

For whom is suicide painless?

BY DANIEL CLARK

Through early morning
fog I see
Visions of the things to be.
The pains that are withheld
for me.
I realize and I can see,
That Suicide Is Painless,
It brings on many changes,
And I can take or leave it if I
please.
— Theme from the movie
M*A*S*H

It is everywhere you look in the media. From television gossip shows to newspapers, and from the Internet to call-in radio programs — suicide is a sweeping problem which knows no barriers.

In just the last few weeks 39 people outside of San Diego killed themselves in a mass suicide, a boy from Pugwash shot himself, and five people in Québec killed themselves in another religious suicide.

Contrary to popular belief, suicide is more common in the warmer months. There is also a higher incidence of suicide among men, the elderly, and those with higher status jobs and more money (Motto, Heibron and Juster released in 1985).

But suicide does not exclude all ages and all aspects of our society. There are steady suicide rates for women, and people fifteen years of age and up. With suicide, we are all at risk.

Suicide is one of the ten leading causes of death in the United States, and it is the second leading cause of death among young males. It has been estimated that for every one completed suicide, there are eight to ten attempts. In a study of university students, 26 per cent had considered suicide in the preceding year, 2 per cent had attempted it, and 10 per cent had attempted it at one time in their life (Meehan, Lamb, Saltzman, and O'Carroll 1992, supported by M.D. Rudd 1989).

What is easy to forget behind these statistics, is that each individual who has ended their life, or tried to, has had their own very important and very specific reasons for doing so. Myself included.

In three weeks I will reach the four year anniversary of my own suicide attempt. It was ill-considered action, wrought from pain and fear, but it was very real. Looking back, it amazes me that not one single person seemed to understand why I did what I did — not my psychologists, not my parents, and not the hospital staff.

That is the root of this epidemic. We should not be trying to figure out why the Heaven's Gate cult wanted to go to heaven, but instead investigate how these cults serve a common need. The question we should be asking is: why did each of those people join the cult? And why did they want to leave the earth?

A friend recently told me that

he had absolutely no respect for those who took their own life. The point that he failed to understand is that those who have committed suicide, or tried to, probably don't give a shit about his respect. They have pain and fear for which there seems to be no escape. So they make their own.

There is not a day that goes by in which I am not thankful that my attempt failed. Since

April 23, 1993 my life has had a new focus and a new direction. Looking back I have no doubt that I wanted to die. Today I am clinging to life in any way I can.

As we near the dog days of summer and the exam pressure that comes before them, the possible scenarios for suicide increase. If you want to prevent any more suicides in Halifax, then you need to keep an eye on

not only yourself, but your friends. If things look like they're getting too hard, and the pressure too intense, then seek help. Whether it is from Dal Counseling Services (494-2081) or from your best friend, give life a chance. If you see a friend who's teetering on the edge, help them help themselves. Be there for them, and convince them to talk about it.

This is the last issue of the
Gazette until September 1997.

Go crazy, enjoy the few hours of warm sun
we're bound to have one of these days, and
remember this one important thing:

If you feel like you don't have the
energy to fight back against the
weeds of life — *smoke them.*

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