

Some Unwelcome News

Written by Jeff Wagg
Saturday, 06 December 2008 12:00

This is a personal article, and I hope you'll indulge me. If you decide to stop reading now, I won't be offended.

Over Thanksgiving, I learned that a friend of mine saw some rough times. It's been five years since our last meeting.

We met in Vegas, and though he was more my father's friend (being a coworker) than mine, I quite enjoyed his company. He had a decent job, his own condo, and given his behavior at the Super Bowl parties we used to attend, he seemed happy.

At this point, I'm envisioning sitting with him next to an enormous screen in the ballroom of Paris, as he nearly won a very long-shot bet. We were all very excited, but he just sat there looking at the screen with a content smile on his face.

And that will be my permanent memory of him.

He was often alone, and people would comment how they never saw him with a woman. No one thought too much of this... it was more a sentiment of "how could a nice guy like this not be with someone." We assumed he preferred it that way. He was always welcome in our group.

As things go, the NFL and Las Vegas had a fight, and Super Bowl parties are no longer allowed in the casinos. I'll spare you commentary on that, and just point out that with no more Super Bowl parties, those of us who used to attend lost touch with each other.

This is the story I heard about what happened in the intervening years.

He worked for a newspaper, which started to suffer as all newspapers are. Though his base salary was safe, he could no longer make the bonus money he had come to depend upon. He

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began to fall behind on his condo payments, until he was finally evicted.

At some point he lost his job, car, etc. He ended up living on the streets of Boston. Towards the end of summer, with cold weather approaching, he found a secluded location and committed suicide. I don't know exactly how, and I'm fine with that.

His body wasn't found for at least two weeks. He was only identified because his long out-of-service cell phone still had some address book entries, and the police called them until a friend agreed to identify him. Why he didn't call them himself, I'll never know.

Before I joined the JREF, I worked as a suicide hot line listener. I know what a difference a single phone call can make, and I wonder if Paul had just dialed [1-800-SUICIDE](tel:1-800-SUICIDE) if would have made a difference. I like to think it would have. At the very least, he would have learned that there were other options and people willing to listen.

Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. A bit of critical thinking at a crucial time can save a life.

I'll let you draw your own lessons from this tale. Maybe you'll consider that the road from your own place to the street isn't all that far, or that some of the friends you've lost touch with could use a phone call now and then. I don't know... you decide. As for me, I'm going to spread the word that there are good people out there willing to help prevent stories just like this one. In the hopes of my not having to tell another, I'll be donating to [CrisisLink](#) this holiday season. Should you decide to do the same, you'll have my gratitude. Thanks for reading.