosely wants to know: Is the stranger willing to reach out to someone better equipped to steer him to safety than a panicked high school wrestling state champ? But the voice insists it must be Alec. He has stepped to the same precipice and contemplated what relief might lie in the void below.

So Alec stays on the line. He listens and occasionally places his hand over the phone when he needs to whisper to Mosely. The teacher guides him: probe for an address, he says; remind the boy that there is another path. Mosely calls the authorities, relays the location and asks Alec to parrot back words of confidence and assurance. Eventually, the sirens ring in the background. Then, silence. For five disquieting minutes, just silence.

Alec hangs up.

A week later, the stranger's number appears again: "Thank you, Alec." The other boy is still afraid to do what Alec did. He isn't ready to tell the world, to feel the fog lift and finally *breathe*. But he hopes his fear will soon begin to crack and let the truth slip through. He doesn't want to end his life anymore because he knows someone cares — someone who was willing to spend those 35 agonizing minutes on the phone until the sirens came to save him.

Alec exhales. He understands the boundary separating the two paths is precariously thin. He straddled it for years, even after hearing the stories of athletes and many others who were celebrated for coming out — those who insist that uttering "I'm gay" erased the pain rather than sharpening it.

Despite so much progress, countless young men remain petrified of those two words. It's why Alec wants to help. It's why he took that call and stayed on the line.

The first active NCAA wrestler to come out publicly once warred with the fear and uncertainty that, even today, can drive a young athlete to wrap a belt around the pullup bar in his room or to envision a nearby bridge and ponder whether it's high enough rather than have an honest conversation with a teammate or a coach.

Or, especially, with a father.

After the divorce, the kids are Tom Donovan's to raise.

A 31-year-old single dad, he will come to know strain and sacrifice as he watches over 4-year-old Alec and 1-year-old Harleigh. He will put them first. He will put in extra hours working construction jobs so they won't go hungry, and so they can attend St. Rose — the good Catholic school nearby. Little Alec will get to wear a uniform — rich or poor, two parents or one, he will be indistinguishable from the others.

So Tom works those extra hours and starts his own contracting company. He cooks for his children and teaches them to do the same. He watches Alec flail at soccer balls, but the babysitter reports that he tosses and pins his friends with ease when they fight on the floor. Tom, part of a state champion wrestling team in high school, takes his 5-year-old son to a youth wrestling league to determine what Alec has inherited. Tom hopes to linger along the wall, but he is quickly recognized and recruited: Help coach the little ones, they urge. He wants Alec to thrive, so he erupts at every mistake. Tom is quicker to berate his son than any of the other boys. Alec finishes 1-15 in his first competitive season. His sole victory is a forfeit.

The wrestling room can't cage Tom's temper. Steal a few extra bites from the fridge, and Tom roars. Come home with substandard grades and he seethes. "Anger issues," he calls them.

Alec begs his father to go on a run when he starts to boil to flush the adrenaline. If he won't, the boy flees next door to find refuge with the woman he calls mom. Bound neither by blood nor romance, Lisa Martinson and her daughter were absorbed into the Donovan family. Their adjacent townhomes share a wall, a porch, and empathy. Her daughter goes to Tom with her troubles, and Alec reciprocates. With time, Martinson learns how to soften the blow when Alec needs to deliver bad news.

Alec is often gone, always at nearby Shore Thing Wrestling Club. He runs the four miles along busy roads if no one can offer a ride, dripping

sweat when he walks through the door. The boy's eagerness to lose himself in the sport rather than devote more time to friends and frivolity leaves the club's owner, Vinnie Santaniello, in awe. As Alec improves, Tom gets tougher. Santaniello watches as the father shouts instructions, corrects form and monitors every meal. But Tom always takes Alec to breakfast after weigh-ins and flashes hand signals from the stands during matches, pointing to his head to remind Alec to be smart, slapping his cheek when he loses focus.

Tom ensures his children say their prayers every night before bed. He takes Alec and his sister to Mass on Sunday mornings before practice, and arranges the Nativity scene under the television as Christmas approaches. Every night, dutifully, Alec prays.

Memories of the 1-15 season fade, replaced by a Middle Atlantic Wrestling Association championship at 128 pounds in eighth grade. Tom insists to Lisa and anyone within earshot that his progeny is a stud, that he is charming — Tom calls him "the mayor" — and that he will have any girl he wants.

In a middle school match, Tom sees Alec's leg twist and his ankle snap. He sees him try to soldier on for another 20 seconds, then hears his cries of pain and watches him pound the mat, begging for the end.

Finally, Tom ready to pounce, the referee stops the match. Coaches dive to Alec's aid, but Tom berates the referee for not ending the match sooner — for prolonging Alec's pain.

The fury, as always, is a byproduct of his love. He doesn't want his son to hurt.

"That looks gay."

The comment about the trophy Alec places on his desk comes from one of the popular kids, a middle school classmate. They always talk about their basketball games and soccer matches, so why can't he share the symbol of another tournament victory? Why can't he be proud? The

school doesn't have a wrestling team, so no one understands what he endured to earn it.

Classmates hear the remark and snicker. The teacher lets the comment pass. Then more words: "Male on male contact — touching each other, so sweaty," the boy says. "It's wrong."

Alec's peers talk about wanting to kiss girls, but he doesn't feel the same urges. As hormones expose desires and differences, friends start distancing themselves. Alec says hello in the hallways, but he feels them staring through him. He hangs on the periphery of conversations, but he feels invisible. After the comment in class, he turns to Google for answers about what "gay" means. He reads and understands. "Oh, that might be me," he thinks. "But it's not wrestling."

Days spent learning from the Bible at St. Rose compound the confusion: *If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.* His nightly prayers dwindle. Then, they stop.

He moves to Brick Memorial High School as a freshman. He hears "gay" and "faggot" every day. Though the words aren't directed at him, they hover in every hallway and classroom — and they sting. He hears

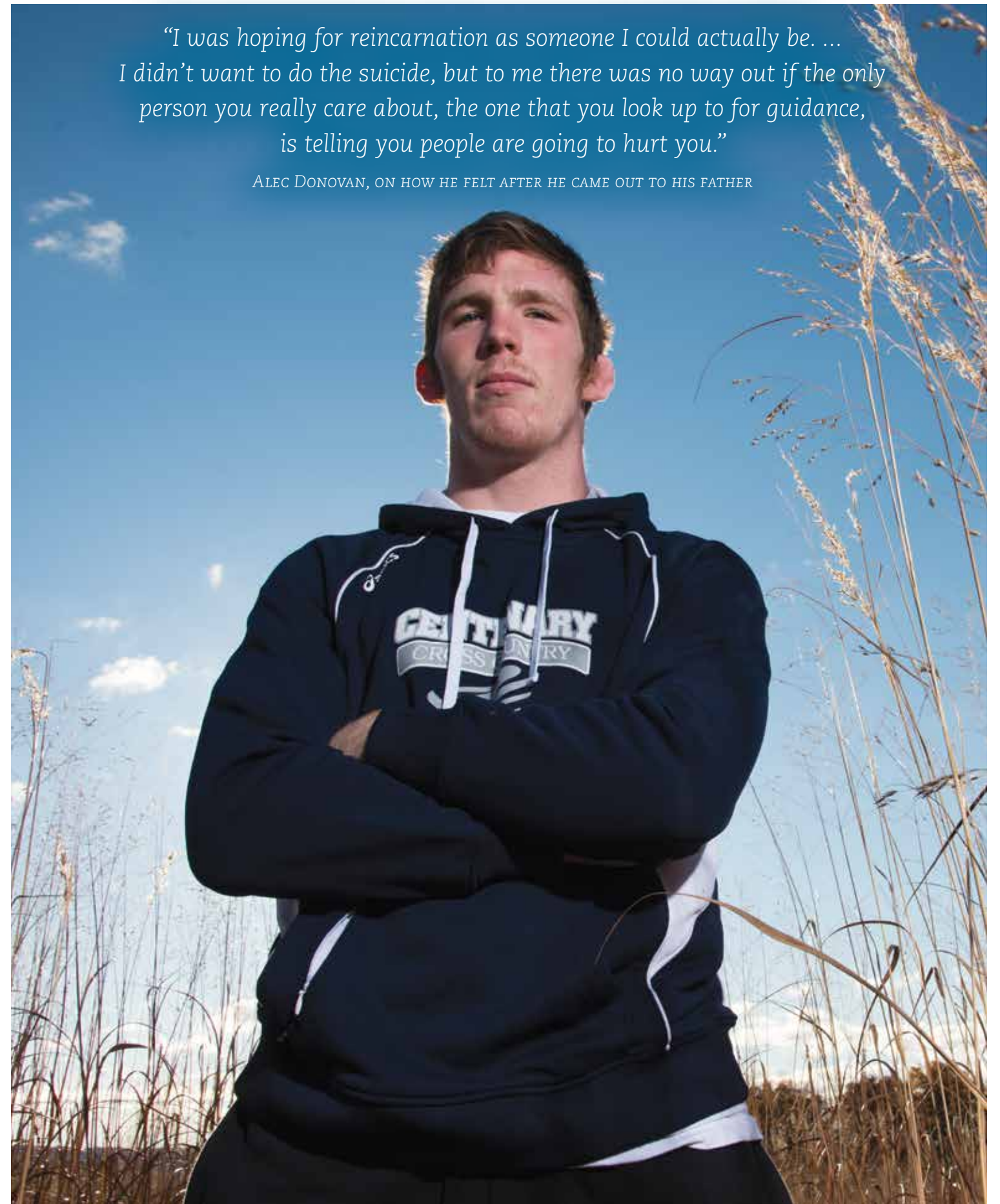


Since he was a boy, wrestling has served as Alec's outlet.

SUBMITTED BY ALEC DONOVAN

"I was hoping for reincarnation as someone I could actually be. ... I didn't want to do the suicide, but to me there was no way out if the only person you really care about, the one that you look up to for guidance, is telling you people are going to hurt you."

ALEC DONOVAN, ON HOW HE FELT AFTER HE CAME OUT TO HIS FATHER



JAMIE SCHWABEROW / NCAA PHOTOS

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whispers that the new kid on the wrestling team might be gay. He's looking at you in the showers. So, before and after gym class, he goes to the wrestling locker room to change — alone.

Online, Alec finds older movies about AIDS being a gay plague. He reads the story of Matthew Shepard, a gay college student in Wyoming who was beaten with a pistol, tied to a fence and left to die. He watches "Prayers for Bobby," a movie based on a true story of a gay man whose devout mother never accepts him. Bobby leaps from a bridge and is pulverized by a semitruck passing underneath.

He permits his confusion and anger to manifest at Shore Thing.

Grappling makes him forget, which is why he shows up every day, why he runs the 4 miles to the gym even when he isn't expected. Santaniello watches Alec batter his peers and coaches in practice — taking cheap shots, making necks pop. Some grow wary of sparing with him at all.

Then, when he needs it, Alec goes to the one place that provides peace without violence. He strolls nearly every day to the townhome next door. He grabs Martinson's soft, tan, rectangular throw pillow, places it in her lap and lays his head there, the rest of him tucked onto the couch next to her. On some days he stays quiet and still. On others, they discuss bullies and his father. But Alec won't broach one subject, even here. He is too afraid — of what she might think, whom she might tell, or how his life may come unmoored. He can't escape thoughts of Bobby's suicide, or of Matthew Shepard cinched to that fence post.

Rather than hide from the worst, Alec finally embraces it. In his freshman year, he writes a letter explaining to Tom and Martinson why he needs to take his life. He is certain his father will lash out, that his secret will make them all suffer.

For the first time in his life, Alec writes the words, "I'm gay." Then he ties a belt around the post of his bunk bed, pushes his head through the makeshift noose, pulls it tight and stares at the floor below. Alec takes the long step forward, but the belt gives way and he crashes to the floor, sobbing. He tucks the suicide note away in a drawer. His father, downstairs, asks about the sound. Alec says he dropped the remote.

Then, the next year, an argument at home. Like so many of their other squabbles, father and son rage over something innocuous. Rather than stand toe-to-toe, Alec bolts upstairs. His father's words follow him: "What are you gay or something?"

Anger overrides prudence. Alec shouts back: "Yeah, I am!"

Upstairs, Alec sits and waits and trembles. How could he have let it slip? Eventually, a calmer voice calls him back down. Martinson long had suspected. Tom had begun to as well.

"Are you sure you're gay?" Tom asks. "Do you know what gay is?"

"I'm gay," Alec says. "That's who I am."

"All right," Tom pauses. "You can't tell anybody."

His father doesn't want him to hide his identity because he is

ashamed of his son, or angry. It's because he harbors the same fears as Alec. He worries someone may want to hurt his son, or that he may be shunned in the sport he loves. He's concerned that the college scholarship he seems destined to receive may never come.

But perpetuating the lie for everyone else makes Alec feel hollow. Tom's protection only brings pain. Weeks later, Alec goes running in the snow, hoping to rouse the endorphins that typically thwart his fears. But on that dreary evening, they never come. He knows there is a bridge nearby, tall enough, just like the one Bobby used. Alec hopes for reincarnation, to be transformed into someone who isn't forced to hide from the world. He yearns for a life free of fear.

Alec turns away from the bridge but thinks back to the belt. He won't fail this time.

He texts a friend — a girl at school, also gay — about his thoughts. She urges him to wait. She will be there soon. Undeterred, he ties a belt around the pullup bar in his room. Underneath, he places a small blue wooden stool that bears his name — a childhood gift, each letter a different color. He stands on it and contemplates the next step, but his friend arrives and wraps her arms around him. She tells him to rip up the letter — the same letter from the year before, now sitting on his bed — so he does. As he rips, the weight on his chest dissipates, and he can breathe just a bit deeper. They go out for ice cream. They cry.

The rumors intensify. Wrestlers at Shore Thing notice posts on Alec's Facebook page that hint at his orientation. Santaniello asks the question. This time, despite his father's warnings, Alec feels comfortable enough to relay the truth. His coach is unfazed. He expresses support, not malice. More weight tumbles off Alec's chest. More oxygen pours in. At the state tournament during his sophomore year, teammates confront Alec as he rests on an Atlantic City hotel bed. He confirms the rumors. They commend him, vowing to keep his secret. More weight leaves. More air.

The truth now out among his family — a father, a mother next door, brothers on the mat — Alec still heeds Tom's wishes and acts the part at school. He clings to the one place where he feels free to push the façade aside. On

Martinson's couch — Alec's head in her lap, body curled up beside her — the two talk celebrity crushes. She asks him to show her pictures of boys he is talking to and of ones he might want to date. She picks out those he is too good for and those who might be worthy. Mom and son gab or laugh or watch TV. The couch provides a few soft square feet of sanctuary where he doesn't have to hide.

Tom's cousin Rob Robson never shied away from bringing his boyfriend to holiday meals and family functions. Tom never showed disgust or disdain toward Rob, so why would his son think he would be furious with him for following the same path? Why was Alec so scared?

Tom doesn't know what to say, what advice to offer or how to navigate



Alec with Lisa Martinson, his "mom next door."

SUBMITTED BY ALEC DONOVAN

"There's been nights he slept on my couch. I'd come downstairs and he's in here. ... I was always telling Alec and Harleigh, 'I'm right here. I'm right next door if you get scared.'"

LISA MARTINSON

something so foreign. So at family barbecues, Tom pulls Alec and Robson aside and asks his cousin to impart wisdom about their shared world. Robson is bemused, but he plays along. He thinks the lessons are the same — boy or girl, gay or straight. He will tell Alec nothing different from what Tom would have told him if Alec had become the stud he once bragged about: practice safe sex; be wary of people who may use you and hurt you; someone will break your heart, but you will be stronger for it.

One piece of Robson's advice would have eluded Tom. He came out to friends and family when he was 20, but remained closeted in his professional life. The decision made every day "soul-wrenching," he tells Alec. For a time, being dishonest with himself cost him true contentment.

Don't confine your identity to a lap and a pillow and a couch, Alec hears.

For the sake of a scholarship — no active college wrestler had yet come out publicly — Tom demands the circle stay small. So with one foot in the closet and one foot out, Alec climbs his sport's ranks. By his senior year, having come so close the year before, he insists to Tom and his coaches that he is going to be the New Jersey state champion at 145 pounds.

He fulfills that promise on March 8, 2015, wrestling Stephan Glasgow to a near stalemate and holding on for a 1-0 victory. Tom bounds down from the bleachers, forced to wait to embrace his son until Alec has first been mobbed by coaches and teammates, and finishes interviews with local media. Tom tells Alec he is proud.

Alec finishes the season 39-1 and ranked among the top 25 nationally in his weight class. New Jersey is a wrestling hotbed, and state champions are bound for scholarships and college glory, Tom thinks. It's everything he hoped for when Alec first started to show promise. It's why Tom worked the extra hours and grudgingly agreed to coach.

Colleges start reaching out — Edinboro University of Pennsylvania and California Polytechnic State University seem particularly interested. Tom prefers Edinboro, a smaller school that is only a seven-hour drive away. But his son has earned the right to decide. So, in May, Alec makes a trip to San Luis Obispo, California, to see what promise lies on the Pacific. While he is gone, Tom's phone buzzes and chirps ceaselessly. Friends ask if he has seen the article.

Seen the article?

He finds a link that leads to Outsports.com: "Gay New Jersey high school wrestling state champ comes out on college recruiting trip." Tom reads the mentions of depression, about Alec's thoughts of suicide and sees the bold headline pronouncing to the world that his son is gay. The fury returns.

Why didn't he wait until he had a scholarship?

Why didn't he tell me he was suicidal?

Can we make them take the article down?

Stewing, he turns to Facebook and sees someone has posted a story about Alec coming out. Underneath, a comment:

"Wtf why would you say your (sic) gay keep it in the closet."

Tom won't abide it. He logs in and stands up for his gay son:

"You are so ignorant!"

Others in the thread follow Tom's lead, battling back against a bully. Tom calls a coach at Brick Memorial and asks him to keep an eye out for any mistreatment.

He finds a new way to protect Alec. A new way to spare him pain.

Every few seconds, another sound. The phone renders small talk impossible as Alec rides shotgun with Cal Poly assistant wrestling coach Scotti Sentes, surveying a campus 3,000 miles from home that he hopes will become his new one.

Sentes asks about the commotion. Is this normal?

No, Alec tells him. It's the sound of his life changing.

Each notification is a retweet from someone sharing the story that just posted online — the story in which Alec tells the world, including the coach riding next to him, that he is gay. Alec is jittery. He is unsure how Sentes will react. So the coach pulls over and reads. "No one's going to look at you any differently," he says.

A few months earlier, Alec reached out to Outsports.com founder Cyd Zeigler, who has told the coming-out stories of hundreds of gay athletes through his website.

Alec had read those stories. He told Zeigler he was ready. While the Cal Poly coaches are caught off guard by the bomb Alec drops on his recruiting trip, they assure him he is welcome. They say he made a difficult choice that will help other young athletes feel empowered to do the same.

Alec returns to Brick, content with his visit. But Tom and Martinson ache: Why hadn't he come to them with his deepest troubles? Tom screams, like always. But once he retreats to his room, Alec stumbles upon the nasty Facebook comment and his father's response, "You are so ignorant!" Even amid the shouts, Alec finally feels acceptance. More weight lifts. Another gulp of air.

In the months ahead, because Alec insisted his email address be included in the Outsports article, more than a dozen other young men — including athletes from a range of sports, six wrestlers among them — reach out to him. They've all lived the same lives, felt the same despair and wrestled with the same uncertainty. One by one, he encourages them to be honest with their loved ones and to embrace themselves without constraint. Those who heed his advice offer thanks. Zeigler counsels Alec to shepherd people to professionals if they reach out and threaten self-harm. Then the stranger calls when Alec is in gym class. He stays on the phone for 35 minutes as he and the teacher help save the boy's life. Another thank you.

The deluge continues, each note laden with support and empathy. They come from men who were closeted into middle age, from men who regret their once-bigoted ways, from mothers of gay sons. Gratitude binds them. *Thank you for sharing your story, Alec.*

He responds to each note.

It takes him all summer.

Despite Alec's surprise announcement, colleges don't flee. Tom realizes his fears are unfounded. The worries that so often manifest as anger finally burn out. "Night and day," Alec says. He commits to Cal Poly, where he will be a Division I scholarship wrestler. A stud.

Coaches at Cal Poly bring in representatives from the school's campus pride center to speak with the team, answer questions and offer insight. Alec's most formidable fears have finally washed away, and he arrives to an environment ready to welcome him. Yet his new life brings new pressures.

Alec finds himself unprepared. Classes prove difficult. He starts an anti-bullying club on campus, which stretches his time thin. The coaching staff redshirts him — at practices he feels forgotten and shunned. He is no longer a star, the state champ. He is merely a lowly freshman who can't contribute. One night, he calls Tom at 3 a.m. for advice on a paper. It's due the next day. Martinson hears Alec's voice drop whenever he says goodbye after quick trips home.

Coaches meet with him frequently, but Alec feels alienated and alone. He begins to fear the motivations and biases of those around him. Though redshirts like Alec can't score points for their team, they are still permitted to wrestle in competitions. He finishes 14-7, and his season comes to an end after he is knocked unconscious for six minutes in his final match. Recovering from the concussion, he misses classes and workouts, his healing brain rattled by the wrestling room's thundering music.

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“What these guys go through day in and day out, I don’t think your sexual preference or anything like that has anything to do with who you are out on the mat. You’re good enough to get out there on the mat, you have the guts to get on that mat, you’re going to get respect. No matter what.”

JOHN GARRIQUES, CENTENARY UNIVERSITY (NEW JERSEY) WRESTLING COACH



Alec and his Centenary teammates share a laugh before a prepractice run.

JAMIE SCHWABEROW / NCAA PHOTOS

By spring, Cal Poly head coach Brendan Buckley announces he is leaving the program to work for a nonprofit in New York. The new coach, Jon Sioredas, asks Alec if he plans on returning next season. Despite a difficult year, does he still want to be a member of the team? Alec affirms that he does.

Home for summer, though, a letter arrives. It tells him that he is no longer on scholarship at Cal Poly. The words burn. Furious, he calls the school, but can’t get a satisfactory answer. He hides the letter in his car and doesn’t tell Tom. He returns to Martinson’s lap, fearing his father’s

wrath for losing the one thing that seemed to matter most. “I don’t know who to talk to,” he says. “I don’t know what to do.”

Martinson forces Alec’s hand only three weeks before Tom thinks his son is due back at Cal Poly. The news is greeted with the usual detonation. It’s directed at Alec for not telling him, but also at the school for not taking back his son — a New Jersey state champion. But inside, Tom glows. He will be happier here. He will be safe.

The bad news is offset with a dose of good. Alec has been in touch with John Garriques, the coach at Centenary University, a Division III school only a two-hour drive north. One of Alec’s closest childhood friends, Zac Huxford, is an assistant coach there. Alec says he misses the leaves changing color in the fall and the crispness in the air, so Tom helps get his transfer papers in order. He cobbles together grant money and saves another \$13,000 by arranging for Alec to live 20 minutes from campus with his grandmother and aunt.

With his son’s love for the sport waning after his experience at Cal Poly, Tom’s only stipulation for the transfer is that Alec must keep wrestling. His son may be renowned as a pioneer, but Tom knows him, above all, as a wrestler. He watches Alec’s state championship match when he needs to remember.

Alec agrees. Tom sees his son’s passion for the sport reignite while instructing the youth wrestlers at Shore Thing. Other members of the club are less wary of squaring off with him. The cheap shots and brutality of the past departed along with his secret.

Tom even welcomes another boy into his home — Alec’s boyfriend, in from out of town, becomes another member of the family. Tom takes them hiking in the Catskills.

And when Alec asks if he can attend a gay pride event in Chicago, Tom blanches — not because of the event, he insists, but because of the location. The city’s murder rate frightens him. So he finds another route: Why not go to one in New York? He advises Alec on the easiest way to get there and shows him where to park. He tells him to have a good time, but to be safe. “Like any other parent thing,” Tom says.

As Alec starts his time at Centenary, father and son attend Robson’s wedding. Alec, who dabbles in photography, agrees to shoot the ceremony. He and Tom listen to the two men exchange vows on a fall afternoon, pledging to love each other for the rest of their lives. Through it all, Tom beams. When he can, Alec pulls his eye away from the lens and watches his father smile.

At Centenary, Alec and his new teammates grind through two-hour practices that demand contact and intimate proximity six days a week. Foreheads press against foreheads. Legs wrap around torsos. The men carry one another on their backs or hold each other in their arms while running laps.

That looks gay.

The Centenary wrestlers understand those words from Alec’s past are misguided. None are unnerved by entwining their bodies with a gay man’s because calculated brutality defines the wrestling room — each lunge, grapple, twist of a limb or forearm pressing a face into the mat is not easily mistaken for anything else. They endure that torture together, as equals.

Team captain Josh Sibbles has spoken with his teammates. Not one of

the 20 others pushes back or expresses discomfort. Gay or straight, they eagerly sweat and bleed with Alec. They slap his back when he stands at the water fountain and shake his hand after trying to mangle him.

Garriques forecasts multiple All-America honors in Alec’s future, and perhaps a national championship. More important, though, is the anti-bullying club the coach starts on campus because Alec started one at Cal Poly. The two work together to design its mission and recruit members. Soon, wrestlers and distance runners intermingle.

Alec addresses the room, 30 strong, at the club’s first meeting in September. He details the confusion he felt. The depression. The comments in school hallways. The suicide attempts. The power words can have over a fragile young psyche. Some students stand up, one by one, and share their own stories. Others quietly relate. Garriques had a speech impediment that elicited mockery as a child. Sibbles’ high school teammates seemed too eager to chastise him because he is black. Chris Muce, only 5 feet 5 inches, long endured short jokes and jabs about his malformed ears — their bulbous cartilage battered and reshaped by years of wrestling. Alec’s ears look similar. More than a dozen attendees approach him after the presentation. He is brave, they say. They are proud to know him.

Alec decides to major in secondary education. After a fulfilling summer working with children at Shore Thing, he hopes to become a teacher and a coach. Perhaps he will start a college wrestling program for women. He wants them to have the same opportunities that were afforded to a gay boy from New Jersey. “They have no one to look up to,” he says.

He wants a son one day, carried by a surrogate. Alec hopes the boy will follow him into wrestling, but he will let him try any sport or hobby he desires. No matter what he chooses, Alec hopes to cheer for him like his father did. That, at least, he will emulate.

Alec walks to his car on a fall day after practice, drenched in sweat, hair tousled and face red from two more hours in Centenary’s wrestling room. As he often does on these walks, he calls Tom. They discuss the nutrition plan that the father has carefully laid

out for his son. They talk about work and class and grades and grappling, the traumas of the past long since scarred over by the minutiae of the present.

Alec glances at the ridge to the west that looms over campus. He admires the mix of hues on the hillside — yellows, oranges, auburns, crimsons — as the last bits of evening sunlight dance on the leaves. Tom rambles, and Alec stops to soak in the sight. The distinct colors complement each other, he thinks. Those differences make each tree appear more vibrant than if it stood alone, isolated from the others, shivering in the wind.

Alec listens to his father and gazes at those trees, tired from practice, breathing deep. **A**



Alec, his sister, Harleigh, and his father, Tom, on a recent trip to New York City.

SUBMITTED BY ALEC DONOVAN

“Now that Alec’s a little bit more mature, our relationship is a lot better. I think it was last year, Alec came around and told me, ‘You know what? You were hard, but I understand now. ... I appreciate it.’”

TOM DONOVAN