

BETH

by Andrew Himebaugh

My first day home for Christmas break I learned that one of my high school classmates, a girl for whom I cared very much, had committed suicide. This news, added to my concern about the finals I had just completed, greatly reduced my holiday spirit.

I had known Beth since the third grade. Through the years we always had sat next to each other in classes because the teachers seated us alphabetically, and Beth's name was one below mine on the rolls. Even in high school, teachers use this type of arrangement, I suppose as a matter of convenience.

When we got to our junior year in high school, I asked Beth to the prom. She turned me down. She had a horse show to prepare for the following day. We laughed for years afterward about how she turned me down in favor of a horse. You see, horses were very important to Beth. She spent her entire life breaking and training horses. She was a member of the Indiana Quarter Horse Association, and of the FFA. Beth always won top honors in the 4-H, and last summer she won a horse for her efforts in 4-H. Horses were her life.

Beth graduated from high school number seven in our class, and this was her sophomore year at Indiana University. People around town told me that only days before she died she had been full of Christmas spirit and was looking forward to returning to I.U. next semester. I understand she was an "A" student there.

Now that you have Beth's background, let's get back to the matter on my mind: suicide. Suicide is something we made jokes about in grade school. It is not so funny now that it has struck home with me for the first time.

Committed suicide. That is an ugly action for such a sweet, lovely person as Beth was. However, that is what she did; she took her own life, committed suicide. Her story went like this:

Eight years ago Beth's father died. She and her father were very close, and Beth never got over his death. Her brother told me it changed her whole personality. She withdrew into herself. I never really noticed a change; I had always considered her a very quiet person.

Her brother also told me that she was so upset that she could not even express her emotions at her dad's funeral, she just kept them bottled up inside her. Two days before Christmas and three days before her twenty-first birthday, she vented eight years of emotions. Unfortunately she vented them with a .22 instead of words or tears.

How does Beth's story apply to us? I am sure that the possibility of committing suicide has passed through the minds of each of us at one time or another. But how many of us have seriously considered ending our own lives?

Suicide would seem to be the ultimate solution to all of our problems. However, suicide is also an irreversible solution. Once it is done, you cannot change your mind and take it back. Consider the problems, both physical and emotional, it creates for those who care for you. Christmas is a time of joy; but for Beth's mother it will always be a time of deep sorrow. The emotions of Beth's mother when she found Beth's body in the barn are unimaginable. I cannot begin to comprehend the horrors the woman felt when she found her daughter lying dead in the hay, of suicide.

The point is, if you have a problem, express your emotions: cry, talk to someone, or otherwise vent your emotions in a non-violent way. I returned from Beth's funeral and for the first time in years I wept openly. I did not just cry; I bawled. I am sure I am not the only person in town who did. I was not ashamed; I was venting my emotions, and I felt a little better when I was done. Do not assume you are the only person with problems. Talk to someone about your problems. Maybe someone else has the same type of problems, and together you can work them out.

Try looking at your problems from a different angle. Try to look at all the things you have to live for: your family, your friends, your efforts and your achievements. Beth had her family, her horses, and a houseful of trophies. She had fellowship in the Indiana Quarter Horse Association, and in 4-H. She had all her friends from high school and college. Now all we have are the memories, and her mother has a large houseful of trophies with no one to be proud of them.

I am not going to condemn Beth for taking her life as she did; I thought too much of her to do that. I just think (and wish) that she would have found some other way to release herself from her problems. I still cannot believe such a violent act could come from this quiet girl.

Please, if you have a problem, do not brush it off onto someone else by destroying yourself. Do not put your family and friends through the same anguish Beth's mother, several other people and myself have suffered. Reach out for help. It may take a while to work things out, but it can be done.

And remember, as in Beth's case, there might be other people besides family who love you. They might not be people you immediately think of, but they love you just the same.

To Beth

December 26, 1960 to December 23, 1981

