

FILLING

Coping through the loss of suicide

STORY | ALLY KRUPINSKY

PHOTO | KASSIDY LEE

He tells his friend he's going upstairs, he says he'll be right back. "Well I'll be down here waiting for you." He's gone for a just few minutes, long enough for his friend to make the decision, long enough for him to retrieve a handgun from his family's safe. "I told you I'd be waiting for you" were the words that changed his life forever.

Century High School junior Eyan Dworshak was in eighth grade when his best friend Carson Pillet committed suicide right in front of him.

"I believe it was a spur of the moment," Dworshak said. "I think everything just came to his mind at once and [he] just couldn't take it."

Dworshak and Pillet became friends through elementary school in Fargo. After Dworshak moved to Bismarck in eighth grade, they continued to stay in touch through long phone calls and visits, which is why Dworshak was with Pillet at his home. Pillet's father had passed away only two months prior, which Dworshak says was a very difficult time for both Pillet and his mother. They were in an argument at the time, and Dworshak was trying to calm them down. Once Dworshak was back downstairs after talking to his mother, Pillet said his last words and took his life by shooting himself in the mouth.

"I think he waited for me just to know that I was coming back for him, maybe he wanted to show himself that someone really cared," Dworshak said. "But I'm never going to get to know the reason."

Immediately after it happened, Dworshak reacted with an almost numb disbelief. He sat outside of the bedroom door, and told Pillet's mother to call 911 after she came running down the stairs.

"The hardest thing was believing it, like, it really happened. I know when I got back to Bismarck I just kept on telling myself it didn't happen it didn't happen," Dworshak said. "And then just thinking I'm not going to go back to Fargo because there's nothing for me there."

Dworshak had no idea Pillet was contemplating suicide, or even remotely capable of going through with it. He says that the only signs Pillet ever showed were when he was talking about life without his father, but suicide was never mentioned or even implied.

"The kid had everything going for him. He had football, he was a good student, he had lots of friends. Everyone wanted to be around him," Dworshak said. "It just goes to show that

even if a person has everything, there are still a lot of problems they have to face."

When Dworshak arrived back in Bismarck, he struggled to accept what he had been through.

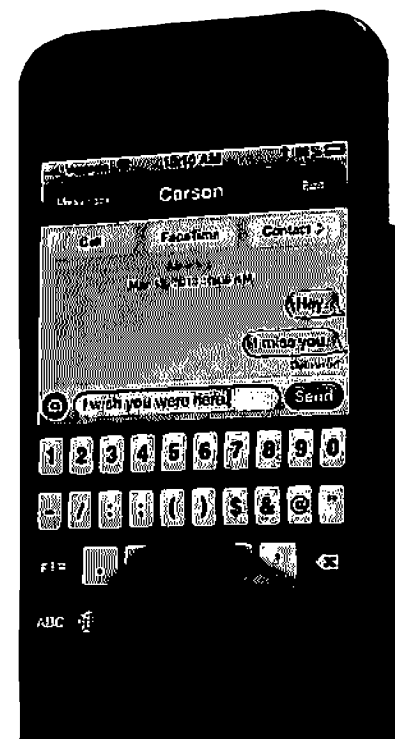
"And the hardest thing after it was just still having to realize that it really happened," Dworshak said. "You witnessed this, something that a kid shouldn't have to."

Bismarck High School junior Lacey Brunelle is another student who has had to endure the loss and pain of a loved one's suicide. Brunelle was a freshman when her boyfriend Zachary Nelson committed suicide by hanging himself with a belt.

"[The hardest thing was] convincing myself that it was real..." Brunelle said. "I wanted to wake up from a bad dream and I couldn't."

Brunelle was the last person Nelson spoke to on that fateful night. She felt something was wrong before it happened, because he wasn't returning any of her calls. She went to bed believing and hoping everything would be okay in the morning, but her sister came into her room late that same night with the news Brunelle neither expected nor dreamt possible—her boyfriend of six months had committed suicide.

There isn't a day that goes by without me thinking about him.



The hallways will be filled with rushing feet and shouting voices. It'll be a different year starting with one major change—Century High School freshman will be making their first appearance. The 2013-14 school year is going to be very different at Century in terms of schedules, students and layout.

The current standings of enrolled freshmen is at 275, these students are coming from Horizon Middle School. The overall number of new students to Century, including the incoming sophomores, will be around 750. These won't be the only additions of people to the population at Century. There will have to be 15 teachers hired to teach all of the upcoming freshmen.

"I think that they [the upcoming freshmen] are very mature, excited and ready for this change," Century counselor Connie Armstrong said.

A majority of those teachers will be teaching the core classes to the freshmen.

Classes that weren't available to the freshmen class at Horizon will also be open for them to register for this coming year. Those including ND History, world history, U.S. History, journalism I and several core classes in the block format. Physical science is a core class for all freshmen and will continue to be here at Century. Since that particular class requires a regulated science lab it will have to be taught in the main building instead of being in a portable. Plans are in effect to make the current sewing room into the lab that the freshmen will need.

On a building level, freshmen will benefit from CHS electives and co-curricular locations. Freshmen are earning their high school GPA and they should be in high school while doing that. Elective classes will help them stay interested in school," Bismarck Schools superintendent Tamara Uselman said.

There was talk about another issue involving lack of space, but not about classrooms- instead about lockers. With about 275 extra students carrying their books and in the wintertime, their coats, it

would only make sense to think extra lockers would have to be added. In the current locker bay there are 1,000 lockers for all of the classes. But there isn't too much concern on lacking lockers for students who want them.

"There are about 400-600 [lockers] that no one even uses right now," principal Steve Madler said.

The daily school schedule will also be going through some changes. While the current schedule has seven periods with two lunches, the new schedule will consist of eight periods and three different lunches without any periods and lunches overlapping. Lunches will be during fourth, fifth, and sixth period for 50 minutes like a normal period. To make lunch longer the bell will ring for first period at 8:20 a.m instead of 8:25 a.m. ChannelOne will also be taken out of second period all together to help add time to the lunch period.

Another space issue is concerning the seven extra portables and the student parking that will be lost in the lot east of the main building. There are plans to modify the west lot by adding onto the "gravel" to make up for any lost parking since the remaining parking in the east lot will be for teachers. Plans are in place for a driving loop in the west lot for student pick-up and drop-

off to be added. There will be one other portable that won't just be used by the freshman class. This portable will be positioned on the north side of the building and will be used by all of the physical education classes as an area for fitness days.

"By adding it, up to four gym classes will be able to go on during one period," Madler said.

The portables that will be added to the school aren't actually anything new, in the whole district there will be 11 buildings being moved to three different locations. There is a district budget set at \$40,000 specifically for the portable project.

"I believe the CHS student body will welcome the freshmen and respect them. After all, everyone in CHS was once a freshman themselves," Uselman said.

"I think that they are very mature, excited and ready for this change."

THE VOID

"After that it was like hazy, I remember just falling to my knees and I was crying," Brunelle said. "I guess that was the beginning of the end."

Nelson had made suicide attempts in the past, but Brunelle still never imagined she would have to live through such a traumatic and heartbreaking incident. Attending her boyfriend's funeral is just one of the many things Brunelle finds incredibly hard to believe that she has had to experience.

"Life is precious," Brunelle said. "There are people who fight for their lives every day. When you kill yourself you don't think about [it], you think you're not loved but you will never realize how many people you really affect."

Although Brunelle believes his decision was largely due to family issues and things beyond her control, she still looks back with regret and uncertainty.

"To this day it still gets me that I failed at saving him," Brunelle said.

Coping has been a long and ongoing struggle for Brunelle. She's learned who her true friends are, and is still trying to overcome fears of abandonment.

"I would never wish for someone to go through that though. Not even my worst enemy," Brunelle said. "That pain, it messes you up in the head."

Licensed professional counselor Diana Jacobson has dealt with several instances of suicide, and believes there is not an easily definable difference between age groups when regarding the decision, since every case is different.

"The ability to have the coping skills necessary to avoid suicide do not necessarily come with age. We hope they do, however, that is not always the case," Jacobson said. "Young people probably have not experienced as many incidents that develop resilience, therefore how they view their problems may seem more overwhelming to them than they actually are, and this perception leads them to a disadvantage emotionally."

When there are obvious warning signs of suicide, Jacobson stresses the importance immediate action and professional help.

"A common myth about suicide is that if the topic is brought up it will encourage the person to attempt suicide, it is really the opposite. If the thoughts of suicide are kept private

and covered up, the deception it creates for the person contemplating it become much stronger and convincing," Jacobson said. "If a friend is talking about this, it is time to get them in to see a professional and/or contact the people closest to them so they are aware, do not keep the secret."

Since the tragedy, Dworshak says he is much more apt to approach anyone going through a difficult time and offer an outlet. He hopes and believes that by simply listening, he is able to provide a comforting alternative to the permanent and sorrowful act of suicide.

"If someone has a problem, even if I don't know them, I'll be like I'm here for you, if you need anyone to talk because I don't think suicide should be an option," Dworshak said.

Dworshak urges anyone who is contemplating suicide to find someone to confide in.

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"Seek help. Make a relationship with somebody, to where you can trust them to talk and just know that they'll be there for you," Dworshak said.

This is the first year Dworshak has begun to talk about what happened to him, in past years only his immediate

family knew what had been through. Dworshak has since found much more comfort in communication, rather than when he chose to face it alone.

"You can't let something that you know affect your life and just hold it in. Talking to people helps you get over it," Dworshak said. "I feel better about it now that I'm more open about it."

Even after three years, Dworshak is still trying to find ways to cope and bear the weight of his friend's death.

"There isn't a day that goes by without me thinking about him, the incident, or what I could've even done to make it different," Dworshak said. "I feel as if I didn't go upstairs it wouldn't have happened. In a moment or a situation like this, everyone gets those 'it's my fault' and guilt trips, and I still get those feelings to this day. And that's the reason why I try helping people with their problems."