

Cottage Grove Sentinel
116 N. Sixth St.
Cottage Grove, Ore. 97424

Opinion

The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

"I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend." —Thomas Jefferson (1800)



(Managing Editor's Note: Today marks the final installment in our month-long collaborative series with The Creswell Chronicle, Siuslaw News and Newport News-Times focusing on Oregon's rising suicide rate. It was the first collaboration of this kind. And it won't be the last. — Ned Hickson)

I want to commend the subjects of the "Breaking the Silence" series for their bravery in coming forward about their experiences with suicide. I sit in awe of their courage and candor in telling their accounts, knowing it would be read by thousands. In this week's piece, I am humbled by those I interviewed for trusting me to tell their story.

I always say that as a journalist, I am the vessel for which people can tell their stories. I am merely a transcriber; they are the ones who do all the work, the ones who make the story. It's especially true in this case, and it was a pleasure to be part of their journey as Cora, Ashley, Eli and other loved ones learn to grow from the

Reflecting on our 'Breaking the Silence' series

pain they have suffered. The topic of suicide seems to bubble up in my career wherever I go. I was first introduced to the power of these conversations when I was serving as an editor in Pennsylvania in 2014.

It started with a wom-

who lost her son; a man who attempted suicide as a teen; and a woman who suffered from severe depression and anxiety — and how they grappled with the aftermath.

I remember them all so vividly. They're the kind of interviews that stick with

be more inspired, more touched by the whole experience.

And the same goes for this one.

We are proud to have partnered with *The Cottage Grove Sentinel*, *Siuslaw News* and *Newport News-Times* on this important subject this month. It's collaboration that rarely, if ever, occurs between community newspapers in Oregon, but is one that supports, strengthens and upholds local journalism, as well as its network of journalists.

It's a collaboration that has enabled our newspapers to share resources and readership, to spread information far and wide for the betterment of all our communities. We're thankful to have been a part of it.

Though the series has concluded, *The Creswell Chronicle*, *The Cottage Grove Sentinel*, *Siuslaw News* and *Newport News-Times* encourage people to keep talking; to let their stories be known; to continue to work toward healing; to watch for those who may be suffering silently; to try and help those in need.

Everybody is somebody's loved one. No one is immune to the pain of losing someone to suicide.

an by the name of Kathy Merrill, who came to the paper as she was trying to start an Out of the Darkness suicide survivor walk in our county.

She told me her experience with suicide; losing her husband, Carl. It was a heartbreaking story worth telling, and Kathy wanted to tell it.

Shortly thereafter, beloved comedian Robin Williams died by suicide. People couldn't have been more shocked. The merit in expanding on the subject became clear.

And so began a series called Stepping Out of the Shadows, a series that, very similar to this one, recounted loss after loss of loved ones by suicide.

The series followed a woman who lost her husband; a man who lost his cousin; a daughter who lost her mom; a son who lost his mom; a mother

you, become part of you.

Just as the series titles suggest, it all starts with one story — one person to come out of the shadows, one person to break the silence.

That one story inspired another person to come forward, and another. And then another.

Kathy got her walk organized that year, and I attended as a reporter and as a supporter. People came out in droves to walk for their losses, and I felt so proud of Kathy and all she'd accomplished.

A memorial vigil was held in town next to a quaint gazebo after the series concluded. People lit candles, sang songs and I received the warmest embrace from one of my interviewees.

With tears in his eyes, he thanked me and said telling his story had helped him to heal. I couldn't

Guest Editorial

Erin Tierney, *The Creswell Chronicle*

No matter what, someone cares about you

(Editor's Note: As we wrap up our month-long series collaborative focusing on suicide, this week's Guest Viewpoint is particularly poignant, submitted by a Cottage Grove High School senior willing to share their first-hand experience dealing with the loss of a friend to suicide. Though the series is ending, we hope community members will continue to keep this important conversation going with one another as well as in within these pages.)

There are hidden sides to losing someone. Most feel sadness, a sense of loss, and some even feel happiness. Yet all these feelings are mixed up when you lose someone to suicide.

Last summer, I lost a dear friend to suicide. I had known her for more than four years. She was one of my closest friends. Even with us growing apart before her death, we always had each other's back.

Her passing was very sudden just as anyone lost through suicide is. But even if I knew she was going to take

her life, there's no handbook on how to handle it. Once I learned the news, I had many mixed emotions. But the biggest was guilt.

I felt guilty for a lot of things. Not talking to her as much, growing dis-

GUEST VIEWPOINT

By Tyler Rhynes

Cottage Grove High School senior

tant from her, and not checking in on her. The biggest was that I forgot to wish her a happy birthday. I had set a reminder to message her but time slipped away — and I never did.

Now that her birthday is coming up again next month, I feel terrible for forgetting; I now make sure to message everyone that simple message when it's their birthday.

Another thing was the unanswered questions. Her death left me with more questions than answers. Things like this are difficult because you can ask anyone — and everyone — and

they never can give you an answer.

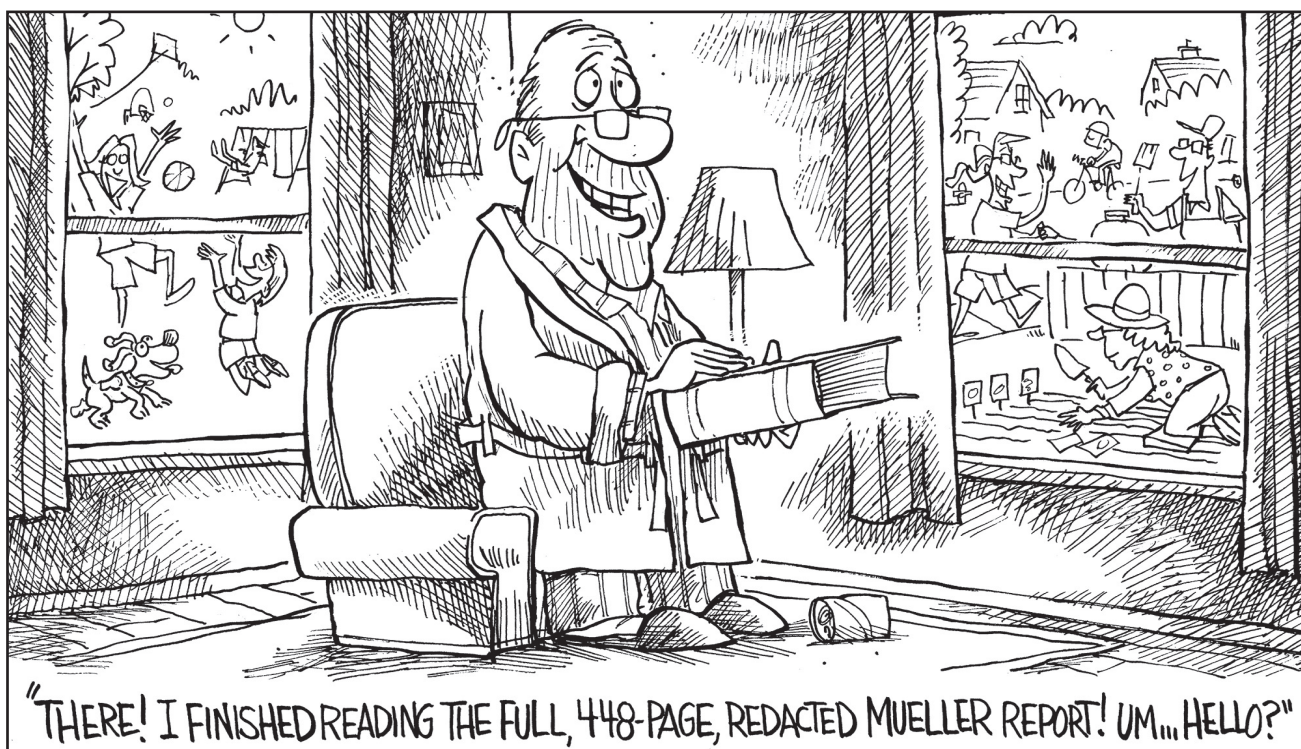
Some questions I began asking were "Did she know I loved her?" "What pushed her to this?" "Why did she not message me?" and "I thought she was getting better?"

Now, I never will get an answer to those questions. At the same time, those questions have helped change me to who I am. The tragedy is an open door to grow.

Her passing has taught me to make sure my friends and family know I care for them and how quickly someone can be gone. And as it gets close to one year since she passed, all I can say is that if anyone ever feels like she did to please reach out.

Someone cares about you and wants you to be happy. There are other ways to relieve the pain you are feeling. Many people are willing to help you through this. Some resources are the National Suicide Hotline (1-800-273-8255) and the online chat.

Just remember: No matter what, someone cares about you.



Letters to the Editor Policy

The Sentinel welcomes letters to the editor as part of a community discussion of issues on the local, state and national level.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters need to include full name, address and phone number; only name and city will be printed. Letters should be limited to about 300 words. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Letters that are anonymous, libelous, argumentative, sarcastic or contain accusations that are unsourced or without documentation will not be published.

Letters containing poetry or from outside The Sentinel readership area will only be published at the discretion of the editor.

Political/Election Letters:

Election-related letters must address pertinent or timely issues of interest to our readers at-large.

Letters must: 1) Not be a part of letter-writing campaigns on behalf of (or by) candidates; 2) Ensure any information about a candidate is accurate, fair and not from second-hand knowledge or hearsay; and 3) explain the reasons to support candidates based on personal experience and perspective rather than partisanship and campaign-style rhetoric.

Candidates themselves may not use the letters to the editor column to outline their views and platforms or to ask for votes; this constitutes paid political advertising.

As with all letters and advertising content, the newspaper, at the sole discretion of the publisher, general manager and editor, reserves the right to reject any letter that doesn't follow the above criteria.

Send letters to:

nhickson@cgsentinel.com

HOW TO CONTACT YOUR REPS

Oregon state representatives

• **Sen. Floyd Prozanski**
District 4 State Senator
PO Box 11511
Eugene, Ore. 97440
Phone: 541-342-2447
Email: sen.floydprozanski@state.or.us

• **Rep. Cedric Hayden**
Republican District 7 State Representative
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Ore. 97301
Phone: 503-986-1407
Website: www.leg.state.or.us/hayden
Email: rep.cedrichayden@state.or.us

Oregon federal representatives

• **Rep. Peter DeFazio**
(House of Representatives)
405 East 8th Ave.
#2030
Eugene, Ore. 97401
Email: defazio.house.gov/contact/email-peter
Phone: 541-465-6732

• **Sen. Ron Wyden**
405 East 8th Ave., Suite 2020
Eugene, Ore. 97401
Email: wyden.senate.gov
Phone: (541) 431-0229

• **Sen. Jeff Merkley**
Email: merkley.senate.gov
Phone: 541-465-6750

Cottage Grove Sentinel

541-942-3325

Administration

Jenna Bartlett, Group Publisher

Gary Manly, General Manager... Ext. 1207
gmanly@cgsentinel.com

Allison Miller, Multi-Media Sales Consultant... Ext. 1213
amiller@cgsentinel.com
Gerald Santana, Multi-Media Sales Consultant... Ext. 1216
gsantana@cgsentinel.com

Gina Nauman, Inside Multi-Media Sales Consultant... Ext. 1203
gnauman@cgsentinel.com

Editorial

Ned Hickson, Managing Editor... 541-902-3520
nhickson@cgsentinel.com
Damien Sherwood, Staff Reporter... Ext. 1212
dsherwood@cgsentinel.com

Zach Silva, Sports Editor... Ext. 1204
zsilva@cgsentinel.com

Customer Service

Meg Fringer, Office Manager, Legals, Classifieds... Ext. 1200
mfringer@cgsentinel.com

Production

Ron Annis, Production Supervisor... Ext. 1215
graphics@cgsentinel.com

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