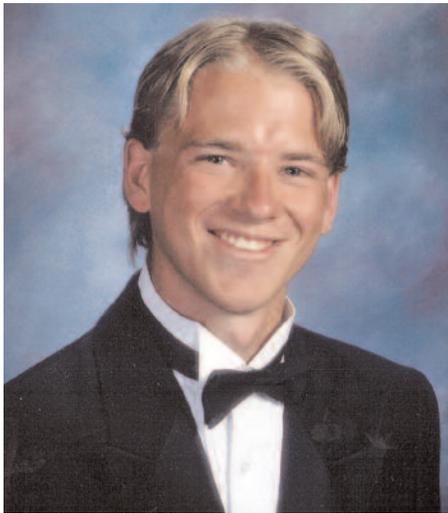


Suicide & Healing

by Larry Eggett

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*Blake Andrew Eggett
December 4, 1987 –
October 28, 2005*

One of the tragedies of suicide is that it is an uncomfortable subject, so it is not discussed. Since the death of my youngest son, Blake, I have learned a great deal about suicide. It is no respecter of persons, and it affects people of all religions, races, ages, and economic circumstances.

I have also learned that suicide is never an answer to life's challenges, and it is never an acceptable option. Most important, however, is that I have learned that healing and peace will come.

About Blake

Blake Andrew Eggett was born in Salt Lake City on December 4, 1987. He was the youngest of five boys – his baby sister was born two years later. Blake had an active childhood, participating in T-ball, soccer, and basketball. In middle school, he expressed an interest in instrumental music. He

wanted to play the piccolo, but the school required that he first learn to play the flute. Following 7th grade, he was able to play both instruments in the school band.

Blake joined the Riverton High School marching band after 9th grade, where he played the piccolo. Band became his life. He wasn't a particularly good student – he was smart and did well on tests – but he wasn't willing to do all of the work required. Band kept Blake in school, and he excelled in music. Although he learned to play the clarinet and other instruments, his instruments of choice continued to be the flute and the piccolo.

During Blake's sophomore year, we received an email from one of his friends letting us know that Blake had begun to talk about death and suicide. We talked to Blake about this, and he admitted having suicidal thoughts. He agreed to visit the doctor, who prescribed an anti-depressant. The medication seemed to help at first, but after a couple of months, Blake became more lethargic, and he stopped taking the medication because he didn't like how it made him feel. He wouldn't try anything else because he was afraid they would also make him sick. He refused to go back to the doctor, and he refused to see a counselor. He would say, "I know what I need to do to feel better. I'll be OK." And he seemed to do much better. At those times when he seemed depressed, he wouldn't talk about, but he would say, "I can handle it." He would then do better again for awhile.

Blake still struggled with school as

a junior, but he made it through the year because of band. It helped when his band teacher told him that he could probably qualify for a music scholarship, but he would need to graduate to make it happen. His senior year began with a new enthusiasm for school. His grades started to improve, he talked about the future, and I thought he was moving forward with his life. Then on Friday, October 28, 2005, Blake committed suicide.

The Friday that Blake died will always be etched into my memory. It had been a pretty good day at work. I spoke with Barbra (my wife) that afternoon. She said that Blake had talked to her during lunch (she is a cashier in the high school cafeteria) and said that he wasn't feeling well and was going home – this had happened before, so it didn't raise any red flags. When she arrived home from work, the van Blake drove was there, but there was no sign of him. She thought he had gone somewhere with his girlfriend. When she called 20 minutes later, she was screaming that she had found Blake and that he had committed suicide.

The note Blake left on his computer said that no one should blame themselves. "I have always been depressed and suicidal," he said, "but I have learned how to hide it." Although I had wondered for a couple of years whether Blake would one day commit suicide, the timing of his death puzzled me. It was near the end of the marching band competition season, and there was still one more competition the day after his death. The band

was going on tour to California the following week, and Blake had seemed excited about the trip. The night before his death was the high school band concert. Blake played a solo and had done very well. He appeared to be truly happy that night. I have since come to the conclusion that Blake's timing was planned. I think he knew that during marching band season, no one would expect him to commit suicide, so no one would be trying to talk him out of it.

Our Healing Process

Our healing process began almost immediately. The support of family, church leaders, and friends was overwhelming. The first night, we were visited by our LDS Bishop and other leaders, who conveyed their love and support. In addition, several members of our extended family came to express their love. Friends and even people we didn't know came or called. We were hugged by more people than we could count. And no one judged us for what Blake had done.

One of the hardest things we did was attend the final marching band competition the day following Blake's death. We felt we had to be there to support Blake's friends. They honored Blake by placing his band hat and his flute on the field. They played their hearts out, and they took first place. Several of the band members told us later that our presence at that performance helped them deal with their own grief.

A big factor in our healing has been our faith. One of the first things we were given – and several people referred this to us – was a talk given by Elder M. Russell Ballard of the LDS

Quorum of the 12 Apostles, called "Suicide – Some Things We Know and Some We Do Not." He offers the opinion that "Persons subject to great stresses may lose control of themselves and become mentally clouded to the point that they are no longer accountable for their acts. Such are not to be condemned for taking their own lives." This gave us great hope that God will be merciful in His judgment of those – including Blake – who take their own lives.

Many people offered to render service to our family. The young men from our church who were Blake's age sat at our house on Halloween night – the night of the viewing at the mortuary – so that we wouldn't have to worry while we were at the mortuary. A few weeks after Blake's death, I came home from work to find several young people from the high school cleaning up our yard.

Our own service to others helped our healing process. I was the Scoutmaster at the time, and Barbra was a leader in the church women's organization. Serving others in these capacities helped take our minds off our own troubles as we focused on the needs of others.

It is natural to feel angry toward the one who has committed suicide. I justified my feelings because Blake's act was a very selfish one. These feelings were especially strong as I watched my wife and children, as well as Blake's friends, struggle with his death. Feelings of anger, however, are not conducive to healing. I had to forgive him. Once I allowed my love for Blake to take the place of the anger, I was able to forgive him. Forgiveness also allowed me to focus on Blake as

the good young man that he was – and is – rather than remembering him for his final decision and action. He brought good feelings into our home with his music, and I remember that with fondness.

At the beginning, we decided that we would not allow ourselves to play the "blame game." Even though Blake's note said that no one should blame themselves, it is easy to blame ourselves or others for what happened, or to ask, "What if...?" It is not productive to second-guess yourself and wonder what "might" have happened had you or someone else done something different. By making this decision right away, we were able to avoid carrying unnecessary guilt, and it sped up the healing process.

For me, talking about Blake – about his life and about his death – has been a big part of my therapy. I know that not everyone will feel comfortable sharing such things, but it has worked for me. I have especially enjoyed sharing Blake's story with youth groups, hoping that it might keep someone from following the path that he chose.

We have been involved in some suicide prevention activities – mostly walks designed to draw attention to suicide awareness and prevention. The biggest thing this did for us at first was to help us realize that we are not alone – the tragedy of suicide touches many people. Riverton High School has a Hope Squad, and they have invited us to participate every year in their Hope Week activities, including a Hope Walk.

I try to visit the cemetery often. For the first couple of years, I tried to visit once each week. Now, however, it is usually every second or third week.

The cemetery helps me stay close to Blake, and it gives me a sense of comfort and peace.

The first year is the most difficult – it involves the “first” of everything without your loved one – the first Christmas, the first family vacation, and so forth. But we made it through those hard times, trying to include our positive memories of Blake in our celebrations. We determined to make the anniversary of Blake’s death a pleasant memory for our family. On the first anniversary, we and our unmarried children boarded a plane for California and went to Disneyland for a few days.

Healing is a process, and it will be different for everyone. As of this writing, it has been over four years since Blake passed away. We are doing really well, and we have been richly blessed. Even so, I still think about Blake nearly every day – but those thoughts are positive memories and assurances that he is doing well. Once in a while, I experience what I call a “Blake moment” – a moment when I feel a sense of loss and sadness. But those moments don’t come nearly as often, nor do they last as long, as they did at first.

10 Tips for Healing

- Forgiveness – while feelings of anger or bitterness may be natural, healing can only come with forgiveness.
- Counseling
- Focus on your loved one’s good qualities rather than on that one final decision and action.
- Refuse to play the “Blame Game” or “What if...?”
- Be open and honest with others. When others ask about your

loved one’s death, don’t be afraid to tell them what happened. Suicide is an uncomfortable subject, but it needs to be discussed openly.

- Service to others has great healing power. When we serve others, we forget our own problems for a time and focus on the needs of others.
- Focus on the good memories of your loved one. Our daughter was 15 when Blake died – she was quite close to him, and his death hit her especially hard. She created a “Memories of Blake” book – she included pictures of Blake,

wrote her thoughts, and so forth. This helped her regain the sparkle in her eyes.

- Find a place where you can feel close to your loved one, and where you can feel a sense of comfort and peace, and go there as often as you can. For me, it has been the cemetery.
- Participate in suicide prevention activities – walks, workshops, and so forth.
- Turn the anniversary of your loved one’s death into a good memory. Go to Disneyland, for example, or do something else fun with your family.

IN MEMORY

Blake sleeps in the embrace of Jesus
Who died for all of us.
When he awakens
He will see what he could not see here.
His mother’s strength: a legacy from Eve.
His father’s wisdom from Adam.
His brothers and sister from the light of Love.
That life shortened here
Intensifies learning there.
Consequence is savored.
Understanding unfolds.
Transition through grace
Continues forever.

Your family sleeps in the embrace of Jesus
Who died for all of us.
When you pass through the veil,
You will see what you cannot see here.
Mother Eve lost Abel, and gave you her strength.
Father Adam lost Eden, and gave you his wisdom.
Brothers and sister embrace each other in the light of Love.
Life here
Must trust life there.
Consequence is not punishment.
Understanding unfolds.
Transition through grace
Will reunite you
Forever.

–Barbara Springer