

Gillihan, Jesse

#340166

7-1-21

Suicide

I awoke from an intense nightmare, covered in beads of sweat. Unable to collect my thoughts, plagued by remembrance of the dream itself, I searched for my cell phone in a panic. My brother had taken his life that night and I had a dream of him doing it. The police traced the last phone call to my cell and I was told by my aunt, not even 7 hours after my horrible dream and unanswered phone call, that my brother had killed himself. The tragic loss of my brother can still be felt today in the lives of my family. The overcoming of such a blow, was hard fought and is still ongoing. I'm proud to say however, that his surviving daughters Emily and Lily, are an outstanding legacy. The next 14 years have been a roller coaster ride, but the death of my brother, my best friend, it has had quite the impact.

Losing my brother to suicide was a devastating blow to my family. Coupled with the death of my mother just 8 short years prior, I was racked with grief and with loss. As a young man, with a huge emptiness in my heart, in my life and in my very existence, the void was all consuming for me and I in very short order, turned to heavily drinking and using drugs. The grief could not be quenched with such novel ideologies as "Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll," but I had tried my very best to feed that fire. I adamantly refused to attend my brother's funeral and I lost all contact with my entire family for a number of months. I quite literally ghosted everyone in my life. I had taken my brother's death personal, much more so in consideration of him telling me 2 months prior that he had every intention of killing himself and there was nothing I

could do to change his plan. My Little brother had made up his mind and if you had known what a bull he could be, anyone would have considered his resolve, concrete.

The next couple months were hectic for me and somewhat of a complete blur, however, I ended up moving in with family and finding out I was going to be a father. The child was to be a boy. Upon finding out the alarming news, I sprang into action at the bequest of my family and sought out treatment and employment. In that order. I had found that I qualified for state assisted treatment, for drugs and alcohol. I wasted no time in signing myself into a 3 times a week contract for meetings, regular drug tests and intensive one on one therapy. After 2 months, a young man enlisted me at a local restaurant to become the nighttime dish washer and from there I moved into a nighttime line cook position. I doubled up on employment, by working a construction job in the mornings and treatment in the evenings. I worked my tail off to fight for my sobriety and for my family and the fruits of that labor, ended up being a 3 story house to call my own. A home I could raise my son in. My boy, aptly named after his late uncle Caleb. It wasn't easy to bounce back from the passing of my brother and is still ongoing, but I believe he would have been proud to know that his nephew carried his name.

You can never be quite sure what type of legacy a suicide will bring, but my brother's daughters fight continually for achievement. His oldest, Emily, she struggled bad throughout the last decade of her short life. She has gone from wanting to follow in her father's footsteps to gainful employment. My oldest niece is a picture of what suicide does to a young child. She still fights today with his death and with her own demons. Lily, my brother's youngest daughter is a complete rock star. At a young age of 6 years old, losing her father to suicide was tremendous. Today, however, she carries the torch of education in her heart and excels in

every area she puts her mind to. She retains an honor roll status in her school, helps with the high school football team and is a beautiful young lady. Lily has told me many times in her last couple years, "Uncle, my dad's death isn't going to be in vain and I'm going to make him proud!". Isabella Ray Gillihan would have been my brother's third daughter, but she died in birth, due to strangulation by the umbilical cord. She passed away 4 months after my brother. Caleb's daughters continue his legacy and they continue to work to overcome stereotypes and to be recognized not as just survivors of suicide, but as young, intelligent women.

In closing, I will say this "Rest in Peace little brother," and I'll continue to miss him every day. The unfolding events since his passing have literally transpired in a mere blink of the eye, but the pain has never dulled. If anything, it has increased. The void can never be filled with nonsense and childish ways, and for me the result has been 4 trips to prison. Some proverbially mountains will always be present in my life and I look forward to the challenge, however, the loss of my brother will always be felt. The true measure of his life will now be found in the obstacles that his very own daughters will need to rise to and overcome. Hopefully where ever he may rest, heaven or hell, in life he knew that I loved him, that his daughters adored him and his family would miss him.