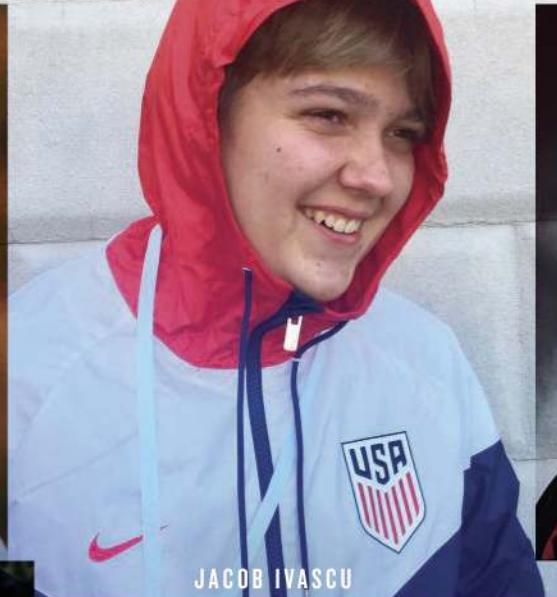




DANIEL HAWKINS



JACOB IVASCU



DRAKE RUIZ

**THE WRECKAGE**

Joshua Ivascu, who survived the Jan. 19 crash (below) that killed his brother, says it “felt like a train ran over us.”

## Sleepover Tragedy

# A TEEN PRANK TURNS DEADLY

A game of Ding-Dong Ditch leaves 3 best friends dead, a neighbor charged with murder, and 6 grieving parents in search of justice

By SANDRA SOBIERAJ WESTFALL and CHRISTINE PELISEK

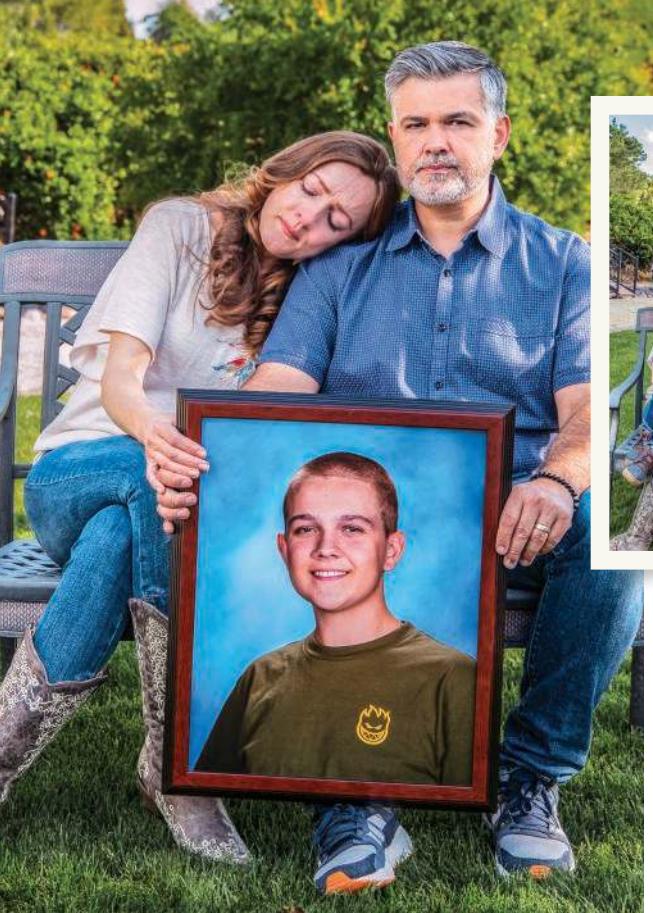


WATCHAWA, IHOHICINDA/THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER/AP, INSETS, FROM LEFT: COURTESY HAWKINS FAMILY, COURTESY IVASCU FAMILY, COURTESY RUIZ FAMILY

The three California boys, inseparable since fifth grade, were squeezing out one last bit of fun from a January weekend already packed with a birthday dinner, wrestling, a sleepover and one freezing plunge into a backyard pool. The trio—Daniel Hawkins, Jacob Ivascu and Drake Ruiz, all 16—were half of a six-pack who did everything together. And so on Jan. 19, the Sunday night before the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, Daniel and Jacob each had a younger brother along when the sixth of their happy crew, 18-year-old Sergio Campusano, got behind the wheel of his mom’s old Prius and the rest piled in. They were headed on a snack run to a nearby gas station minimart in Corona, Calif., and along the way were playing the age-old game of Ding-Dong Ditch, with a YouTube twist. It was up to Joshua Ivascu, Jacob’s 14-year-old brother, to ring a stranger’s doorbell, moon whoever answers and run away. The boys thought they were being smart—safe, even—by choosing an adobe house on Mojeska Summit Road. “We saw in a window the glow of these LED lights that a lot of kids have in their room,” Sergio recalls. “So we were like, ‘Look! They have kids. They’re going to be chill.’” The plan was to get all the hilarity on video for Drake’s YouTube channel. “Drake made videos each month, editing together clips of all the stuff we did and putting it to music,” says Sergio. “He always said that one day, when we’re older, we could look back on all the good times we had.”

But what unspooled on Jan. 19 was sheer horror—and it is forever memorialized not on YouTube but on three gravestones. Sergio told police that Joshua Ivascu rang the bell on Mojeska Summit Road, just around the corner from the Hawkins house, but fled





### MOURNING JACOB IVASCU

Ramona and Alex, an IT business owner (above), with Jedidiah, 2, and (back row from left) Jeremiah, 12; Jillian, 10; and Joshua, 14. Jacob had taught them “to think of others,” says Ramona.



### MOURNING DRAKE RUIZ

Caleb (right, with Sergio) “can’t get Drake out of his mind,” says his father, Billy (not pictured). Below: Debbie with a teddy bear wearing her son’s elementary school jersey.

loved history. And all his friends say he was the glue that drew people together.” The group’s first sleepover of that January weekend was at her house on Friday night. She remembers watching through the window the next morning after breakfast as the boys “took off their clothes and jumped in the 50-degree swimming pool, videotaping the whole thing. I’m thinking, ‘Wow, these boys have so much life. They just know how to have fun.’”

Not 36 hours later her phone rang at 10:30 p.m. with word of the wreck, and she raced to Joshua at the hospital. Wearing his seat belt in the front seat, he’d suffered a “huge gash” behind his ear. “He told me he climbed out of the car but couldn’t open the door to let his friends and brother out. He said he could see them in the back seat, and it looked like Jacob had passed out. Thank God it was dark; he already saw more than he should.”

What she wants now is for Chandra to confess. “My Joshua kept saying, ‘Mom, I thought it was a safe neighborhood, we were just having fun,’” says Ramona. “They were not robbing a liquor store, these kids. I wish [Chandra] would just say, ‘I’m sorry.’”



**Drake was a “natural” at rugby with plans to be a firefighter, says his mom, Debbie. In the last year**



Sergio was living with the family of three (including Drake’s brother Caleb, 11) and was sharing Drake’s bedroom. “So they’re like brothers, too,” says Debbie. She notes Jan. 18 as the first time she didn’t drive Drake to the Ivascu home and hang out with the family too. “He said, ‘I just want to be with my friends, Mom.’ He was growing up.” To Sergio, Drake was the jokester who talked the whole group into shaving their heads last summer, only to dodge the clippers himself. “Because he knew it was a bad idea,” Sergio recalls with a chuckle. Once the pandemic travel restrictions are lifted, he says, he will visit his friends’ graves at least once a month: “Just to have them close to me, you know?”

While the families work out the details of scholarships and maybe a foundation in their sons’ names, they take comfort in knowing the boys’ faith prepared them. In church their last Sunday morning, the sermon was about how fragile life can be—“so that if you have one more day to live, or 10 days or 15 years, you are ready, because you’ve set your house in order for the Lord,” recalls Ramona. “Two times Jacob and I locked eyes, and I knew this was sinking into his heart. God was preparing him and the other boys. Little did they know what was heading their way.” For all the grief that remains, says Janet, “there’s a peace knowing that they lived life here together on earth, and they’re now living their life in heaven together.” ●