

Megan Christine Einfeldt 1980-2006

### That Ugly “S” Word

Our daughter, Megan Christine Einfeldt was a lovely young woman. She was funny, smart, clever and witty. She was energetic and athletic while at the same time, gentile and demure. She was an accomplished musician, a recognized scholar, an honored teacher, a published writer and a gifted linguist. She was talented and exceptional in so many ways. Megan made friends upon meeting strangers. Everyone who met her loved her. She was kind, compassionate and loving. She was a wonderful daughter, sister, friend, wife and mother. Megan was also numbered statistically as one of Utah’s 2006 suicide deaths.

Uggghhh! That word! Suicide. That ugly “S” word—that word that has such a stigma and such disgrace and dishonor attached to it that people rarely know what to say to those left behind by it.

It’s a word that, in its meaning and definition, tells only one story: *They took their life*. Those left behind by such a choice know that this word doesn’t describe the story behind that word. Nevertheless, *they left*. They left. Staying here was too difficult, too painful, just too much for them. But, the stigma, the stares, glares and whispery silence is what is borne by those who love and miss them. Aside from the unbearable sadness, self-blame, and unnumbered unanswerable questions, families, more than the closest of friends, must endure the stigma of this thing known as “suicide.”

There is always more to the story. We don’t always know it. With any death other than suicide, there is often an explanation, but with suicide there are more questions than answers. What happened? Why? What could have been done, said...? What possible interventions could have possibly prevented this? Could we have known, seen, gotten help for them? Where are they? How are they? Questions... unanswered, undetermined, unknown.

When someone dies, there are always two sides of the death equation; the person who dies and those who are left to grieve for them—“the survivors.” For the most part, death brings loved ones together to remember the loved one and share compassionate support. It is different for “survivors of suicide.” Those left by one who “chose to leave,” are oftentimes left feeling alone with an ominous “silence.” There is a silent social stigma surrounding suicide survivors. People don’t know what to say, so they say nothing. It is agonizing for survivors of these tragic losses! They need so much for someone to listen! Like all other losses, they too lost someone loved and treasured. They too need time to grieve,

remember and share. They need the same considerations given to others that grieve their losses. They need a safe and compassionate place to tell their sadness; to cry, yell, scream and sob their hearts out.

Oftentimes when people don't understand something, they respond to it with fear. In the case of suicidal deaths, survivors of these deaths are often abandoned by fearful "would-be listeners" at a time when they desperately need just that. Those left by these deaths suffer not only the loss of one they loved; most often, they have endured the details of a sudden, most typically traumatic death. Add this to the social stigma of suicide and the silence of being shunned by a society unwilling to listen and what you have is excruciating loneliness.

Judgments come in all forms of communication ranging from the spoken to the unspoken. Family members do their best to swallow hard and endure the verbal barrage. *Did you see any signs? Did you know that anything was so terribly wrong? Did they tell you anything? Where were you when it happened?* There is an invisible- pointing-finger directed at those closest as if perhaps they could have stopped this. Wouldn't one think that if anyone could have stopped it, those closest to them would have done all they could to prevent this? Oftentimes those closest are the least likely to know as the one leaving doesn't want to alarm, cause concern or even hurt them. "Leaving" in this way is most generally done in private without those closest even aware.

Why such stigma? Generally the social disgrace and dishonor can be traced to religious dogma. Depending on the religious reference points of the "glare and starrers," the one who "left" is believed to be in eternal darkness or some other less-than-heavenly abode, having committed an unforgivable sin. Who makes such determinations? Who says that this is so? Who knows for sure and who, on earth, has the right to pass such post-life definitive judgments?

Regardless of the unanswered questions and hurtful judgments by those who do less than understand, there are ways we can help survivors left by those who willfully "departed." We can listen without judgment. We can avoid simplistic clichés that diminish the loss by providing simple solutions to difficult realities such as, "They are in a better place," and "Time heals all wounds." Avoid any reference that the person they lost was "not in their right mind" or "not mentally well." This only complicates the situation. Simply state your sorrow for their loss. Survivors, as they are allowed to talk and sort things out for themselves, will come to their own understanding of what happened. Their own personal search for meaning and understanding of all this is what is really most important.

Arms of love, hearts of support and wide–open ears of unconditional listening offers the healing balm needed for suicide survivors. No one needs to feel alone when someone they love “leaves.” Though they may have left, love remains. And love, without judgment, listens.

Submitted By Maureen Crimin Einfeldt