

Something Happened On the Way to Suicide

By John Austin, April 2021

Warning: the content of this article is based on the personal experiences of the writer. Each person has their own experiences, and they may differ from what it is expressed in this article. Suicide is NEVER an option nor the answer to our problems, whatever the circumstances are. If you feel suicidal now, please seek for help. Visit [The Canada Suicide Prevention Service](#) or call this number 1-888-456-4566

It was a dress rehearsal I knew all too well. The note I would leave behind to garnish my corpse was a manifesto of despair, defeat, and disillusionment in relation to a grisly, cerebral theatre played out in the visual and sensory cortex of my mind. It would be the penultimate act of relief to satiate years of self-loathing, paranoia, and tormenting thoughts furnished by a horrid psychological disorder. The method by which I would rid humanity of me varied over the years. The first one involved drowning. On a hot evening in the summer of 1993, while standing on the shoreline of Sunnyside Beach in Toronto, Ontario, the conspiratorial muse of ending my life arose from the belief that my death would prevent me from harming or killing other people; a pre-emptive execution if you will. Even though that would've seemed a cruel remedy for what psychologists and psychiatrists call "Harm OCD," from my distorted perspective it appeared to be the best resolution. I didn't realize it then but many years later, a study done by the Karolinska Institute in Sweden found that people with Harm OCD are ten times likelier to commit suicide than the general population. No wonder it seemed like a good idea!

OCD stands for “Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.” It is compulsive behaviour meant to remedy an obsession, uncomfortable preoccupation, or irrational fear of something, similar to a phobia.

Those afflicted with Harm OCD believe they will commit horrific violence because of the continuous, intrusive thoughts about it. The tragic result of this disorder is that some sufferers believe they’re monstrously evil and therefore have no right to associate with other people. It is one of the loneliest forms of mental illness for two reasons:

1. Not telling others about it for fear of being branded the very thing you think you are (even though you are not), and
2. Fear of committing the evil act you’re convinced you’re likely to commit. The strange irony of this loneliness is that it can be comforting to the Harm-OCD sufferer in that you’re secure in the knowledge that as long as you isolate from people and don’t develop relationships, they will be safe from you.

For many of us with Harm OCD, the thoughts and urges that plague our tortured souls often involve people we love, or try to love. It even threatens opportunities to forge relationships with mere acquaintances, making success at any relationship precarious at best, impossible at worst. This condition can surface at any age, driving the sufferer into abysmal depression and terrifying precipices of anxiety. Medication can soften the edges of this macabre mania for some but not for everyone and even if psychotropic treatment may ease the symptoms, it doesn’t cure the root cause, which is still unknown and highly debated among medical and psychoanalytic practitioners. What is certain though is that extreme self-loathing lies at the core of it.

My Harm OCD first surfaced in the summer of 1975, at age ten. What seemed to trigger it was watching a ‘true story’ TV movie about a woman who murdered her parents and got away with it. After watching this movie, I was convinced I would murder my parents and was terrified to get too close to them. Afraid others would think I was a lunatic (which I felt like!) I refrained from telling anyone about this morbid paranoia. Thankfully, my OCD seemed to fade as summer passed. By the fall of 1975 it subsided to the back of my mind, even though I knew it was lurking in the recesses of my psyche, ready to pounce on the next rumination that traversed my wary soul.

There are many root causes of this affliction. For the longest time I couldn’t figure out what it was. As far as I was concerned, I was simply a freak who had to conceal this dark, disturbing secret. I suspected it might’ve been connected to my expulsion from King George VI elementary school at age seven because of my unusual mannerisms and alleged sexual misconduct with a female classmate. Anyone with a scintilla of common sense would see the absurdity of such an accusation that sent me for psychiatric evaluation at a children’s hospital in London, Ontario. Years later, when I was grown, my mother explained to me that socio-economic bigotry had more to do with my expulsion because we were “white trash.” Unlike my two sisters, who attended the same school, I was an easy target because of my strange mannerisms.

It’s highly probable that my self-loathing may have been spawned by that expulsion and subsequent move my family was forced to make at the behest of the attending psychiatrist. After we moved from Chatham, Ontario to the tiny village of Louisville, a short drive east of Chatham, my strange mannerisms seemed to abate, but the deep feeling of freakishness and self-loathing never left me. We continued to move from town to town, living mostly in Southwestern Ontario but spending some time in B.C. and Alberta.

But the geographical cure never worked.

Thus, I assumed my identity as an aberration. It became the albatross that has straddled my proverbial neck to this day. From time to time it would rear its ugly head throughout the years, eventually leading me to planning my Final Solution: extermination of a madman.

People who commit or attempt suicide are often dismissed as selfish and inconsiderate of how their actions will affect others. While there is some truth to that, selfishness isn't always the intention. Only God fully understands the immense complexity of the human soul and what ails our psychic pain that always longs to be anaesthetized but always eludes a cure. After all, He did create us.

I didn't take my encore plunge into Lake Ontario to end my life at twenty-eight that summer, but I did continue to contemplate it in the ensuing decades. Yet, while I was planning my demise, God was watching over me.

The method of suicide evolved with the passage of time. By my forties, I devised the scheme that I would contemplate well into my fifties: I would travel to a forested area—far from where I resided—where I'd kill myself in total secrecy, leaving a note to the authorities to find my remains. I figured the least I could do was be considerate enough to not leave a disturbing mess in my apartment, strange as that may seem.

In retrospect, I thank the Lord Jesus for reminding me how wrong that excursion would've been, which brings me to the most important platitude about suicide: God's hand in all of this. As I've stated, psychotropic meds didn't cure my OCD, depression and anxiety; the only remedy left was God's diagnosis and treatment. Please understand, I'm not discounting psychotropic meds for those with mental illness; it does help some. I'm simply saying that was not the case for me. Although my psychological malady wasn't a sin, my response to it was. Rather than look to God, I looked instead to my own devices, such as isolation and substance abuse, with the possibility of suicide as my failsafe default position.

Although I cannot speak for anyone else, I must refer to the Word of God when discussing my relationship with suicide and Harm OCD. The bible is replete with accounts of people ending their own lives and I can see glimpses of myself in some of these souls, such as Sampson killing more philistines in his death than he did in his life to escape ridicule and failure as a result of disobedience to God (Judges 16:25-30).

I can see a little of myself in King Saul, who suffered from bitter envy towards David, depression, and paranoia after disobeying God and losing God's presence in his life, leading to his inevitable suicide (1 Samuel 16:14-17, 1 Samuel 31:4). Interestingly, I can see myself in Judas, who hanged himself after betraying Christ for thirty pieces of silver (Mat.27:1-5). It would seem that an underlying current in these examples is pride, rebellion to God, human wrath, and ultimately reliance on human—rather than divine—solutions. The other major factor would be seeing ourselves falsely, rather than how God meant us to be.

If I see myself as a malevolent freak, wandering life believing I'm a murderer or abuser, I make God out to be a liar, and I make me out to be a self-contradictory fool if I also call myself a follower of Christ. To hold to that perspective invalidates the integrity of Psalm 139:13-16, which says the inverse in that God not only created me in all the intricacy of my being, but also foreordained my entire life. It would be a logical fallacy for God to deliberately create the antithesis of His greatest gift: life. The one conviction that veins my conscience is what a terrible insult it would be to the Lord of all creation, if I ended my life instead of trusting my life to His loving will.

In looking back to all the planned attempts at suicide, when I viewed myself through the lens of sin and charted this betrayal of life that masqueraded as escape, I showed utter contempt for God, instead of seeing myself through His prism of love. Whenever I abused myself with drugs and contrived this morbid cabal, it was a snub to the one who knew me before conception, who knitted me in my mother's womb, foreordained my life in this fractured world, died for me, and resurrected so I could spend eternity with Him.

Although I still struggle with OCD, depression and anxiety, I no longer need drugs or alcohol to assuage the torment of this condition; prayer to Jesus, fellowshiping with brothers in Christ, meditating on scripture and praising God has helped me far more than any drug. I know OCD is the thorn in my flesh, like with the apostle Paul, drawing me to Christ, relying on His strength, not mine (2 Cor. 12:7-10). It keeps me from becoming too arrogant and cavalier, reminding me of my utter helplessness without Christ. God invaded my forty-six-year nightmare with His eternal love. When I turned to Christ in repentance, asking for His forgiveness, He told me I became God's child (Jn.1:12), His friend (Jn.15:5), united with Him (1 Cor.6:17), free from condemnation (Rom.8:1-2), and with a sound mind (2 Tim.1:7). It's taken a long time after years of backsliding, but I can now see God's truth in this.

It can be summed up in a sign I saw outside a church one day, walking in a fog of self-loathing and despair: God Created You for the Pleasure of Your Company. It was meant for all who feel the way I felt that day. God loves us not because we deserve it but because He is love (1 John 4:16).

Something happened on the way to suicide, on all the dark nights when I wandered streets and beaches as I plotted my death. Something happened when I purchased suicide-on-the-installment-plan with alcohol and hard drugs. Something happened during all the times I believed the lie that I was an evil monster who didn't belong with humanity. It was the sweet voice of compassion, the Holy Spirit drawing me, telling me I could be free.

That Something was Jesus...