



CASE STUDY #23: LINDA (Suicide)

When asked about the reason for our meeting she admitted to not starting the volunteer graduation requirement. After assuring her that she was not the only one; Linda teared-up whispering “I just don’t want to be with anyone else...I guess I’m depressed?”

Me: “Really? So, what do you do for fun?”

L: “I don’t know.” *(Normally I would jump all over this because of many avoidance issues; but I needed to change the mood ASAP.)*

Me: “OK, let’s say you were bummed out about something...what would you do to feel better?”

L: “I wouldn’t do drugs if that’s what you’re thinking!”

Me: “Well, I wasn’t but let’s talk about the last time you were”depressed “. What got you down?”

L: “I don’t remember.”

Me: “If that is true it must not have been a major life trauma? So what do you have to look forward to for the day, week, month or even year?”

L: “What?”

Me: “OK, Think hard and take as long as you need...I’ll just be sitting here getting older and even more senile!” *(A slight smile appears on Linda’s face.)*

L: “So how old are you really?”

Me: “Old enough to no longer lie about my age...75 and a half”

L: “You’re funny.”

Me: “Funny Ha Ha or funny weird?”

L: “Both” *(She is now actually looking at me and smiling) (Seizing the moment I slip back into counselor mode)*

Me: “You mentioned earlier about feeling depressed. How bad does it get?”

L: “Are you asking about suicide?”

Me: *(slightly taken aback)* “Ah...Well not really but do you have thoughts about it? *(Notice how I didn’t mention the “S” word and I’m not sure why not.)*

L: “I tried to kill myself twice but all my “friends” said I was just trying to get attention...”

Me: “You have better ways than that to gain attention, Right?” A friend of mine says that ““Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem””. Thinking back over your High School career so far; How did you receive attention without harming yourself?

L: “I’m in a marching band and we got to play at the Coliseum. Thousands of people yelling and cheering. Kinda cool!”

Me: “I get chills just thinking about it! How can you capture that feeling again?”

L: “You’re trying to get me to come up with a community service volunteer plan huh?”

Me: “And the smart money says that you will. When did you first start playing a musical instrument?” L: “In 6th grade.”

Me: “Did you know that elementary music programs have been cut from the budget?”

L: “That sucks!”

Me: “Boy howdy: like sports, music is one of the activities that keeps kids in school.” *(short reflective pause)*

L: “I’ll bet you think I might be able to get service volunteer hours in my old elementary school don’t you?”

Me: More importantly YOU thought of it. By the way; that’s not something a clinically depressed person would think about ... YEAH YOU!!!! FOLLOW UP:

Linda contacted her elementary school principal and volunteered to teach the recorder, (that little wooden horn-like gadget that sounds like a cat being drug backwards through a knot hole in a fence) teaching her “students” how to read music.

Her high school band teacher let her skip class on Monday because they usually worked on advancement and she was the first chair in just about any instrument. This allowed her to have a three hour break including lunch; plenty of time to travel and teach her class. She appeared on a video we shot for a Stanford University service learning grant that we won.

Along with Linda’s testimony we filmed a tearful parent who was so grateful that Linda could provide music instruction to parents who can’t afford it.

Linda was notably touched by the parent’s gratitude. Linda quote on video: “When I got depressed I knew that I couldn’t kill myself because I didn’t want to bum out the fifth graders...they needed my help to learn music.” *It’s become obvious that students and for that matter, adults who feel needed, and present as being somewhat rational, are less likely to act on suicidal thoughts. When others rely and depend upon our attendance in their lives it increases our desire to live. Not all stories end this well!*

Another suicide story involved a 17 year old young man who had a long history of physical abuse at the hands of his father. Dad was a retired Marine officer who, understandably, was harsh and demanding. His only son received a “D” for a semester science class and lied to his father about it. When his father found out there was going to be hell to pay.

As father was entering the front door in full yell mode he heard a muffled retort coming from the bathroom. His search ended when pounding on the locked door didn’t result in a sheepish son coming out to receive his punishment.

An angry father kicked in the door revealing a bloody pillow and his service revolver clutched in his son’s hand. I didn’t have the opportunity to speak with the father but word around the school was that he was consumed with guilt and remorse, as could be expected.

The scuttlebutt in the faculty lounge was that he was drinking himself into a permanent stupor refusing any condolences from family or friends. The father was certainly a candidate for prolonged grief counseling but I transferred to another high school and never heard about what happened. In an attempt to “turn lemons into lemon-aid”; I would share this story with parents whose tendencies would lean toward over the top anger and discipline of their offspring.

SIDEBAR: I would say that more parents tend to not discipline as much as I did with my kids. (Sounds like somebody thinks they were a great parent? ... OK I probably struck out as many times as I got on base...and many of those were H.B.P.B (Hit by pitched ball) or walked! ... A walk might be the kid agreeing with the punishment ... I got a lot more walks from my daughter!!) I digress; (Didn't Shakespear say "I think he doth digress too much." Perhaps it was something else? Haha ...It was an "object too much", right? Boy I really am avoiding the rest of this discussion. I'm sorry Dear reader. Suicide Is Increasing In Teenagers Every Year:

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among teens behind accidents (NIMH) National Institute of Mental Health In 2017 alone 6,252 teens took their own lives 10.5% of all teens contemplated killing themselves compared with 4.3% of those aged 25 to 49 and only 2.5% for aged 50 and above.
- Each day 3,041 teens attempt suicide.
Stats from The Jason Foundation (reach them @ jasonfoundation.com)
- Suicide is increasing among young females due in large measure to drug overdose
An article published in The Journal of Pediatrics found that "medication overdose suicide attempts have more than doubled since 2000, and more than tripled for girls". (Roughly 60% of suicides by young males involve guns but fewer than 12% by young women. Drugs are the method of choice by females.) In the latest study, John Ackerman, suicide prevention coordinator and clinical psychologist at Nationwide Children's Hospital, reported to the poison center that from 2000 to 2019 1.6 million children and young adults attempted suicide by self-poisoning with a "dramatic and persistent increase from 2011 to 2018 ranging from 120% to nearly 300%." "We need a public health approach...like we've had with cancer, with HIV and with motor vehicle accidents." he said.

National Suicide Prevention Crisis Talk Line
1-800-273-8255
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.com