



BestMinds

Invites you to participate in

***The Second Day
Project***

Sharing stories of hope

The Second Day
Project

The Second Day

Project

Desperation

She had rehearsed it all in her mind. On cue, at 2:00 am that night, she arose from her bed, pulled on her robe and slippers, and walked out of the house while her husband and children lay sleeping. She left no note. The stream she journeyed toward was a good mile from the house, a difficult trek through fields and pastures even for a fully dressed and healthy person, let alone a woman with a chronic and debilitating heart condition. Nonetheless, she pressed forward, driven by a resolve that she could no longer allow the burden of her poor health to fall on the shoulders of her loved ones.

Whether aided by moon or star light we do not know, but she persevered through the darkness to stand at the water's edge. With the same determination that had led her from house to stream, she shook off her robe and slippers for the last time, leaving them for the unlucky discoverers to spot and claim. She waded into the water, and, after a few steps, turned so as to be walking backwards. The water was above her knees. "Deep enough now," she thought. Then, she let her body glide backwards and her head drop below the water covering her face. She was drowning herself. The woman's name was Mattie Waddell. She was my grandmother.

What I find so remarkable about this story is that I did not hear it until I was 60 years old. No one would know the story were it not for the fact

that her daughter, my mother, found the slippers the next day...beside her mother's bed.

"Mommy, why are your slippers all muddy?" she asked.

As far we know, my mother was the only person with whom my grandmother shared what had happened the night before. She related the desperate sojourn through the darkness, the long walk across fields, the sad purpose that drove her, and the descent into the water. Then, she added this, "As my head went back and I began to take in the water, I felt a hand beneath my head, lifting it up. I believe it was the hand of God. I believe he was telling me that it was not my time to die." She told how she had risen from the water, donned her robe and slippers, and walked home. She died several years later of natural causes.

My grandmother was not alone in her experience. In the next hour, four persons in the United States will kill themselves. One of them will leave a note explaining why he or she found life too painful to continue living. However, in that same hour, millions more, like my grandmother, will think about killing themselves, or even attempt to kill themselves...and finally decide not to. And, like my grandmother, none of the latter will send anyone a note explaining why he or she decided to live. This fact alone reveals the curious nature of our attitude toward suicide: the subject is so frightening that the person who dies by suicide does not feel safe talking about it until he or she is dead. By that time, conversation is no longer a possibility. As a result we end up knowing more about what makes for death than what makes for life. If this were the case with any other fatal condition, say cancer, we would find it quite peculiar. Imagine that thousands of people were surviving a particularly deadly type of cancer but we never took the time to discover why they were surviving. Yet, we have in our midst millions of people who have personally survived their own suicidal thinking, or attempts, and we almost never ask them what kept them alive. We

often have the suicide note. The “this is what kept me alive” note is missing. Society cannot help but be on the wrong road when our maladies are public but our cures (how to stay alive) are kept private and unavailable.

The purposes of this booklet are simple.

First, if at some point in your life you have seriously considered or attempted suicide, I want to encourage and equip you to tell your story.

Second, if you are blessed to have never seriously considered suicide, I want to engage your assistance in encouraging those who have considered or attempted suicide to tell their story.

The overarching purpose for both is to use these stories to save lives, not only from death. People kill themselves for many reasons, but they can be boiled down to two: a loss of hope and a lack of social connection. Stories are an antidote to both: they inspire hope and they help us feel less alone.

However, as a Christian, I not only want to help save lives. My commitment to a vital inner life for my brothers and sisters in society requires that I also work to help deliver those plagued by suicidal desperation. Stories of those who have found a pathway out of suicidal thinking and into a hopeful, loving inner life are medicine to the soul

We use words to tell stories. Unfortunately, the words we have available in our daily lexicon are often inadequate when it comes to the subject of human redemption. When the heart is at sea, the mind creates a word to carry it to safe harbor. To that end, I have created a few words that I have found helpful. In doing so, I am not seeking to be cute or artsy. I am trying to get closer to actual experience. I will speak of these words next.

First Day, Night, and Second Day Persons

There are at least 20 million people in the United States who have seriously considered or attempted suicide but have not killed themselves. Some of them have not only resisted the tragedy of killing themselves, they have found a way to stop thinking about suicide as well. As a way of writing and speaking about them, I have coined the term *Second Day* persons. *Second Day* persons are those who have found deliverance from the grip of the suicidal desperation that once besieged them.

I am a *Second Day* person. My life can be divided into three time periods, a *First Day*, a *Night*, and a *Second Day*. (I am using the word *day* to mean an indeterminate period of time that could cover hours, months, or years.) The *First Day* was that span of time that I lived without considering suicide as an option. The *Night* consisted of that period when suicide was not only a real option but impossible to erase from my thinking. The *Second Day* is the season in which I now live, a season in which I have made the necessary changes to find life worth living.

It sounds strange to demarcate life in such a way, like my children who used to measure clock time by a television program (number of "Brady Bunches") and calendar time by the number of "sleeps". Children innately measure time by experiences. We have to be taught how to "tell time" using a clock. To speak of a *First Day*, a *Night*, and a *Second Day* which are measured out, not by a calendar, but by the experience that characterizes those seasons is to return to a deep, primal pattern that I find healing. If we are to repair the neural patterns that are rooted in our primal past, we must return to the thinking of our childhood and grow up anew. I am a *Second Day* person who is quite a number of "sleeps" old. I have to pick up my wife in about four "Brady Bunches." I urge the reader to experiment with telling time this way.

I have trained thousands of persons in suicide awareness skills. I now speak openly about my *Second Day* identity and the likely presence of *Second Day* persons in every audience I address. The inevitable result is that at the end of my presentation, one, sometimes several persons, comes to me with tearful relief and says out loud for the first time, "I am a *Second Day* person."

There are many more *Second Day* persons that have lived among us than we may realize. Some are quite famous with names we would instantly recognize: Mary Astor, Tai Babilonia, Drew Barrymore, Brigitte Bardot, Danny Bonaduce, Maria Callas, Martine Carol, Johnny Cash, Gary Coleman, Nadia Comaneci, Sammy Davis, Jr., Diana, Princess of Wales, Walt Disney, Micky Dolenz, J.K. Rowling, Owen Wilson, Halle Berry, Greg Louganis, James Stockdale, Donna Summer, Drew Carey, Mike Wallace, Robert Young, Paul Robeson, Elizabeth Taylor, Maxene Andrews, Adam Ant, Abraham Lincoln, Eckart Tolle.

We might attribute the names of people on the list above to the pressure of living "in the limelight." The truth is that suicidal thinking impacts persons at every level of society, including folks we see on a regular basis. They worship beside us in our churches, synagogues, and mosques. They work beside us at our jobs and sit beside us in our classrooms. It would surprise us to discover them within our circle of friends or even within our own families. But they are surely there.

I was having tea several years ago with a friend I had not spoken to for some time. When we finally settled ourselves at a table, I shared with her that I was working on this book and that I was a *Second Day* person. She looked at me with a sense of relief. "I, too, am a *Second Day* person," she disclosed. "In fact, I am giving a speech about my experience in two weeks." Oddly enough, what we can learn from *Second Day* persons is not so much what makes people want to kill themselves, but a perspective on the joy of living. I just received a card

from my friend. Above her name she had written, "Every day is a bonus." This is only one of the important lessons about living we can learn from those who almost decided not to live.

The psychotherapist, Carl Jung, believed that addiction is a manifestation of a profound spiritual yearning, a thirst for wholeness which was part of the fundamental dilemma of being human. I believe that the suicidal impulse can also be the expression of a deep, spiritual wisdom of the soul, valid, but wrongly interpreted. Once you have decided to honor this wisdom and yet live, the path forward must be transformational. It may also be extremely difficult. If you decide that your life is more important than death, it becomes more important than most everything else — including the expectations of those closest to you.

It is for this reason that a *Second Day* is not merely a repeat of the *First Day*. A *Second Day* person is not simply a *First Day* person who has stopped thinking about suicide any more than a caterpillar is a butterfly with its wings pulled off. A *Second Day* person may have experienced a transformation that often reaches to the heart of his or her existence. This is often a profoundly spiritual though not necessarily religious experience. In general, many religious organizations have been singularly *First Day* institutions; their historic treatment of suicide using concepts of sin and hell, combined with their tendency to unintentionally fuel the suicidal impulse by ostracizing those who disappoint them rule many churches out as spiritual communities where *Second Day* persons can step forward. Fortunately, many religious leaders are now catching a vision for how their communities can not only minister to those bereft by the suicide of a family member but also for engaging those considering suicide before it occurs.

Othersiders

Second Day people are part of a larger spiritual community of folks that I would call *Othersiders*. *Othersiders* are persons who have passed through a traumatic life experience that has required transformation as a condition of survival. Like suicide, alcohol and drug addiction are generally terminal conditions without some transformational intervention. Persons in the recovery community from such addictions are generally *Othersiders*. *Othersiders* usually believe that they have been delivered from their self-destructive impulse by a spiritual power. As Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski put it, and as often quoted by AA members, "Religion is for people afraid of going to hell. Spirituality is for those who have been there." This somewhat unorthodox perspective on life is one reason that *Othersider* communities are generally anonymous in nature.

What *Second Day* persons have discovered, along with their *Othersider* sisters and brothers, is that suicide invites us to explore the most fundamental aspects of our human journey, namely, friendship and hope. These are as essential to the Soul as food and air are to the body. If friendship and hope could be wrapped into a capsule and administered by our communities, we would consider it a miracle drug. The reality is that our society systematically and in some cases intentionally deprives people of both friendship and hope, and the happiness that is a byproduct of both.

Othersouls

Even those who have never had a traumatic, life altering, soul-jarring experience can still be part of this story. I call them *Othersouls*. When you are in the Night of suicidal desperation, an *Othersoul* is a person

who is able to stand with those living on the thin line between suicidal thought and action, and then walk with you into your *Second Day*, the time when the black fire of suicidal thinking has been extinguished. *Othersouls* are able to listen to you talk about the black fire, the future you have lost, and the temptation to act. They may be quiet and reflective in their response, allowing you to hear yourself think out loud. Or they may be uncomfortably energetic. One person became angry at the thought that I would leave him. One pounded on my chest in the middle of her office. My daughter simply told me it was unacceptable because I had to walk her down the aisle of her wedding.

I had to make up this word because no other word would quite do. *Religious* persons bring faith to bear but are sometimes unable to listen nonjudgmentally. *Friends* are at all levels in our lives, and the friend with whom we play golf or swap babysitting may not be comfortable with our story. *Family* members may love us but may be overcome with anxiety of one kind or another when we tell our story. When you cannot be honest about who you are, what you believe, who you love, and what you must do, you begin to twist yourself into a pretzel to keep the hounds of rejection at bay. Many of our communities have a way of turning us into prostitutes of a sort, selling our souls for the sake of keeping our jobs, our families, and our relationships. And for all the wonder of professional *therapists* and *counselors*, they cannot be with us day in and day out.

There is something distinctive about *Othersouls*. *Othersouls* vary in their response and role in your life, but they all have one thing in common: love. They make it clear that they want you around for as long as they can have you. They love your soul enough to accompany you on whatever journey that soul takes you. One of the great gifts of suicidal thinking is that it discloses to us the *Othersouls* in our lives who may not otherwise be obvious to us.

Not every *Second Day* person will use these words in telling their stories. They will have their own words. I do believe that it is important for all of us to move away from words and phrases that are often associated with suicide such as sick, ill, evil, selfish, self-centered, sinful, crazy, unforgivable, lost, committed, and psycho. With that in mind, we can have increased confidence that our stories and conversations will help save lives.

Why Collecting Second Day Stories Is Important

You may be wondering why collecting these *Second Day* stories is important. As a *First Day* person, you may never have seriously considered suicide a single day in your life, and, as far as you know, no one in your life ever does.

Collecting these stories is important for you as a *First Day* person because it can help you understand how you can join the conspiracy of the Universe in helping save the lives of those in the *Night*. Take a moment and tally up the number of persons in your life who are important to you: family, friends, neighbors, work associates, members of spiritual communities and service organizations, sports teams you may coach, etc. Now divide that total number by sixteen. On average, that's how many people in your life are thinking about suicide today. You don't have to be a surgeon, firefighter, or emergency medic to save a life. You can save a life by loving enough to listen with a smart, compassionate ear.

Even in the rare possibility that you will not personally be confronted by the issue of suicide, you may discover a zest for living from the lessons others have learned in the heart of darkness. Many people are living with a chronic sadness that may never lead to thoughts of suicide but

nonetheless dims the luminance of their souls. I have never been addicted to alcohol but my life has been enriched by the stories of those who have been. As a reader, you may never have seriously considered suicide, but you may find your own path brightened by those *Second Day* persons who have.

Collecting these stories is important for you as a person in the *Night* because it can help you realize that you are not alone and that there is something right and true about your soul. And the *Night* is not forever.

Collecting these stories is important for you as a *Second Day* person because it joins hands with you in celebration, encourages you to continue in the pathways that sustain and protect your life, and calls forth a courage that reaches backward to those in the *Night* of suicidal desperation.

Are You Ready to Tell Your Second Day Story?

Before you share your story, spend some time thinking about it. Reflecting on these questions may be helpful.

- When and how did suicide become an option for me?
- What people or things helped me stay safe?
- What helped me stop thinking about suicide?
- How would I tell my story to someone else in a way that is straightforward and honest?

It is also important that you take inventory of your resources.

- Am I clear that I am no longer at risk?
- Do I have people who will support me in telling my story (*Othersouls*)?
- Can I experience misunderstanding and still be OK?

- Am I ready to have an impact, that is, am I prepared to help someone who discloses to me that they are thinking about suicide?

In telling your story, it is important to balance information about your struggles with positive information about your growth. Think about...

- Your experience – What have been the major milestones in your journey with suicidal thinking?
- Your strength – What are the sources of strength that were critical in your deliverance from suicidal thinking?
- Your hope – What do you hope will be the benefit for others in hearing your story?

Finally, after you tell your story for the first time, it will be important to evaluate how it went. Here are some questions that can guide you:

- How am I feeling about sharing my story?
- Do I have the support I need?
- Do I have the tools I need?

If you are a *Second Day* person with a story to tell, either anonymously or by name, please spend some time with the questions above. You may want to make some notes. Then go to <http://www.asecondday.com/tellyourstory> where you are given an opportunity to submit your story. Alternatively, you can send it as an attachment to fe@holycowconsulting.com.

If you are considering suicide today please stop everything and get help. You can find help by calling 1-800-273-TALK.

