

Heartache for a Tyler Cassidy, a little boy lost

Article from: [Herald Sun](#)

Terry Brown

December 19, 2008 12:00am

BLAKE Cassidy slowly pushes the white coffin holding his baby brother Tyler towards the altar.

The 19-year-old's dark eyes look haunted. The loss in them is so deep it is like looking down a well.

Their mother Shani more than hugs the casket than pushes it. These are their last moments together.

For the Cassidy family, a week before Christmas at St John the Baptist church in Clifton Hill, there is no peace on earth.

Tyler's face looks down from a large screen. He is standing in front of a school locker.

There is nothing great about the picture. That suggests it is probably the last one of him alive.

For all its faults, the photograph is still infinitely more appealing than the dreadful reality.

Before the service, Tyler's mother and brother stand at the rear of the church beside his coffin.

The lid is open and some mourners, but certainly not all, file silently past and look in at the boy.

They hope to see Tyler at peace, or looking like he is asleep. He doesn't. Death is not so kind.

Some recoil and some cry and hug Mrs Cassidy. Others shake their heads and walk off heartsick.

The sight is macabre but not gory. There are no signs of the gunshot wounds.

The 15-year-old just looks dead, and that is terrible enough. His face is gaunt and grey. He wasn't a big kid, and his near-shaven head makes him look even smaller.

The life, the spark, whatever it is that made Tyler, is utterly, irretrievably, gone.

The Catholic church seats about 600 and about 100 more stand along walls and near the back. It is too small for the outpouring of grief, but it is the family church and Fr John Salvano is their priest.

Four years ago Tyler's father Ian was buried from there, dead from cancer.

Fr Salvano says four weeks after that, Tyler came to mass alone, sat near the front, listened and left.

He thinks the shattered boy was looking for answers about life and death.

At Tyler's funeral, the same questions trouble mourners, many of them children Tyler's age. Their mood is tense but, in a house of God, the anger is held respectfully in check.

Friends come in groups or with parents. Many bring a white rose as suggested in the funeral notice.

Having pushed the coffin to the front, Mrs Cassidy leaves her child's side forever and takes a seat.

She drops her head and weeps, as Forever Young plays over a slide show of Tyler's life.

He pulls faces in a lot of them - silly, happy faces.

Tyler mostly looks cheeky, but in a few he looks plain sweet, especially when he is playing with a small curly-haired dog.

Others show him on a rug with a bare bottom, in a bubble bath with Blake and pretending to surf.

They are pictures you'd embarrass a boy with at a 16th birthday party, one Tyler will never have.

Mrs Cassidy's brother Bruce begins the task of explaining the spark that bled out of the teenager on the Northcote concrete a week earlier.

He talks about a family holiday in New Zealand, of a kid running around a farm chasing turkeys.

The shooting isn't mentioned, but he warns mourners not to believe what they have heard or read.

He vows "the truth will come out".

"Hold tight your memories of Tyler," he almost begs the many schoolmates there.

Other family bring out the things that defined Tyler's life - a teddy bear, an Xbox controller and, finally, a bible.

Mrs Cassidy's sister Renae says she was there the day Tyler was born, and the day he died. She sums up with two words, "So unfair".

A second slide show has scenes from his last year.

Tyler is thin and angular now. The golden hair he treasured has been shaved off.

He is a young man oozing attitude.

The service almost done, a last slide show shows the family home without him.