

Commentary...

# Transforming the terrible secret of suicide

By Greg Walker (ret)  
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In 1962, my grandfather on my father's side took his own life. This after killing his estranged wife. His murder-suicide shook our immediate and extended families to the core. I was just 8 years old and loved both deeply.

The aftershocks and ripples of that singular act were catastrophic for many, many years. My father, his oldest son, changed entirely as he grew older. His anger, fear, remorse, and self-hatred that came from the event consumed him. He isolated — never explored counseling at any time although he could have afforded the best — and passed away earlier this year without resolution.

Six years ago, given the incredible training and real-world experience I had working with the U.S. Special Operations Command's Care Coalition as a Warrior Care provider and in lieu of nearly 10 years on the street as a police officer with experience investigating suicides and attempted suicides. — I investigated my grandfather's most terrible act.

I discovered no one else in the family had — to include my dad and his two brothers. And I discovered what we all thought was an accurate account was not. We'd all lived our lives believing bad information, trauma generated recollections, and the masking of the event even having

occurred (The Terrible Secret).

I learned the facts from reading the reports and asking questions, lots of questions, of those of our families still alive and willing to talk. I then shared the true story with everyone to include my father in a three-page letter.

The healing process had already begun — for those who wanted to heal.

I was blessed to spend 10 years working with our most seriously wounded, injured, ill, and suicidal. I was well educated along the way, and well trained. I was privileged to participate with equally skilled (many much more so) advocates and clinicians, police officers and hospital staffs, and family members of great courage, to successfully intervene in active suicidal situations.

We continue to lose between 20-22 Active Duty / National Guard / Reservists and veterans a day to suicide. That's a body count of 8,030 of our own a year. Or 80,300 trans-generational war fighters over the past 10 years of ongoing armed conflict. Let that number settle in for a moment. 80,300 fathers, sons, mothers, daughters, husbands, wives, grandchildren, friends, family.

There are no memorial walls for those who take their own lives. The stigma of suicide ensures silence, shame, and secrecy. However, this cultural branding is changing. We know more about what takes our

loved ones to the precipice of death by their own hands. And we are learning more to care for those left behind and to break the chain that suicide in a family or in a military unit can create unless challenged.

To kill the Most Terrible Secret you must expose it to the light of Love, Truth, and Self-Care. You must band together with like-minded warriors and fight the good fight.

And if the suicide is successful you then turn to those left behind, as I was, and self-educate, self-care, and seek professional counseling as I have. Breaking the chain is possible — and important — as is re-learning to love the ones lost.

Because suicide is not painless. Here are some of the exceptional



PHOTO PROVIDED BY GREG WALKER

Greg Walker and his grandfather.

resources in the war on military service-connected suicide I have professionally worked either for or with and with great success.

"No Fallen Comrade Left Behind."

**Lines for Life Military Helpline** <https://www.linesforlife.org/mhl/>

**Military One Source Confidential Counseling**  
<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/confidential-help>

**The Red Badge Project** <https://www.theredbadgeproject.com/>

**The Mighty Oaks Veterans Warriors Programs**  
<https://www.mightyoaksprograms.org/>

**Mission 22** <https://www.mission22.com/#ourcause>

**The Green Beret Foundation** <https://www.greenberetfoundation.org/>

**The Cedar Hills Hospital Military Program**  
<https://cedarhillshospital.com/treatment-services/the-military-program/>

**Wounded Warrior Project Combat Stress Team**  
<https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/after-action-report/issue-1-2018/wwp-nation>

**VA Military Crisis Line**  
<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/military-crisis-line>



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