

JOHN'S STORY

This unedited story is offered to QPR Instructors and the public by John's mother and sister to bring attention to the fact that even though loved ones do all the right things as gatekeepers, too many professionals and healthcare service providers remain ill informed, unprepared, or unwilling to act decisively to prevent suicide. The professionals mentioned in this story are all targeted for suicide prevention training in the *National Strategy for Suicide Prevention*, yet the vast majority remained uneducated. Sadly, this tragic story repeats itself again and again all across America. The names of the family and the professionals involved, as well the location of this story, are withheld to maintain confidentiality.

John's Mother's narrative:

After all the reading I've done since John died I now believe he started getting sick when he was in the middle grades at school. We had just moved from a ranch (much to our children's disgust) to what we thought a very large city. John started isolating himself from friends and his family. We discussed John's behavior a number of times with his school counselors. They all told us he would snap out of it, he was just having trouble adjusting. After two years John seemed to be getting somewhat better. He had made a few friends and was socializing again. About that time John's dad and I went through a divorce and I believe that's when John started drinking to medicate his feelings. I noticed then that there were times John really got depressed. Again we consulted his school counselors and again they told us there was nothing to worry about. But it seems from that time on John drank a lot. It was then he started getting his DUI's and was in and out of out-patient treatment for alcohol but no one was really blaming depression as a reason for his drinking. During this time he ran into a telephone pole coming home one night. It wasn't until a few years later though I heard from John's sister that he had done that deliberately.

The last six months before he died things really got bad for John. It was then that he got his fourth DUI. I received a call from John late on the night of September 6, 2002. He was in jail in another state. His company had sent him out of state to work. John was very, very upset. He stated if he did not get out of jail he would kill himself there. This was not his first threat and I was really scared he would do what he had threatened. I called the Detention Facility and talked to one of the guards telling them that John threatened suicide and I was really worried. The guard informed me they had no holding cell for prisoners that threatened suicide. I knew then that we had to get John out of jail as soon as possible. That next day he was released. I contacted a counselor John had been seeing off and on for a few of years and told him of John's suicide threat. He wanted to see John once John got back into town. As far as I know John did see his counselor three times at least, from the end of September to the beginning of November. During these months John again threatened suicide a number of times.

We could see John was losing weight and was very very depressed. November 11 he agreed to go to the emergency room with his sister and dad because of his suicidal thoughts. John got checked in and waited a long time to see a doctor. He became very frustrated and walked out before getting to see any doctor. John's sister called his counselor and told him what had occurred the night before. I also called and consulted with his counselor. I told John's counselor we would like to have a family meeting with him about John. We did meet with his counselor and told him how terribly scared we were about John and asked him for HELP. We told him we were at a loss and did not have any idea what we could do, how we could help or where to get help. WE WERE ASKING HIM FOR HELP FOR JOHN.

He did not give us any ideas but told us that he had an appointment with John that afternoon and would evaluate John's mental state at that time. After John's appointment I contacted his counselor again and

was told he was not concerned and John seemed to be doing okay. I still felt there was something very wrong with my son but trusted his counselor's judgment. John had one more appointment with his counselor on November 18, 2002. John died NOVEMBER 20, 2002. What little hope John had, he tried to reach out for help, he received none. We as a family trusted the healthcare system but it failed completely with our son.

John's sister's narrative about his last days:

Monday, November 11, 2002 John called me and told me goodbye, said he was going to kill himself, that he no longer could bear the pain and live in this world any longer. I immediately called my Father to make him aware of the situation and went up to my Father's house where John also lived. We talked to John for approximately an hour and he said he didn't want to feel this way anymore. I asked him if he wanted some help and if he would go to the emergency room at the hospital because he was in such a "dangerous state to himself." He said he was willing to go.

We (my Father and I) took him up to the hospital at approximately between the hours of 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. He was checked in and filled out all of the paper work. We told the person who checked him in that he was claiming he was going to kill himself. They immediately took him back to a room where a nurse saw us and we explained the situation to them about John wanting to kill himself. They called the on call psyche Dr. We waited for well OVER an hour and no one EVER checked on John and no Dr. ever came.

John became very frustrated that no one would help him and walked out of his room and out of the hospital. The nurse just watched him as he left and made no attempt to stop him. His only response was, "He shouldn't leave." The hospital never even called the house to see if John received any help or to find out what happened to him.

I called his counselor the following morning and told him about how John had called me and said goodbye and that he was going to kill himself and gave him the information about what had happened at the hospital. We made an appointment with his counselor (my mom, dad and I) to discuss the matter and our concerns for John and what to do with him to get him help so he didn't kill himself. At that meeting I also explained to the counselor how John had tried to kill himself before by running his car into a telephone pole. I was very concerned because of his previous attempt and also because of the state he was in.

The counselor said that he could not do anything until John hit "ROCK BOTTOM" and that John had not hit "ROCK BOTTOM" yet. I made it very clear that I was really afraid that he would make the attempt to kill himself again very soon and still no help was given to him. The counselor did absolutely nothing.

A week later, on the 20th of November, John killed himself. No one was willing to help him, he was searching for help and ASKING for it, but no professional or hospital would help him. The consequences were dire; we lost John because his counselor did nothing and neither did the hospital. They left a suicidal man alone with no intervention or help. If the counselor would have done something.....or if the hospital would have helped, John would not have killed himself. He wanted help, he looked for and asked for help but NO ONE would give it to him.

We have much work ahead of us, but if we never quit, we will prevail.

- The QPR Institute faculty and Staff -