

OPINION

“Idealism is like a castle in the air if it is not based on a solid foundation of social and political realism.”

Claude McKay, (1878-1972) Australian journalist

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GUEST VIEWPOINT

Michael Yates

Williams' suicide a siren for action

The recent suicide of comedian and Oscar winning actor, Robin Williams, sent a shock wave through the American entertainment landscape with a shattering reminder that

deep may run the pain and suffering wrought by the mental illness of depression.

The American novelist and essayist, William Styron, wrote in his 1990 memoir his grave personal account of living with "despair beyond despair." "Depression is a disorder of mood," he wrote, "so mysteriously painful and elusive as to verge close to being beyond description."

For those afflicted with severe depression it truly is beyond description, and yet for those that live without the illness, the severity of depression that leads to suicide can seem, to many, beyond comprehension. Social media is alight with condolences, sympathy, and questions over Williams' suicide. Many bewildered followers and fans have wondered aloud, "How could this happen," "Why suicide," and "Did anyone know?"

So, what do we know about suicide?

Did you know that 108 suicides occur daily across the nation, exceeding the national homicide rate, as reported by CBS Nightly News? Did you know that in Tennessee, motor vehicle and suicide deaths were practically equal in 2012 (958 versus 956)? Did you know that a Tennessee Youth Risk Behavior Survey published in 2011 by Tennessee Department of Education cited one in seven students actually considered suicide; one in nine had developed a plan; and one in sixteen actually tried to take their life?

As the suicide statistics rise, so does the collateral toll on family and friends. Death by suicide, they readily acknowledge, changes everything, for everyone, evermore. It is a complicated grief and sorrow that never quite brings resolution or peace to the survivors.

The truth is as a society, we don't treat depression as a mental illness that deserves proper assessment, care, and treatment. Culturally, we drive it into the shadows and dress it in a shameful cloak of secrecy and embarrassment. Until we take a critical first step to stamp out the shame associated with suffering from a mental illness, the tragic losses and collateral grief from suicide will continue to mount - leaving us, once again, in bewildered disbelief.

In a recent release from the Commissioner of Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Douglas Varney implored, "If you or someone you know and love is at a breaking point, especially one so low they speak of wanting to end their life, take immediate action to get them help."

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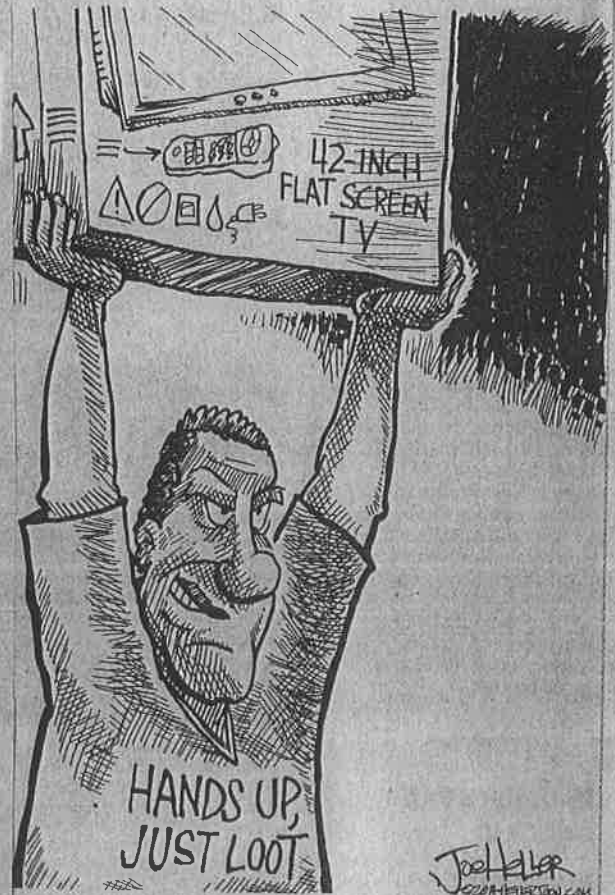
Yates

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Here in the Anderson, Scott, Morgan, Campbell, and Roane County areas, immediate help comes from Ridgeview Behavioral Health Services who have caring professionals available to help at 865-482-1076, or through the Mobile Crisis Team, who is available 24 hours a day at 1-800-870-5481.

Hope and treatment are available. Stories of recovery and healing do exist. Together, let us deepen our understanding of the despair felt by many; let us commit ourselves to eliminating the stigma associated with mental illness; and let us be resolute in suicide prevention efforts. It is time to dignify our discussion of mental illness by stamping out the shame associated with it.

Michael Yates is the director of development at Ridgeview Behavioral Health Services.



Joe Heller
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golf — which is most dangerous?

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They do work. In fact, mine popped me to the surface directly in the path of the trolling motor, which was running on high speed. Those plastic blades left RPM cuts and bruises up my left side and tore the buttons off a decent shirt.

water. Of course, I soldiered on. What would you have done if someone hooked off the tee on the first hole and hit you between the eyes with a golf ball? Quit and waste the greens fee? I don't think so.

My fishing partner...