

Thoughts on and of suicide touch us all?

interview by Jim Miller

The Gateway interviewed someone close to a third year U of A student who committed suicide about two months ago.

Gateway: You knew someone fairly well who committed suicide?

Friend: Well he was friend's of friends and we would go to parties. We would study in the same area, as well.

Gateway: How would you describe his personality?

Friend: He was a really nice, and quiet guy.

Gateway: Did he have the kind of personality that you would think would be the kind of person to commit suicide?

Friend: No, I was really surprised.

Gateway: Did you notice any change in his personality around the time of his death?

Friend: Yes. I didn't see him around as much.

Gateway: Looking back on it, do you think you noticed any times when he might have alluded to the fact, or hinted about, that he was thinking of taking his life?

Friend: No. I saw him two weeks before he killed himself and it was just, "Hi, how's it going?" Nothing at all.

I was talking to his friend, Al (a fictitious name). They were best friends and Al had no idea what was happening.

Gateway: What would you say your initial reaction was?

Friend: I was really shocked. And sort of wondering why?

Gateway: How have your feelings changed?

Friend: I guess he killed himself because he couldn't handle the pressure — the pressure of school. I know now that I will never let the pressure get to me like that.

Gateway: A common feeling among friends of someone who has taken their life is a feeling of guilt. Have you felt this way?

Friend: Yes. You just sort of wonder why they didn't say something about it and if you had been able to do something they wouldn't have done it.

Gateway: How do you cope with those feelings?

Friend: I don't know. We (his friends) talked about it for a while, after he did it. You sort of realize there was nothing you could have done, I don't think.

Al, his best friend is a real keener and I worked very hard last year, too. And after this happened, well the whole group of friends slacked off, they wouldn't get under the pressure.

Gateway: You're pretty sure it was the pressures of school?

Friend: Yeah. I guess there were a lot of tests and papers he hadn't done that were due. Probably, there had to be something else.

Gateway: Did he seem the kind of person that school was his major focus?

Friend: Yes. He wanted to get his degree. He and Al had a company together. They were incorporated. They were always having big business deals. So it was important to him.

Gateway: So had he been out of school for some time then?

Friend: I think he had a year off after high school. I'm not quite sure.

Gateway: Do you think a greater publicity of suicides helps create an awareness of the problem in the community and do you think that's a positive thing or not?

Friend: It does create an awareness and that's good but it also can really hurt the family. The more you know the more you realize that when someone commits suicide it ruins the whole family. And people don't like to talk about it.

Gateway: Do you have any advice or comment you would like to offer others who have had friends or relatives take their lives?

Friend: Just that there is nothing you can do about that I can see. If anyone in my close family did it I would feel terrible. His parents...they don't

understand it at all, why he did it. If you realize that there not doing it to get back at the family. It's just the only way out and if you can get over the guilt feelings it will be a lot better. But to get over the guilt feelings it's not so easy.

Gateway: Is there anything you would like to add?

Friend: It was just really unexpected. I always thought of people who committed suicide as sort of wild. People who would do absurd things. But that wasn't the case.

Gateway: Do you think that one of the reasons why suicide isn't talked about in society is that deep down inside most of us realize that it isn't

just wild people that think about taking their own lives?

Friend: Yes. I think a lot of people do it because there is a big stress on conforming and doing well. And if you don't do well some people can't see going on.

He always
He always wanted to explain things, but no one cared.
So he drew.

Sometimes he would just draw and it wasn't anything.
He wanted to carve it in stone or write it on the sky.
He would lie out on the grass and look up in the sky, and it would be only him
and the sky and the things inside him that needed saying.

And it was after that that he drew the picture.

And it was a beautiful picture.
He kept it under his pillow, and would let no one see it.
And he would look at it every night and think about it.
And when it was dark, and his eyes were closed, he could see it still.
And it was all of him. And he loved it.

When he started school he brought it with him.
Not to show anyone, but just to have with him, like a friend.

It was funny about school.
He sat in a square brown desk like all the other square brown desks and he thought it should be red.

And his room was a square brown room. Like all the other rooms.
And it was tight and close. And stiff.

He hated to hold the pencil and chalk, with his arm stiff, and his feet flat on the floor, stiff, with the teacher watching and watching.

The teacher came and spoke to him.
She told him to wear a tie like all the other boys.
He said he didn't like them and she said it didn't matter.

After that they drew. And he drew all yellow
and it was the way he felt about morning. And it was beautiful.

The teacher came and smiled at him. "What's this?" she said.

"Why don't you draw something like Ken's drawing?"
"Isn't that beautiful?"

After that his mother bought him a tie
and he always drew airplanes and rocketships like everyone else.

And he threw the old picture away.

And when he lay out alone looking at the sky
it was big and blue and all of everything,
But he wasn't anymore.

He was square and brown inside and his hands were stiff,
And he was like everyone else. All the things inside him that needed saying didn't need it anymore.

It had stopped pushing. It was crushed.

Stiff. Like everything else.

(By a high school boy who afterwards committed suicide.)

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