



Scott Wisenbaker is 41 years old, married with three stepchildren, and works with alcoholics and addicts because he loves to. His career in management started in the restaurant business from 1987-1995 and the transportation industry from 1995 to 2007. His work with alcoholics and addicts includes speaking engagements whenever possible as well as weekly commitments to various treatment centers, jails, and hospitals. A few long-term commitments have been 1997-1998 at The Jefferson County Juvenile Detention Center in Lakewood, Colorado and 2000-2003 at The Green Villa Treatment Center in Greenville, Texas.

## SUICIDE IN RECOVERY

by Scott Wisenbaker

Attend any 12-step fellowship, therapeutic community, or treatment center long enough and you will know or meet someone who is contemplating, attempted, or about to commit suicide.

So why would they consider such a horrific act? Don't they understand that things will always get better? Do they not love their mother and children enough to stick it out? Why did they seem to be happier while using? Why would a famous musician like Kurt Cobain swallow his gun having just kicked heroin and becoming a new dad?

The sad truth is that they are often more equipped to deal with life and all the stress that goes along with it while abusing the drugs and alcohol. It is their solution to all problems, grief, celebrations, and social functions. I know this, as it was my own solution for many years. Many nights I wrestled with the thought that it would be easier if I just didn't wake up.

In the 1980's I attended high school in Plano, Texas. We were locally famous for our football and nationally known as the leading teenage suicide capital. Many of these kids I knew of but one of the girls in particular I knew well. She had a struggle with depression and substance abuse that I couldn't quite wrap my mind around at the time. By this time a list of my peers who met an untimely death surrounded by addiction and poor choices was growing at an alarming rate, however, this one beautiful former drill team member was the first one I knew that took her own life.

A world of ignorance lay between understanding and reasoning as the list of suicide victims increased with each passing year. By the 1990's Plano was again in the national spotlight, as my town became the teenage heroine overdose death capital. Suburban youth started dropping like flies from both

accidental and intentional overdoses as the rest of the country watched in shock. Still the ability to make sense of the dark phenomena eluded me as I too sought refuge in the alternate reality achieved through substance abuse.

By 1995 a trail of wreckage was left in my wake including multiple arrests, 13 years of probation, 2 ½ years inside the Dallas County Jail system, a failed marriage, and the loss of trust of everyone known to me. It seemed without help I would spend my adult life incarcerated. I did not consider suicide; it was an unknown urge that I could not understand. In March I was separated from alcohol for the last time.

Four years later I remained sober and remarried. My wife Kathy, a struggling addict in recovery, took her own life on Thanksgiving Day.

Whatever it is that you are thinking at this point, as bad as it sounds, the pain was worse and the level of frustration matched. Narrowly clinging to directions shared with me, I spent the next evening at a treatment center working with men and women. As a result, I did not fall into substance abuse to blot out the pain, I did not fight with anyone, nor did I feel it necessary to assign blame. I did cry for weeks and ran through every emotion expected. I had in fact for the very first time in my life realized that I needed no coping mechanism for life, I, in fact, had a new solution. A solution that neither my wife nor any of the names on the almost countless list of my peers shared. A solution so simple. Helping others, it is the very basis of any 12-step fellowship.

Realizing that every drug addict and alcoholic uses drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism, we can now understand many of their otherwise unexplained actions. We drink to escape fear, blot out pain, deal with stress, and build our confidence and most of all to keep everyone and everything at a comfortable distance, as we are

uncomfortable with ourselves. Until we have a sufficient replacement we will always return to the same behavior. When the stress and pain get bad enough they will use again, regardless of our wishes or will power. It is a fact that has played out thousands of times and taken thousands of lives.

Understanding this; it is our duty to help whenever possible whether doctor, therapist, counselor, sponsor, mentor, family or friend. This is far too important to split hairs on who is more qualified. They need hope and they need it now. A recovered addict or alcoholic, regardless of education, who has successfully come through this dark emotional state, can get through to a potential suicide victim in minutes rather than days or weeks. The fact is simple, they know they are drug addicts or alcoholics, they know that they can't stop using by themselves or they wouldn't be contemplating suicide. A complete psychic change or spiritual experience followed by selfless giving of time to help those still gravely affected will suffice as a new solution.

The truth is that very few potential suicide victims really want to die, they just want the pain to stop.

In our own transitional housing facility, I have personally worked with men and women who have attempted or threatened suicide in the past. Knowing just how hopeless their situation is, they have come to us believing that they would never find freedom from pain and eventually take their own lives. It is our greatest honor to witness the life-saving connections when one man or woman gets through to another and gives them hope. Without hope nothing can be started, without faith there is no reason for them to try, and without action nothing will be accomplished. These components must all be present, for faith without works is truly dead and without it we may lose one more precious soul.

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