

Steven Bawol - A Life Intended to Help Others

By Anne W. Semmes

Early Saturday morning, the life of 19-year-old Steven Bawol was snuffed out when his car inexplicably hit a tree on Stanwich Road. He leaves behind two younger brothers and his parents, Mark and Susan Bawol of Cos Cob.

His family, said his father, Mark Bawol, was a normal family. Steven attended Cos Cob School, Central Middle School and Greenwich High School. At 6-foot-4, he was prime football material. The news stories reported that in his senior year he was elected to play for the Fairfield County team at the National Football Foundation Hall of Fame All-Star Game.

But it was his spiritual life and thoughtfulness toward others that seemed to radiate. An organization important in his life was Young Life of Greenwich, a non-denominational group that works with teenagers to positively impact their lives, that espouses "every kid has the right to know about the unconditional love of God and Jesus Christ." Role model volunteer leaders play an important part in the program.

"Steve came on our summer camp in his sophomore to junior year at Greenwich High School," said Mark Shull, area director of Young Life of Greenwich. He recalled Bawol being "taken aback" by the song singing and "funny skits" giving the teenage perspective. But by week's end Steven was leading a group.

It was in 2003, the summer after his junior year when he went to Young Life's Rocky Mountain Frontier Ranch in Colorado that he made the "180" in his life of what he wanted to do, said Shull. "He wanted to dedicate his life to help others make their lives better, to be a big brother.

"We saw in our Rocky Mountains camp someone who truly cared about other people. He would get you to laugh when you stressed out," said Shull. "The kids responded to his loving support. He'd tell them, 'Don't worry about it.'"

After his graduation from high school, when his friends were setting off for adventurous trips, Shull said, "Steve went and led a cabin on one of our summer camp trips with 10 or 12 freshmen and sophomore kids for a week. He invested his time in those kids.

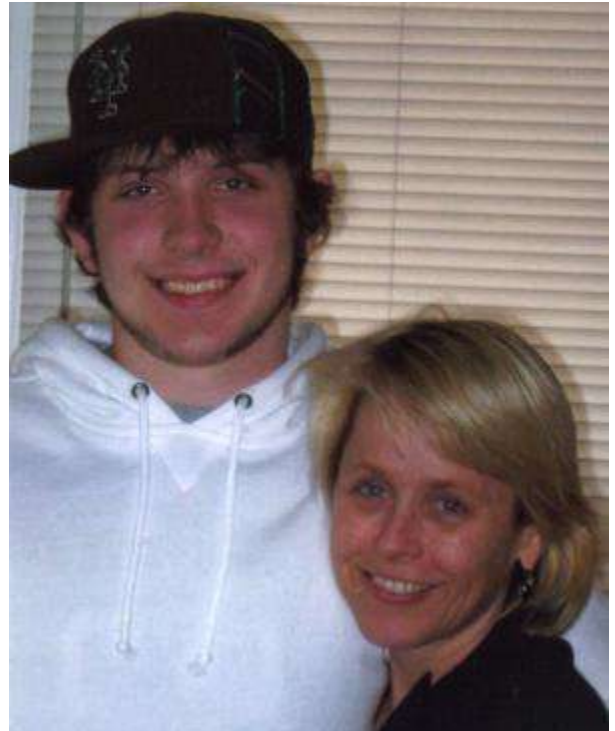
"He looked up to two guys, Andy Marullo and Kevin Chao," said Shull. "They were a year ahead of him. They invested time in him and he turned around and wanted to do this for other people. He never talked about himself. He was always helping others."

"He had a big personality," said Shull. "We saw him on the football field. He was a giant of a football player. But at the center of his life was his relationship with God. He wanted to love others unconditionally."

Steven's father can remember the day his son told him of his 180-degree decision to dedicate his life to others. "It was on July 7, 2004," said Bawol, "I was the first person he told. When he told me, I thought, 'I've got a born-again Christian.'"

"He was a typical kid," his father continued. "We dragged him to church when he was four years old. We told him, you can't not go to church. When you're older, you can make your own decisions to go or not go. We wanted to give him something to make his decision on. What he made of church - that was beautiful."

On Wednesday, Shull was a speaker at Steven Bawol's funeral, held at St. John's Lutheran Church in Stamford. This was the church, his father said, that his son should have been married in.



Steven Bawol with his mother Susan. On July 7, 2004, he dedicated his life to helping others. (Contributed photo)