

Suicide and Death, Roses out of Ashes

By Terri Jones

Okay I suppose the heading seems a little dreary, but life has never been easy so you have to (as a wise woman once told me) make roses out of ashes. Otherwise life will take you down with a hard thud. So here are my thoughts on what life has handed me and how I have made roses out of ashes.

Terri Jones Continued...

Jason's suicide broke my heart into a million pieces and left a gaping hole once I got the pieces back together again. I tried to put my heart back together in many different shapes and I still came up with a missing piece so I realized this hole was to be filled with what others and myself had to offer. I had to tell myself that no matter how much I needed Jason here, how much I looked at his pictures, or replayed events nothing would change the cold hard and ugly fact that Jason is no longer here in the physical form. And there was no answers as to why. And it is the "why" that will about drive you to the point of insanity. I put this question to rest by knowing that by the time I get a chance to ask Jason "why?" the answers will no longer matter. When that time comes, we will be reunited and live among the angels.

So how does one go on? I knew right away that I absolutely would not let his death bring me to a point of disability. I made a conscious effort to keep functioning, even if it hurt. And believe me there was days that I just did not want to function. Within time, I began to see beyond myself and saw my son and daughter struggling, and then saw Jason's friends struggling and then the bigger picture of our military men and women struggling and I knew that it was my chance to make roses out of ashes. If I couldn't make myself feel better then maybe I could help others. And maybe it was the guilt of feeling that I had so terribly failed Jason. Guilt is about as disabling as you can get. As Jason's Mom I could recall memories back to the day he was born and replay events that I should of done this, or I should of done that. I spent about a year doing this. Not a good place to be. And again, after all that, nothing changes, I am still left with a dead son. I was left with his memories and so was everyone

else. His memories he left with his friends slowly began to come my way. One came forward and then another and they just kept coming. In fact, just a few days ago a friend shared pictures and memories of their sledding adventure and it has been these moments in time that were shared with me that has began to fill my heart up again.

I emerged from this dark hole with the will to want to help others who have faced the struggles of mental illness and suicide. I went forward with all the might I had to take on the military machine. I guess I looked at it as to what can I lose, I had already lost what they could take. And with knowing how much Jason was a star within our family, I did not want other families to lose their STAR. So roses out of ashes came to be. I have worked hard to get the military to recognize the suicide risks of their combat soldiers. I have worked hard to bring these lost names into awareness. I have worked hard to force the VA to no longer turn away suicidal veterans. I basically picked up Jason's battle gear and went to war with our own government. It didn't come easy, and at times I just wanted to give up. And it was then when I was sitting on the floor with no energy left that military men and women came and picked me up. One by one, two by two, four by four, they came forward and started telling their stories, ones they had been afraid to talk about, ones of how they had faced suicidal thoughts and loneliness. And most important stories of how things were changing, help was becoming available. The circle was now in motion, and was becoming complete once again.

My rose is blooming now. The seed was planted by a young boy who wanted to be in the Army. A young tender bud taken by disease. But the roots ran deep and new life emerged from the ashes and grew when watered and fed by those who loved the rose.

From my whole heart, I thank each and every one of you who have walked this journey with me. I love all of you.

Terri - Mother of SPC Jason Cooper 4/16/82 - 7/14/05
United States Army Reserve
OIFII 2004 - 2005 Log Base Seitz, Baghdad, Iraq

Succumbed to suicide from untreated PTSD