Depression Didn't Get Rick Hallson, Cigarettes Did!

A while back I published what some have considered to be a controversial Blog about 3 friends of mine who suffered from depression. Others claim it was one of my more sensitive Blogs and very unlike most of my usual egotistical rants. One thing I know for sure though was I received more comments about this Blog than any other, plus I received a surprise e mail which inspired me to revisit the subject.Up until a few years ago I had only heard rumors about the existence of depression because of it being so well hidden. I was very surprised by some of the comments I received like the one I got from my good friend Gary Russell.

Gary's Father was a very successful Winnipeg businessman but according to Gary suffered from depression for most of his career. He finally had to retire at an early age but somehow found the strength to fight his way through it and even started a whole new career again after he left Winnipeg and moved to British Columbia. Gary's story made me think back about what it was like growing up around my Father and I never realized until now that he too may have been suffering from depression. Back then whatever he had was referred to as some kind of nervous disorder which was treated with something called nerve pills. All I know is that whatever he had caused a lot of fun plans to be cancelled because he would be too sick to participate in them. The memories I have of my Father are unfortunately ones of disappointment like the time I was proudly flying home for Christmas shortly after becoming a Program Director in Saskatoon. I was very excited that my Dad was picking me up so I could share with him that not only did my future look bright but that I had already received my first raise. Upon landing my brother in-law Ronnie was there to greet me instead of my Dad who he explained was once again sick. Those kinds of things happened so often when I was growing up that still to this day I don't have much sympathy for sickness of any kind. I wish I had known back then what he was going through because maybe we would have had a much better relationship than the one we did.

My Father lived a Jekyll and Hyde existence which my Brother Reg claimed became even worse after I had left home. My friend Jim Quail though would often say to me ..."It must be great living at your place". Out in public Sandy Johns (pictured) had Jim and others rolling in the aisles with all the jokes he used to tell and my answer to Jim was, Yeah Right!

Jed Duval after reading my Blog commented that our long time production whiz at WIBC TJ Byers suffered from depression and eventually took his own life. I now think that maybe a lot of our radio brothers who we thought of as strange may in fact have been suffering from depression. I believe the more we talk about it, write about it and bring it out into the open, the more chances there may be that some skilled and qualified people will find a way to deal with it.

My original Blog was about 3 guys from Winnipeg, Rick Hallson, Bill Wakeman and Billie Gorrie whom I had no idea were suffering from depression. They like my Father hid it well in public. The surprise e mail I received was from Rick Hallson who because of depression had tried to commit suicide but thankfully failed. Rick who had stumbled across my Blog which mentioned him sent me the e mail below and also sadly told me that when he worked at CHUM a mutual friend of ours J Robert Wood used to drive him home after work now and then and every time he would light up J Bob would tell him that those things were gonna kill him someday. J Robert was right he told me because at this very moment he knew he was dying. Now I'm sad to report that Rick is gone and in his honor I'm reprinting his e mail below which is about his first hand experience with depression.

Hello George,

I think the last time we talked was 1963 when Sandy Koufax won the MVP award in that years' World Series. Maybe that's going back a little far but it's in the ballpark.I was directed to your website last night by Ken Porteous, an old CHUMer and lifelong friend. He found news of the death of Bill Gorrie. I am shocked and saddened to hear about Bill's demise by suicide. Bill, Ken, and I were just three on a long list of Silver Heights Collegiate grads who were drawn to radio in the early sixties, primarily by the dynamic CKY talent with jocks such as Jimmy Darrin, J. Robert Wood, Chuck Dann and the amazing on-air execution. 'KY was huge and working at the station for me, being barely 17, was a gift.

Bill Gorrie was kind, gentle, supportive, humorous, upbeat, flexible, honest, to name a few. That was my experience with him during the time I worked at CKRC. I guess that's why I was so shocked at leaning about his suicide. That just doesn't fit with what I knew of him, his character, his comfortable drive and his kindness toward others. But then, someone who lives with chronic depression lives two lives. One is hidden deep within while the other part struggles to live with a sense of normalcy. I know because I have lived that. I attempted suicide three years ago. I don't know what Bill's issues were but in my case, I carried my issues as far as I could--until August 28, 2008. My demons had won. I was completely surprised when I woke up 26 hours later and it was shortly after waking up, when I became somewhat lucid that I realized I was getting a second chance at life. Since then, I have used my experience and skills as a two-decade professional speaker to advocate for mental wellness and the rights of those who are affected by mental illness. (That's a long way from executing a dynamic intro sitting on the edge of the jock chair in front of a mic in the control room.)

Could Bill have been swayed in the parking lot the night of the CKRC reunion party? No one will ever know. A couple of months after my suicide attempt and release from the psych ward, I became certified in suicide intervention so that I could better understand suicide and perhaps help others in crisis. One who deals with chronic depression feels shame and a sense of hopelessness, every day. It never leaves. There is no relief. Stigma is a huge issue. Stigma is embedded in our health care system—even within the silo of mental health. I've seen it. I've experienced it. It's there in all its ugliness. Bill's pain is gone. May he rest in peace. What a shame. What a loss.

I did write a book about my experience with my suicide attempt. It sits in a folder on my computer. I've never sent it to a publisher for consideration. I'm not sure why but I had to write it for the sake of writing it. Please let me share a few lines from the book with you and your readers. "Within weeks of my release from the hospital after my suicide attempt, I attended a suicide survivors gathering. It's an annual event staged for family and friends who have lost a loved one to suicide. Speakers addressed an audience of about 150, relating their personal stories: anguish, guilt, fear, hurt, anger, frustration, pain; stories that rang so loud it was deafening; Oh how they wish they could turn back the clock and perhaps change an outcome. As the ceremony continued, I became so profoundly aware of what I had done, as never before, and even in my survival, how I had hurt the people who loved and cared for me. I stood in a back corner of the room watching and listening to the stories one after another, trying to keep my crumbling composure in check. It was so hard to be there. As I walked away after the final

prayer from the podium, I came to a decision to write my book. I need to write it for my own sake: fifty years of dealing with my personal demons had almost cost me my existence. It had to end. If telling my story helps even a single human being from taking that final step—suicide, then it is worth every word."

Like so many others, I will remember Bill Gorrie.

Take care George.

Rick Hallson http://www.richardhallson.net

Winnipeg