

SPLIT IMAGE – by Kate Fagan, *ESPN.com*

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ON THE MORNING of Jan. 17, 2014, Madison Holleran awoke in her dorm room at the University of Pennsylvania. She had spent the previous night watching the movie *The Parent Trap* with her good friend Ingrid Hung. Madison went to class. She took a test. She told a few friends she would meet them later that night at the dining hall. She went to the Penn bookstore and bought gifts for her family.

While she was there, her dad called. "Maddy, have you found a therapist down there yet?" he asked.

"No, but don't worry, Daddy, I'll find one," she told him.

But she had no intention of finding one. In fact, she was, at that exact moment, buying the items she would leave for her family at the top of a parking garage. Godiva chocolates for her dad. Two necklaces for her mom. Gingersnaps for her grandparents, who always had those cookies in their home. Outfits for her nephew, Hayes, who had been born two weeks earlier. *The Happiness Project* for Ingrid, with a note scribbled inside. And a picture of herself as a young kid, holding a tennis racket. Over winter break she had told her dad that she was borrowing that picture, that she needed it for something.

She didn't say what.

Then, on the evening of Jan. 17, just after dusk settled on the city, Madison took a running leap off the ninth level of a parking garage in downtown Philadelphia.

She was 19 years old.

MADISON LOVED QUOTES. Sometimes she took a picture of the words, spotted in a magazine, and posted the image on social media. Other times she wrote down the quote -- in beautiful script, to be framed -- so she could revisit the sentiment anytime she wanted.

She loved to draw, write in her journal and read. She enjoyed long runs, singing in the car, sushi, and bananas with peanut butter.

She also loved her big New Jersey family. She was especially close with her dad, whom she called "Big Jimbo." He was her biggest fan. He came to her soccer games and track meets, always wrapping her in a hug afterward. He believed she could do anything.

Family and friends used to joke that whenever they opened the *Bergen Record*, they saw a picture of Madison, another athletic feat captured in print: so many goals scored, so many track meets won. Life seemed good; life was good.

Then Madison left for college. She had decided to run track at Penn, only two hours from home, but it felt like a foreign land to her. Everything seemed to change. Running had once made her feel alive, but at Penn she couldn't breathe. Her friends had once made everything better; now they just couldn't understand.

EVERYONE IN MADISON'S LIFE holds a piece of her story, possesses a clue: a text message, a vacant look, a deleted Instagram post. In the days after she died, the people who knew her best converged on Allendale, New Jersey, her hometown; siblings (one brother, three sisters), parents (Jim and Stacy), high school friends, college classmates -- all offered their shattered piece to see whether they could rebuild Madison.

It was as if they hoped she might be breathed back to life. As if they might then do and say the things they hadn't known she needed.

Madison was beautiful, talented, successful -- very nearly the epitome of what every young girl is supposed to hope she becomes. But she was also a perfectionist who struggled when she performed poorly. She was a deep thinker, someone who was aware of the image she presented to the world, and someone who often struggled with what that image conveyed about her, with how people superficially read who she was, what her life was like.

THE LIFE MADISON projected on her own Instagram feed was filled with shots that seemed to confirm everyone's expectations: Of course she was loving her first year of college. Of course she enjoyed running. Her mom remembers looking at a photo on her feed and saying, "Madison, you look like you're so happy at this party."

"Mom," Madison said. "It's just a picture."

Everyone presents an edited version of life on social media. People share moments that reflect an ideal life, an ideal self. Hundreds of years ago, we sent letters by horseback, containing only what we wanted the recipient to read. Fifty years ago, we spoke via the telephone, sharing only the details that constructed the self we wanted reflected.

With Instagram, one thing has changed: the amount we consume of one another's edited lives. Young women growing up on Instagram are spending a significant chunk of each day absorbing others' filtered images while they walk through their own realities, unfiltered. In a recent survey conducted by the Girl Scouts, nearly 74 percent of girls agreed that other girls tried to make themselves look "cooler than they are" on social networking sites.

No image captures the paradoxes of Madison's Instagram account more than the one she posted just an hour before jumping off the parking garage. Holiday lights are twinkling in the trees of Rittenhouse Square, and Madison put a filter on the image that produced an ethereal quality, almost as if the night is underwater.

She seemed acutely aware that the life she was curating online was distinctly different from the one she was actually living. Yet she could not apply that same logic when she looked at the projected lives of others. Before going home for winter break, she asked Ingrid, who was also struggling at Penn, "What are you going to say when you go home to all your friends? I feel like all my friends are having so much fun at school."

She and Ashley Montgomery, a friend and track teammate, followed a group of Penn upperclassmen on Instagram. They would scroll through pictures and say to each other, "This is what college is supposed to be like; this is what we want our life to be like."

Madison's high school friends had told her they were also struggling. Emma Sullivan was running track at Boston College and having a hard time. Another friend, Jackie Reyneke, was playing basketball at Princeton and feeling overwhelmed. They had all shared some form of their struggles with Madison, yet in her mind, the lives her friends were projecting on social media trumped the reality they were privately sharing.

This confused them, and it still does.

Checking Instagram is like opening a magazine to see a fashion advertisement. Except an ad is branded as what it is: a staged image on glossy paper.

Instagram is passed off as real life.

Yes, people filter their photos to make them prettier. People are also often encouraged to put filters on their sadness, to brighten their reality so as not to "drag down" those around them. The myth still exists that happiness is a choice, which perpetuates the notion of depression as weakness.

Life must be Instagrammed -- in more ways than one.

MADISON ONCE POSTED a picture collage of her dad on Instagram with the caption, "Happy Father's Day to Big Jimbo, the greatest man I've ever known and ever will know. Love you with all my heart Daddio."

Every summer they attended the U.S. Open, the last of the tennis grand slams. Madison loved watching the best female players, occasionally wondering aloud whether she could have played tennis at the highest level.

"Of course you could," Jim said.

The first inkling he had that his daughter wasn't doing well at Penn was when she refused to come with him to Flushing Meadows, site of the U.S. Open, just after the start of her freshman year. She said she was too swamped with schoolwork and practice. He offered to drive down to Philly from Allendale, a four-hour round trip, just so she could get a break from what he sensed had become a high-pressure environment.

But Jim didn't press her. "I should have just driven down there and gotten her," he says, letting the sentence trail off.

Madison's older sister Ashley had started college at Penn State just two years before. She was unhappy, so she transferred to Alabama, where life improved. Jim and Stacy thought Madison must be going through something similar. A change of scenery was what she needed. An easy fix like that and Madison would continue her upward trajectory.

"This is normal," her sister Carli told her. "People leave home, they're unhappy, they transfer -- they figure it out."

Madison shook her head: "It's not normal. It's not normal to feel like this."

She started seeing a therapist during Thanksgiving break and would continue seeing the woman through winter break. The closest Madison came to a diagnosis was "battling anxiety."

"There is nothing, absolutely nothing, that happened when she was younger, growing up, that makes sense of the decision she made," Stacy says. "Am I angry at her? Yes, of course I am."

Everyone now agrees that Madison was depressed, though she had never previously exhibited symptoms. (Depression exists on Jim's side of the family.) Something had changed with her brain chemistry. She was not seeing the world in the same way she had before. She had lost weight too, had become so thin as to appear sick.

The day before Madison returned to Penn for spring semester, she had a session with her therapist that Jim also attended. She admitted to having suicidal thoughts. "If you have suicidal thoughts, don't act them out," her doctor said. "Either call me or call someone in your family."

Madison nodded.

As a family, they had never talked about suicide. Jim never considered it a real possibility -- just the dramatic ending to someone else's story. As Carli explains: "Other people battle depression for years. With Madison, it feels like one day she was happy, the next she was sad and the day after she was gone."

Jim feared that speaking about suicide would make its likelihood greater. He didn't raise the subject as he and Madison drove back to Philadelphia.

Bill Schmitz Jr., former president of the American Association of Suicidology, points out that depression does not have a one-size-fits-all prognosis. "The course varies," he says. "In a way, it's the same as cancer. For some, we might prolong life for months, for years. For others, it can be very sudden."

Jim drove Madison back to Philadelphia on Jan. 11. As they approached the exit off I-95, he offered to keep driving, to put Philly in the rearview mirror, to drive south, to the University of North Carolina or Vanderbilt University -- to somewhere, anywhere. She could enroll at a new school, start over.

"Let's just keep driving," he said. "Let's enroll you somewhere else."

She shook her head. She had promised to meet friends at a Penn basketball game.

As he left his daughter that evening, Jim remembers looking at Madison and thinking, *She's still not happy; that's not a happy kid I'm walking away from.*

A few days later, at the start of the spring semester, Stacy and Mackenzie, Madison's youngest sister, drove to Philadelphia to join Madison for a meeting with Steve Dolan, the head track coach at Penn. Madison had told Ingrid she was planning to quit the team.

The three Hollerans walked into Dolan's office. Madison pulled out a letter she had written outlining why she wanted to quit.

"I need to figure out if track is making me unhappy, or Penn, or if it's something else," she read from the letter. She also spoke of struggling with the training (at that point, she was being coached by an assistant, not Dolan) and with the dorm she was in. She talked about wanting to join a sorority.

Dolan listened patiently, but the news surprised him. Madison seemed to have lost perspective, was seeing through a blurred lens, like some kind of dysmorphia. She had excelled in school (GPA of 3.5) and in track during the first semester, despite her constant fears that she was failing at both. To Dolan, she had appeared happy and content.

"I support you, and I want you to be happy and healthy," Dolan said. "The decision is yours. Do you not want to keep training, keep running?"

Ivy League track is demanding. Madison wasn't the first runner to tell Dolan she might quit. He saw a college freshman in transition, struggling to find her place.

Madison folded the letter and put it away.

"Yes, I do," she said after a pause. "I want to keep running."

Later that week, Madison heard that another member of the track team had quit. "I can't believe that," she said longingly. "I really can't."

As they walked out of Dolan's office, Stacy said, "He is one fabulous coach." They walked to Ingrid's dorm room, where Madison told her friend about the meeting, her voice lighter than anyone had heard in months.

"I drove home feeling pretty good," Stacy says. "I thought she was actually getting better, or starting to. She seemed better, in my mind anyway. But now I know that she was putting on an act that week."

MADISON SPENT WINTER break at home, in Allendale.

Over the holiday, she went to her friend Emma Sullivan's house. Emma was one of her best friends; the two spoke more intimately, more deeply, than they did with others, sharing the fears they had about growing up and leaving home.

She sat at the kitchen table with Emma and her mom. Snow fell heavily outside, sheets of white streaming outside the window. The three women sat there for hours.

"Why are you not as happy as you used to be?" Emma asked.

"Tell us how you're feeling," Emma's mom urged.

Madison was unable to identify exactly what had cast her adrift. Was it the disappointment with Penn, once her dream school? Was she homesick? Was track overwhelming her?

And the most pressing thought of all: If she quit, wasn't she just a failure? Wouldn't that be the first in what would become a lifetime of letdowns?

Madison had always struggled to handle even garden-variety failure. She chased perfection. Once, when a track result wasn't what she expected, she broke down in tears. Outsiders thought she was so gifted she could just show up and run faster than everyone, not knowing how hard she prepared and trained.

Madison kept her eyes down while sitting at the kitchen table. Emma remembers feeling that her best friend was lost -- just so lost.

Like everyone in Madison's life, Emma urged her to transfer from Penn.

"Yeah, it's kind of too late," Madison told Emma. "I'm already at Penn."

She said this as if she were locked in a room, the key thrown away.

That winter break, Madison wanted to keep her circle of seven friends close. They watched movies together. They slept over at one another's houses. And on the final night of break, they got together for a potluck dinner. (Madison brought store-bought sugar cookies; typically, she would have baked.) They called the night "The Last Supper" because, in the morning, the first among them would leave for the start of spring semester.

As the evening ended, Madison said, "Love you, see you soon!" as if they'd all see one another in a few weeks, maybe over spring break, maybe sooner.

Later, she sent a text message to Ingrid, a picture of the seven high school friends, arms around one another. "These are the types of friends we need to find at Penn," she said.

THE NIGHT OF Jan. 17 was chilly, but not unseasonably so. Madison walked the streets of the city, wearing jeans, a sweater and a coat. She carried a shopping bag filled with the goodbye gifts for her family. For a while, she responded to friends on iMessage. Then she stopped. Just after the sun went down, Madison began walking toward the parking garage at the corner of 15th Street and Spruce.

"Madison?" came a voice from across the street.

Lehigh soccer coach Eric Lambinus was standing on the street with assistant coach Amy Hough. The pair had recruited Madison out of high school, but at the last minute she chose Penn. The coaches were standing outside a restaurant. Eric waved to Madison, and she crossed the street toward them.

"How are you?" he asked.

Madison mentioned that she was cutting back on track but said otherwise everything was fine. Eric had heard through mutual friends that she was unhappy at Penn, but nothing appeared out of the ordinary.

"What's in the bag?" he asked.

"Some presents for my family," she said.

After a few minutes, Eric told Madison: "Just know there are doors open for you still. There are opportunities."

The coach needed to be careful with his words. He didn't want to appear to be poaching another school's student-athlete, but he also wanted to convey to Madison that if she wanted to start the transfer process, to play soccer at Lehigh as she had considered doing out of high school, that option was available. Madison had been one of the best prep soccer players in the state, winning two state titles with Northern Highlands.

Madison thanked him. The two said goodbye. She walked away, toward the parking garage. Eric immediately called his wife to tell her about running into Madison, about what a coincidence it was. *Perhaps the meeting was serendipitous*, he thought.

A block away, Madison began climbing the nine flights of stairs. When she reached the top, she placed the bag of gifts where it would easily be found. And a few minutes later -- maybe as few as five or as many as 15 -- she hurdled the silver-colored railing. She landed in the bike lane. A woman who did not see her fall stayed with her until an ambulance arrived. The woman believed Madison had passed out, perhaps drunk. Madison did not look like she had jumped from a building. She looked like she was asleep, the only scratch on her a small one, just above her eye.

When Eric walked out of the restaurant a little over an hour later, he heard the wail of police cars and ambulances. Something had happened down the street. He walked the other way to avoid the commotion. "I've gone over that night probably 100 times in my mind," he says. "I wish I had spent a little more time with her, but really nothing seemed out of the ordinary."

More than two hours after Madison jumped, at 9 p.m., Stacy received a call from the 215 area code. Even before she picked up, she felt unsettled.

"Is Madison OK?" she said.

It was Steve Dolan. He told Stacy something was wrong with Madison and he would find out more details and get back to her. Frightened, Stacy called some of Madison's friends at Penn. First on her list was Ingrid.

"Where is Madison?" Stacy asked. "Have you seen her?"

"No, I haven't, but we were supposed to eat dinner together tonight."

"Something is wrong," Stacy said.

Ingrid ran the quarter of a mile from her dorm room to Madison's, calling her friend's roommate on the way. The information to that point was limited: Nobody could find Madison. None of it made sense. Ingrid had just seen her friend that morning, and she had seemed the same as any other day.

Ingrid burst into Madison's dorm room -- her friend left the door unlocked. Every other time she'd been there, Madison's bed was unmade, clothes draped across the chair. As Ingrid looked around, alarm bells went off in her mind.

Madison's bed was crisply made.

Within minutes, campus officials were in the room and Ingrid was back on the phone with her friend's mom, who had received a call from the chaplain.

"She's gone," Stacy said.

No one can say for sure why Madison chose that specific parking garage. Maybe it doesn't matter. Or maybe it does. Maybe comfort exists in believing there is order in the world, even when someone is making the most disorderly decision we know: running toward death instead of away from it.

In their absence, we're left trying to pin meaning to air.

Nine stories of air.

PHILLY IS THE City of Murals. Hundreds of buildings are covered in artwork.

There is art on the parking garage from which Madison jumped. On the south side of the structure, on the wall facing Spruce, is a small installation. Quotes, fragments of thoughts, are stenciled in white against a black background, like chalk on a blackboard. The most evocative phrase reads, "She had wings on."

The wall looks like the rubble, the stacked words from poems never published.

She had wings on.

Madison left a suicide note that began, "I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out, and I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in." Previously, in her journal, she had written "Help!" at the top of one page, followed at the bottom by "No, no more help."

She also left a copy of the young adult book *Reconstructing Amelia*, which tells the story of a devastated single mother who pieces together clues about the death of her daughter, who supposedly killed herself by jumping off a building at her prep school. In the book, nothing is as it seems. And at the end, the mother discovers that Amelia didn't jump; she was pushed.

Jim cannot bring himself to read the book.

"Sometimes it's hard to tell how fast the current's moving until you're headed over a waterfall," the author writes.

Madison seemed to see a version of herself in Amelia, in the perfectly crafted veneer that never felt like an honest reflection of her interior life. As though she could never find validation for her struggle because how could someone so beautiful, so seemingly put together, be unhappy? This is illogical, of course. Like thinking a computer's hard drive can't malfunction simply because the screen hasn't a scratch.

The day after Madison jumped, Jim walked to the top of the parking garage. He read the phrase, *She had wings on*. He spoke with Madison's friends. He compiled clues.

Then he stopped. He could spend his life trying, in vain, to make his child whole again, he thought. Or he could work to keep others from breaking apart.

The Hollerans are trying now to deliver a new message: It's OK to not be OK. It's OK *to show people* you're not OK.

ASHLEY MONTGOMERY IS now a sophomore at Penn, and she still runs track. When she was a freshman, she and Madison would train together; the two were also close away from the sport. For Ashley, sophomore year has gone much better than freshman year, and she often thinks to herself, *If only Maddy were around to feel this, to be here.*

Freshman year of college can be like running an obstacle course wearing a blindfold. Nothing prepares you for how hard the workouts will be, how long they last, what each class will be like, which events are fun and which should be avoided.

Once, as she and Ashley ran through the Penn campus, Madison spotted a quote on the side of a building, part of a mural. She stopped to take a picture. Then she uploaded the image to Instagram.

A few hours later, when Ashley went to Instagram to see the picture, the image was gone. Madison had deleted it.

After Madison died, Ashley went running, hoping to find the mural that had caught the attention of her friend.

She couldn't.

"We all shared what we knew, and some things were answered," Ashley says. "But we could only do so much. The puzzle will never be complete."

THE TOP OF the parking garage slopes upward. There is a wall, then a silver-colored railing. Because Madison landed out in the street, her friends and family are convinced she took a running leap over the side, clearing the barrier just like she once cleared hurdles on the track.

At first glance, a running leap off a nine-story building makes little sense. Why not something that seems gentler, easier? (Whatever that means.) Maybe this is because all we can think about, standing at great heights, is the moment of impact, the violence of a falling body hitting concrete. This is exactly what Jim thought of when he went to the top of the parking garage on Jan. 18, 2014, the morning after -- peering over the railing and wondering what that final moment, the impact, must have felt like for his daughter.

Emma hasn't made sense of the act, or the method, but says if forced to make sense of it -- and Madison has forced her to do so -- she can maybe understand why Madison chose jumping. "If you run and jump, it's freeing -- to just do that. You just jump and it happens. And it's over with. And you don't have to struggle. I can picture her walking up there and just setting her mind to it and knowing it could happen -- that's something I can see her doing. When she gets on that line in track, it's like, 'I'm doing this.' She was always so determined, with everything that she did. Maybe even too determined sometimes."

In high school, Emma and Madison talked about what life would be like as they grew older. (Most of Madison's friends said she rarely spoke of the future with them.) What it would be like to get married, have a family. Both were scared of growing up. Madison never even got her driver's license.

"We were both so fearful of what was to come," Emma says. "The way her mind worked, it threw her off when she didn't know what the next step was, or what the future would hold. Knowing the end result was something she always wanted."

But maybe Madison had stopped projecting into the future. Maybe picturing the concrete at the base of the parking garage was as impossible as imagining herself in old age.

Maybe she could only imagine the freedom of flying.

EVERY YEAR, MORE than 40,000 Americans die by suicide. Among young adults, ages 10 to 24, suicide is the second-leading cause of death, with more than 4,500 young people taking their lives each year. The suicide rate among NCAA athletes is lower than the general population (0.93 per 100,000, versus 10.9). Between 2004 and 2012, 35 student-athletes took their own lives. Young adult suicide profoundly shakes us. Such promise, gone so soon.

What happened? Why? What did we miss?

Survivors search for answers. At first, those left behind are detectives. They are chasing clues. Over time, friends and family begin looking instead for peace, and for some kind of purpose.

"What happened?" becomes "What now?"

JIM STANDS IN the kitchen of the Holleran family home, looking into the backyard. He and Stacy played college tennis and still play. All their kids play the sport, or played at one time, including the two youngest, Mackenzie and Brendan, both of whom are still in high school. Mackenzie is packing a bag now, about to walk out the door for a lesson.

Jim makes a joke about the "friendly" rivalry between Mackenzie and Brendan on the tennis court. Everyone laughs.

A worn soccer goal sits in the backyard. Jim gestures out the window and says, "Madison used to run laps around the yard."

A shrine to Madison, with a sketched portrait, a dangling cross and the card from her funeral Mass, sits on a ledge over the dining room table. The Godiva chocolates Madison left for Jim were eaten. He doesn't remember when. The gingersnaps are gone too. Jim and Stacy seem much more interested in sharing Madison's life -- a DVD of her soccer highlights, a binder of newspaper clippings, her senior yearbook filled with notes from adoring classmates -- than the items she left before ending it.

On the refrigerator is a 2013 holiday card that reads, "Happy New Year. With love, the Holleran Family."

Madison is in the back row. She looks happy.

A week after Madison died, on Jan. 23, 2014, the family launched a Facebook page, "In Memory of Madison Holleran," which has more than 52,000 likes. The site is dedicated to suicide prevention and ending the stigma attached to mental illness. Included on the page are stories of Madison, and stories from people struggling with depression, looking for a community.

"Sometimes we are all a little broken, but there is always someone to help, always someone who cares," one post reads.

"Please seek help," another reads. "You are not alone."

And there's this one, from a runner, dated Oct. 6:

"I run because it's therapeutic for me. Because every time I run outside, around my home, I am reminded of the beauty of the world, of which I often forget. Yet at the same time, I am fully aware of beauty -- it simply saddens me because of reasons I have not yet conjured up. I suppose I am sad. But at the same time I am happy; and miserable; and joyful; and stressed out; and calm, and everything in between. I am everything. Every emotion, rigged in every format, and developed through every machine. I am numb but I am not."

A little over a year before she died, Madison posted on Instagram a snapshot of a quote from *Seventeen* magazine:

"Even people you think are perfect are going through something difficult."

The image had been put through a filter.



Photos from Madison's Facebook and Instagram completely concealed her reality. *From right: Facebook; Instagram; LetsRun.com*