

SUICIDE

Often, there appears to be a disease of the week, MS (multiple sclerosis) or Bipolar, (formerly called, manic depression) but a constant is suicide. Suicide and the philosophical and hot button issue of euthanasia are inexplicably related. HOW?

The academy award winning, [Million Dollar Baby](#), has triggered the debate big time. And, even the venerable Golden Gate Bridge is wrestling with the idea of interfering with the beauty and ambiance of its most prized tourist attraction by installing a suicide barrier. The Bridge has an almost hypnotic hold on those who may be on the edge. Will a barrier prevent suicides is the question? And, how is all this related to issues of euthanasia?



In a recent San Francisco Chronicle story, there's a sad, moving article about a teenager jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge. The boy who jumped had never given any indication there was a problem of suicide. Was suicide a trigger, an impulse? Maybe? The father is a prominent psychiatrist and the son went to the prestigious American/French school in San Francisco. The youngster was a major procrastinator and waited to the last minute to do his papers; or, in fact, any of his work. The parents and son had lots of conflict. The kid's Dad was the shrink and medical advisor to the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance and served for years on Kaiser's (this big HMO) suicide review committee.

The article said this, "He (Jonathan) struggled with an almost paralyzing

inability to get himself started on projects and reports, a problem that caused frequent clashes with parents and teachers." He sometimes worked himself into a pitched state of anxiety over his schoolwork.

The week he killed himself, the seniors had a battery of research papers due that would say pass or fail. The day before the big tests, the parents discovered (also the day before he died), he had not even started on his history paper about the 1986 Challenger explosion. The parents confronted him. They had just gone through the same infuriating routine in getting him to write his college entrance essays. His aunt found a suicide note on his computer: "I'm a coward. I'm taking the coward's way out and it should be honestly said what has happened. I have struggled with the same problems for 6 years and it is painfully obvious to me that I cannot overcome it for any length of time and be happy." What is so weird and beyond understanding is that this kid, probably did this on an impulse. Was it impulse? How could it have been prevented?

An equally sad case is the young genius who just killed himself—played classical piano at 4, read at 18 months but fatally shot himself. He delivered his High School commencement speech in cap and gown when he was just ten. He composed and recorded music, won piano competitions, breezed through college courses and mastered everything from archery to photography, hurtling through life seemingly doing great and his own person. And, he shoots himself—go figure. Did this super aware kid do this on an impulse? How could it have been prevented?

These are tough questions. There are so many tiers to the issue. We have scores of old folks in this world who aren't capable of making decisions concerning living and dying. What about them in this equation? I use to go into some of these nursing homes and it would seem that there were acres of old folks just waiting to die. Most didn't know they were in this world and had not known for years. I was always reminded of something one of my parishioners said when I was a pastor, "In this country, we treat our animals better than we do human beings."

How is suicide and euthanasia related? They are both final for sure. The Golden Gate Bridge has been the world's No. 1 destination for suicide. Some 1300 people are known to have taken the fatal leap since the bridge was built in 1937.

However, most believe that at least 2000 have actually jumped as many

have not been recovered. Parents of suicide victims understandably want something done, "three weeks ago today" said one, "Our daughter jumped off the bridge. Two weeks ago, I carried my daughter up the hill to her grave site. This was a temporary condition. She was not a nut case. Daddy's little girl is not coming home. "

Although I think we need a bridge barrier, it's still a question fraught with questions. Does a person's life belong to them? Albert Ellis, long time psychologist and therapist, not to mention, one of my heroes, has argued over and over, "Yes, a person's life belongs to him. He says to his patients, "If a person says they are going to do themselves in," he will say, "I understand, your life is your own but you must understand that if you are successful, there is no turning back."

Can people be protected from themselves. Robert Schmidt, 77, may have had the best comment to the Bridge Commission about suicide, "The Bridge represents the terminus, not the source of suicide." Schmidt, whose Aunt and Uncle, committed suicide years ago and said suicidal tendencies come from within and cannot be solved by fencing or barriers.

I think, that the issue is basically this: a person's life does belong to the individual. There is nothing that is so bad that they should be driven to desperation to take their lives. However, as people of faith, if you are that--in the final analysis, whatever choice someone makes, it is an acknowledgment that this world is not our home.

****by Jerry Davis in a Special to AP---[BACK TO AIRBORNE PRESS](#)**