



A SIBLING TALKS ABOUT SUICIDE

It has been 10 months since my brother, Lenny, took his own life. On December 5th, Lenny would have turned 30. Tragically he chose to die. Life was too painful for him, it had been that way since he was born. Growing up without a father, never really having close friends, preferring his own company to that of others.

Lenny and I used to be close. We grew up together, only five years difference in age. I adored my little brother and he me. I have many lovely memories of us playing with friends, going swimming, riding bikes, and doing all the activities that brothers and sisters do. When I left Hobart and moved to Sydney to live, Lenny came up and lived with me for a while. There were times when we argued but there were times when I felt close and loving to him.

Over the past couple of years our relationship had changed, I had moved away to Canada, and he back to Hobart.

I last saw Lenny alive last Christmas. He looked so happy, handsome, and full of life. He was in love and was going to get married. He had finally found the woman of his dreams. How proud and pleased I was of him. I flew back to Sydney, excited that my only brother was getting married. Eleven days later he took his own life, and there began my own personal nightmare of hell.

I was to learn from that point on, that suicide was something that in our society is not a subject to be talked about, that I would be shunned by my own friends who, I thought would be there to listen to me, to hold me, comfort me and love me. So began the lonely, isolating process of living and grieving suicide, a pain with such embarrassment as public ridicule and private humiliation, and often intense feelings of anger and guilt.

I thought Lenny was immortal if I thought of it at all, for I never considered he might choose to die, I can see now that life is precious and fragile and can vanish in an instant. What a treasure of lessons his sacrifice has uncovered.

The first few weeks following his death were turbulent. I was in a state of shock, numbness and disbelief, with police asking probing questions, trying to arrange a funeral (when only two weeks before my mind was planning a wedding), packing up all his clothes and furniture, comforting my mother whilst all the time I, too, was slowly dying inside. I would wake up in the morning and wonder how I would get myself out of bed; did it really matter if I didn't shower for a week; couldn't I just lie there and die? Doesn't anyone care what is happening to me?

I would walk through the streets and be sure I could see Lenny or hear his voice, and my heart would stop - oh, he isn't here any more. I would drive myself crazy, day after day, week after week, month after month wondering why, why, why did he make his last choice death? Why did he leave me now to deal with the legacy that his death has left for me. Why? why? why?

Then there is the guilt. What could I have done to help him? What if I had made the phone call that my mother wanted me to? How come I have been so supportive and available to my friends but I wasn't there for my brother, whose call I missed? I feel such a failure that my love wasn't enough to keep him alive. Then of course is the ultimate - suicide is rejection at its worst.

Then there is my anger. Anger at Lenny for what he has done to me, my mother, my sister and my family. There have been times when my murderous rage overwhelms me. Rage at the world, at life, that unreasoned choices must be accepted without question, that life can be so unfair sometimes, and finally my rage at friends. Friends who I once loved and cared for, who I supported unconditionally, to find for whatever reason, that they could not be there for me. To see that my heart had been ripped out, that my pain was so bad that I too, wanted to die. On top of Lenny's death, I also had to deal with their abandonment, their loss of love and support of me at the worst possible time. How dare they!



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Slowly now, I am able to let go of my rage, resentment, despair and anguish. I can come to the realization that Lenny has died, and I now can choose life, that my scarred heart will continue to miss Lenny, but I want my healing to begin. I want to free myself from bargaining so I can get beyond another day. I can make some meaning of Lenny's death by recommitting my life to unconditional love of myself and others.

I am hopeful that I will one day, when I am physically and emotionally healed, be able to go out to society and make a difference for those people who follow me, so that they will not have to live with fear of the stigma that suicide holds; so that people can open their hearts and offer us their presence of unconditional love and caring that I have desperately needed. I would like to thank Bart, Kerry and Penny who have been there, walking beside me through this valley of hell.

I am not looking forward to the next couple of months. On the 5th December I will light a candle for Lenny, for his birthday. I will spend Christmas quietly comforting my mother. January 22nd we will be remembering Lenny, and one year of my life without him here. For those who have survived suicide, please think of my family through these difficult times.

Many thanks to Compassionate Friends for being there when others have not.

Kathy Williams.

(Lifted from the T.C.F. New South Wales Newsletter - Focus)