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College student finds opportunity in twin's death

By SCOTT MARTINDALE

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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Sean McCoy was feeling high on life as he finished eating lunch at a USC cafeteria and headed to his off-campus apartment.

The Tustin native had just gotten into his dream college as a transfer student – after being rejected twice – and was enrolled in USC's entrepreneurial studies program as a business major.



Sean McCoy together with his mother, Tammy, are starting a Costa Mesa based non-profit foundation to help kids dealing with drug dependencies and other problems. McCoy's twin sister, Devin, died of a drug overdose.

PAUL RODRIGUEZ, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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Sean McCoy**Age:** 22**Residence:** Los Angeles (USC) and Costa Mesa**Education:** Tustin High School; Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa; USC senior majoring in business (entrepreneurial studies concentration)**Family:** Parents Mark and Tammy; brothers Jeff, 30, and Matt, 28; twin sister Devin (deceased)**Job:** Founder and CEO of Los Angeles-based Xtreme Innovations; creator of Cloud.cm**Fraternity:** Pi Kappa Phi**More from Education**

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Their mother, Tammy McCoy, will serve as executive director of a spinoff company – an Orange County nonprofit founded in Devin's memory that will help families dealing with drug dependency and other problems.

The only thing missing on this day was a phone call from his twin sister, Devin, who called him each day.

Sean pushed this worry out of his mind. His sister was doing well; she had been off drugs and in rehab for about a year.

As he rode his bike home on this afternoon – Oct. 29, 2008 – he received an unexpected phone call from a family friend. Devin had died early that morning of a drug overdose.

"I felt like I was on top of the world that day; everything was going well," said Sean, now 22, a Tustin High School graduate and a senior at USC. "And then I heard the news. Everything went out the window at that point. I felt like I died."

It was the darkest point of his life, Sean recalled – and that was after a childhood marred by pain and family strife.

His mother had walked out on the family after a bitter divorce; his father and twin sister had turned to illicit drug use; and he had been expelled from high school after throwing the first punch in a fight.

But from Sean's loss would come a new sense of purpose and direction.

Death inspires Internet startup

After much soul-searching, Sean in 2009 founded a cloud-computing company called Cloud.cm that seeks to harness the collective wisdom of USC students and faculty to build the ultimate college social-networking and file-sharing site. Cloud computing is an Internet-based computer network linking a potentially unlimited number of users.

The concept – which Sean had often discussed with his twin but never seriously considered pursuing – has brought his family together.

Sean's older brother Matt, 28, a linebacker for the Seattle Seahawks, gave about \$400,000 to start the company. Cloud.cm already employs 12 programmers in a leased west Los Angeles office, and is live on the Web with about 2,500 users.

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Sean has pledged 10 percent of all profits from Cloud.cm to this foundation, which will be run out of his mother's Costa Mesa home.

"I'm building the Cloud because of her," Sean said. "I believe that's what Devin would have wanted me to do – follow my dreams and my heart. If I grow this company to be successful, I will help a lot of lives to be better."

Sean's father, Mark, meanwhile, quit his job as a banking loan officer to move to San Diego, where he's pursuing his master's degree in Christian ministry and counseling.

"From her death, this whole family has changed," Mark said. "We're trying to do good things. I look at this as miraculous."

Twins take divergent paths

As a teen, Devin had turned to drugs and petty crimes including shoplifting to cope with her parents' divorce, Sean said, while he hunkered down in his room, shut out the chaos and tinkered with computers.

Sean took apart and rebuilt a desktop computer his father had brought home from work. He connected all of his household's computers together via an internal network. And he dreamed of a way to allow even more computers to share information instantaneously and reliably.

He also knew his parents were struggling. They fought over money, Sean recalled, and after the divorce his depressed father surrounded himself with friends who used drugs.

Sean also struggled academically. His report cards were littered with Ds and Fs, and he had been diagnosed with a mild learning disability affecting his ability to concentrate, he said.

In his freshman year at Foothill High School in Santa Ana, Sean learned one of his friends had told a girl he liked that his family was poor and addicted to drugs. Sean said he confronted the friend at lunch and ended up punching the boy in the face. Sean was expelled.

Sean refocused, moving out of the family's Tustin home and into his mother's Costa Mesa apartment.

He enrolled in Tustin High School and decided he wanted to go to USC. Although he graduated with mostly As and Bs, he was rejected from USC, he said. Instead, he enrolled at Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa. He applied to USC again after a year and was rejected again.

Intent upon attending USC's top-ranked business school, Sean met with an admissions officer. She told him to get all As in his second year of community college, he said. So Sean did just that – and he was in.

"It was all or nothing," Sean said. "I'm very ambitious. My personality is that if you have a backup, you fall short."

Cloud.cm growing

Today Sean is devoting almost every waking moment to his cloud-computing company.

His staff of 12 computer programmers – all USC students and graduates – has already created the network's basic infrastructure, including allowing users to store five gigabytes of data for free; create a personal profile similar to Facebook; and connect with classmates to swap notes, share files, post announcements and work on group projects.

Anyone, not just USC students, can use the site for free.

This spring, Cloud.cm plans to roll out screen sharing, where students and professors can allow others to view their desktop screens – or even a classroom whiteboard – on the Web. The company also is working on video conferencing, allowing class lectures to be broadcast live and recorded for later use. One of McCoy's professors in the business school, Duke Bristow, who is on Cloud.cm's advisory board, will be the first to integrate the network into his classes this spring, Sean said.

When classes resume in a few weeks, Sean plans to approach various USC organizations, from fraternities and sororities to cultural clubs and political groups, to encourage them to create profiles on Cloud.cm.

"The university itself doesn't have any social-networking aspects on Blackboard," Sean said, referring to the most commonly used classroom Web tool at USC. "It doesn't allow you to share notes, and you can't connect to other students. The Cloud is free, very easy to use and there are no (technical) problems. We're the ultimate social networking site mixed with an operating system."

Cloud.cm may still be in its infancy, but Sean, as always, is dreaming big: "We want to replace Facebook."

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