

August 23, 2020

Dear Friends,

Today is the sixteenth anniversary of the passing of my dear nephew Jimmy. Because his father is also a “Jimmy” we always called my nephew “Little Jimmy,” or just “Little.” He wasn’t little though, he had good height and was quite muscular. But it was his personality that was farthest from little. He lit up every room he walked into and had a unique and loving way to brighten your day. Although he was an athlete and quite comfortable in his rugged masculinity, he never came to visit anyone without bringing a fistful of Gerber Daises. He loved flowers, art museums, concerts, sports, and having lots of fun. Unfortunately, there was another side to our Little; a hidden, unrecognizable suffering he kept below the surface which made it difficult to help him to find healing and solace. He took his own life and used a permanent solution to end what I am sure he felt was unbearable pain.

One of my mantras that I share as often as possible is: everyone deserves to be remembered by their life not their death. This is a lot easier said than done. It takes an indeterminate amount of time for our brains to be able to start to access happy memories because we need to ‘process’ what happened before we can start to allow the happy memories and gratitude to flood in to begin the healing. Grief never goes away, but it does ‘heal.’ By healing I mean that it softens, and it can become something that we are able to not only live with but eventually embrace. Because it’s something that is not going away, we have no choice but to find ways not only to navigate through it, but to live with it. In the beginning, usually, we spend a lot of time fighting with our grief, battling with it constantly, after all, who the hell wants this pain! At times the pain can feel and seem quite unbearable. But I want you to know that it SEEMS and FEELS that way, but we must be able to allow ourselves to bear it, to bear through it. This is when we need to hold on, perhaps to rest and withdraw, and even ask for help. Please don’t be afraid to ask for help. This is why we are here together, to help one another through this.

Tom Zuba,, an amazing author and Life Coach, who I often recommend to anyone who is grieving, has a video on Facebook called “Hold on. Hold on. Hold on.” In it he says, “Never, never, never give up. Do not give up. Rest when you have to rest. Ask for help. But do not give up.” Over the course of just a few years Tom lost his daughter, his wife and his son. Out of his unfathomable pain, he wrote the book, “Permission to Mourn,” which is the number one book

that I recommend at Stephy's Place. In the video Tom shares that over the years he considered suicide many, many times and when someone said to him that she thought suicide was a selfish act, he said, "Don't say that. Suicide is not selfish. Suicide is out of desperation and hopelessness. And if you believe that it is selfish than you are blessed because you have never been in that space."

In the throes of raw grief, many of us may come to feel like there is nothing to live for. This is not uncommon. It is in fact normal in grief. During this time of isolation caused by the pandemic, however, I am understandably noticing that many people are sharing that they have an increase in these feelings. Thank goodness that we have these incredible safe spaces, these groups that provide the support and trust that people can articulate how they are really, truly feeling. In the very sharing, in the owning of these feelings, we may begin to start to find solace and healing. These normal feelings in grief are not the same as being suicidal. We must, however, take any signs very seriously and help one another to determine the thin line between the two.

I wish I had a rewind so I could say to Little, "Don't give up. It may feel like everything is pain, but it will get better, trust me, things will change, feelings will change, get through this and you will be ok." But as we all know all too well, there is no rewind. We have no choice but to move forward. We never move on, we only move forward, even if it is baby steps, one foot at a time, one hour at a time, one day at a time. And so, I would like to say to any of you who may be feeling these feelings: "Do not give up. Do not give up. Do not give up. Rest when you have to. And the hardest thing is: Ask for help." We will get through this together.

Help is available through the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.

The Veterans Crisis line is 1-800-273-8255.

New Jersey peer support and suicide prevention hotline is 1-855-654-6735.

***God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.***

Peace and Serenity,

Kevin