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## Stunned South Hadley students grieve and regret after classmate's apparent suicide

By CATHERINE BAUM  
Staff Writer

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Saturday, January 16, 2010

SOUTH HADLEY - Dressed in black hoodies, black jeans and black jackets, South Hadley High School students forgot about the trivial differences that divide them and joined together in school Friday to mourn the loss of their 14-year-old classmate Phoebe Prince.

Tests were optional, the library's most popular resource was counseling, and classroom discussions Friday included bullying - a possible factor in Prince's apparent suicide, according to students. Many students learned of Prince's death Thursday night on Facebook.com, and on Friday they were reminded again through moments of silence, poems and drawings. Outside in the school parking lot, signs on car windows memorialized Prince. One read, "Rest in Peace Phoebe Prince 'Irish Girl'" while another read "We are all family in this town ... show it. R.I.P. wild Irish chick."

"I really feel like school was when it hit everyone," said Grace Szybiak, a junior. "You walked into the library to over 100 kids just crying. It was just the hardest thing ever."

"Yesterday she was here, and today she's not," said Cindy Belinger, a freshman along with Prince. "It was really something that nobody saw coming."

Down the street from school, yellow teddy bears, tulips and roses were tied to the white picket fence in front of Prince's 356 Newton St. home.

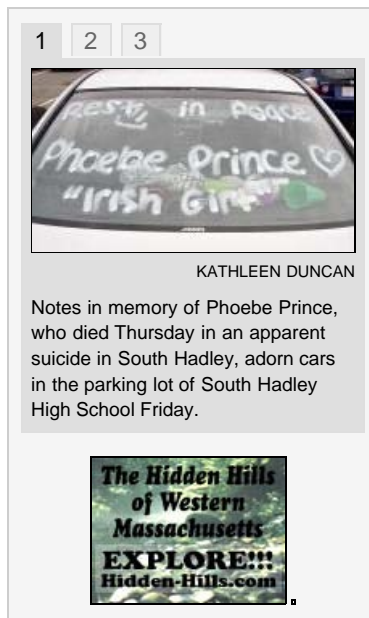
Craig Connor, master barber at Werks Men's Grooming next door, said he saw mourners arrange the memorial outside her home Friday morning.

Prince used to pass by the barber shop on the way to and from school and when she took her small dog for walks in the neighborhood, Connor said. Connor met Prince a few months after she moved in. He asked her what kind of dog she had and what part of Ireland she was from (he played soccer there and immediately picked up on her accent.)

"She seemed like a nice, polite young girl," Connor said. "It's hard to tell what type of people would be bullied."

Prince moved here from Ireland and was in her first year at South Hadley High School. Students, teachers and neighbors described her as nice, pretty, friendly, outgoing and cheerful. Foreign language teacher Jessica Lindsey told her French class she enjoyed Prince's intelligence and sense of humor.

But Prince also got picked on, according to students. It appeared as though her efforts to make new



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friends might have been misunderstood, they said.

"Our school is so small so they all knew who she was, but she was new and she was trying to get to know people," Szybziak said. "All the girls who didn't like her, it was just because she talked to their boyfriends. I think girlfriends got jealous because they wanted the attention on them. She didn't do anything wrong, but they took it the wrong way."

Prince engaged in school counseling to help her adjust to her new setting, according to Superintendent of Schools Gus Sayer.

"She didn't really like it here," said Liam Murphy, a freshman who exchanged conversations and text messages with Prince. Murphy noted the popularity of text messaging was one of the differences Prince mentioned between America and Ireland.

Freshman Tyler Narey agreed with Murphy as they walked home from school Friday.

"She was really cheerful - none of the girls liked it because she was flirtatious," Narey said.

People ganged up on Prince, called her names and even told her to kill herself, students reported.

"Girls are really mean to each other; I don't think it's really ever going to change," said senior Ashley McAdaragh. "People need to start realizing that their words really do hurt other people."

Bullying was not a problem unique to Prince, students say. Rather, it is an issue throughout the high school, according to students. "Everyone does it to everyone," Szybziak said. "It's not like everyone was bullying her more. It was just the fact that she was a new girl in South Hadley."

Meanwhile, signs students created and posted in school Friday request that people be nice to others. Students continued their reflections Friday night in a candlelight vigil in memory of Prince.

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Fri, 01/22/2010 - 05:53 — [pretzelogic](#)

### **punishment**

Obviously, you can't send a kid to jail for bullying, but I wonder what should happen to the 'mean girls' who were the catalyst...perhaps making them buddy up with 'unpopular' kids, eat lunch with them, spend 10 hours/week with them after school...that's crazy too, but there should be a creative way to make them see and atone for their silly, shallow hate.

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Tue, 01/19/2010 - 11:11 — [hmabry](#)

### **Horrible**

Bullying only continues to get worse all the time, and without parents and teachers being vigilant and willing to step in, more kids will be hurt for life, deeply scarred, or even lost because their peers assault them with messages like this. I can remember being picked on right under a teacher's nose because they didn't want to get involved, or were just not paying attention, I am sure it is the same today.

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Sun, 01/17/2010 - 08:39 — [sfischer](#)

### **students grieve classmates suicide**

I adamantly agree with Sweetie. How many kids do we need to lose to bullying? Parents can't control every word or action from their kids, but they can teach no tolerance for bullying or hurtful words/comments from day one. It turns my stomach that the same kids that told the girl to "go kill herself" were putting on a drama show of tears at school. Give me a break! You drove her to kill herself and now you're glad she won't be there to "flirt with your boyfriends" - guys you won't even be with in a year or two. You teenagers are brats! You are used to getting what you want by acting that

way. All you care about are your fake colored hair, your chest size and who is sexing who. Sound like the grown ups in your life or the tv shows you watch? I wonder. Any kid involved should spend time in jail or at the very least be permanently suspended from school and made to work off an incredibly high fine - like one that takes you the rest of your life to pay off! I don't believe the bullies have any regrets.

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Sat, 01/16/2010 - 09:02 — [Sweetie](#)

### to every parent - tell this to your kids

Parents who read this, make sure your kids read this story, especially the last part. NO kid ANYWHERE should be participating in this kind of behavior. It takes a lot of courage to be the one who steps up and says something as simple as "This isn't cool."

Help them find that strength. Help them realize that persecution is wrong, period, whether it be at the global or personal level.

In a way, I feel sorry for the kids who caused this. They will have to carry the guilt with them for the rest of their lives. They know who they are. I hope that some of them will put that guilt to good use, and find a way to help prevent this from happening to anyone else.

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