

Sitting on the edge of his bed, Ali fiddled with the gun in his hands. The only light in the room was the illumination provided by his laptop screen, the latest rejection letter on display marking his tenth consecutive failure at finding work. Or at least his tenth rejection by email, there were at least ten other contacts and references whom had ghosted him after his initial interview, not even bothering to give him the dignity of letting him know that they were not interested. A few of them he considered good friends, all of them he had supported through their own tough times. Now they just left him on read.

He reached for the folder sitting on his side-table, pulled out the papers inside and started going through them one by one, each one a reminder of days long past. A participation certificate from a poetry contest he had entered on a whim to impress a female classmate. Newspaper clippings from the small competitions he had actually won. Letters of recommendations from his professors, all attesting to his hard work, dedication and countless other merits. Transcripts, mark sheets and achievement letters that showcased his near perfect scores throughout his 16 years of studies. A perfect student they called him but then why was he unemployed?!

A sudden burst of movement and the papers sailed through the room, scattering halfway and falling on the bare ground; little more than litter at this point. His anger quickly disappeared and was replaced with shame, embarrassment and worry that he might have woken his father whom slept in the tiny room next door. The doctor had prescribed him bedrest and sleeping pills, urging him to drop one of the three jobs he worked every day of the week. But then how was he to pay the bills and bring food to the table was his father's retort as he took the pills and went back to work the next day, assuring his son that he would find a good job real soon. After all Ali had worked hard and studied well, it was only a matter of time before his hard work paid off right?

As his father snored on uninterrupted he bent down and picked up his documents, rubbing away at the wetness of his eyes as he stuffed them back into the folder. He tossed the folder back on to the side-table, slightly disrupting the small stack of CV's already placed there his father had printed out for his convenience. A waste of money, he reflected as he powered off his laptop and placed it neatly to the side. All alone in the dark room the gun felt less intimidating to hold and the promise it offered grew more and more tantalizing by the second. As he slowly raised the pistol to his head his thoughts raced over all the steps that brought him to this point. The long nights of studying, the time he never had to enjoy his hobbies, his

expectations of the future that were crushed, the shame after each rejection and all the future disappointments that were to come. The muzzle resting against his temple his thoughts were of happier times; back when his mother was alive, his father had less work to do and more time to spend with him, when life seemed so easy and his hopes for the future were optimistic. As his finger squeezed the trigger he suddenly remembered that he had forgotten to do something...

Ali stopped in a panic at the realization, the trigger perched on the very edge of firing the bullet. His heart was beating out of his chest, it felt like there was no air in his lungs and his forehead was covered in a cold sweat.

He remembered what he had forgotten.

“Oh right. I didn’t write a suicide note.”

For the first time in many months he sported a smile as he chuckled lightly to himself...

BANG!

...the last thought that passed through his mind before the bullet did was more of a reminder than anything else: *“No point. I forgot Dad can’t read.”*

Suicide is not a new phenomenon; its existence has been recorded from as early as the times of the Ancient Greeks. From this era comes the story of the great philosopher Socrates whom was put on trial for corrupting the minds of Athens youth. Sentenced to death for his actions the philosopher chose not to escape his home but instead face his death without complaint and drink the hemlock willingly. Further down the line of history we have the example of Japanese fighter pilots who would crash their planes into American ships in kamikaze attacks rather than suffering the humiliation of surrender. In doing so they emulated the code of their samurai ancestors, seppuku a form of Japanese ritual-suicide wherein one would disembowel themselves to preserve their honor. The Aokigahara forest in Japan (popularly known as the Suicide Forest) has become one of the worlds most used suicide spots with hundreds of bodies having been found there to this day.

The World Health Organization has estimated that every 40 seconds someone on the planet attempts suicide and is successful in doing so. That makes

approximately one million people that depart this world on their own terms each year. This number includes people from every walk of life, race, religion, creed, gender and age. They cut their wrists, shoot themselves in the head, jump off balconies, swallow pesticide, hang themselves, jump in front of trains, willingly starve, drown themselves or do whatever else it takes to end their suffering. And next year they expect this rate to double to one death every 20 seconds.

Open social media and there is no shortage of reports and stories regarding suicides. It makes one think that there didn't use to be so many suicides in the past; that is partially true, in fact it's due to the fact that the rate of suicide has increased by 60 percent in the last 45 years combined and is now among the three leading causes of death among those aged 15-44. In America alone it is the third leading cause of death for youth between the ages of 15-24. In regards to gender differences, males are four times more likely to die to suicide than females, however females are more likely to attempt suicide than males (WHO).

Yet this still begs the important question; "Why? Why do people choose to kill themselves? What drives people to give up everything they hold dear and end their lives?"

Those whom are at greatest risk for suicide are those who suffer from mental disorders, in fact 90 percent of all suicides are associated with mental disorders. Depression being the first and foremost among them all which may be responsible for half of all suicide attempts. Bipolar disorder, among other mood disorders, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder and schizophrenia sufferers are also more likely to engage in suicide. Substance abuse is the second largest risk factor for suicide, many people have killed themselves while under the influence of alcohol or other substances while others have died due to overdose. Combine all this with other factors such as the glorification of suicide by the media through its depiction and details can increase the risk of suicide in the exposed population as a whole.

Keeping this in mind take a moment and think of the worst day you've ever had. It could be failing an important exam, death of a family member, being in the midst of a natural disaster or a war, anything as long as you're certain it is the worst day you've ever had. But you're still here reading this article aren't you? Why are you here when so many others gave up and resorted to suicide? What did you have that they didn't?

There are many answers but the one common across most (if not all of you) is: "Friends. Family. A psychologist. Someone to talk to about my problems,

someone who listened to me when I was down in the dumps. I had a support system when I was at my worst.”

Now imagine not having any of those people around you and imagine having to go through the worst days of your life without anyone to support you. Would you still be here if you had no one?

Take a look around yourself. The WHO stated that 1 in 4 people will be effected by a mental disorder at some point in their lives. Who will that person be in your life? Is it your friend? A family member? Your coworker? Or maybe it's you?

Every 40 seconds another human being commits suicide.

This person can be as young as 6 years or as old as 85 years.

Suicide does not care about gender, sexuality, race, religion or even geographic borders.

Suicide is not the fault of the deceased, it is the consequence of the people around them and the society that brought them to such extremes. It is humanity's own fault.

In the spirit of Global Mental Health Awareness Day, I would like you to take out 40 seconds of your time to talk to someone. It can be someone you're already close with like a family member or a friend. It can also be a random stranger on the street who doesn't seem to be having a good day or a coworker you haven't interacted much with before.

1. Start with “Hello” and make sure you smile, when you smile others around you feel happy.
2. Next follow up with “How are you doing?” or “Anything going on in your life?”. Ask them about their family, their hobbies, the car they bought last week or even about the weather. The point is to get them talking, as long as it's something they want to talk about. Don't steer the conversation towards what is going on with you unless they are uncomfortable about sharing details about their life. Only then can you talk about what's happening in your life.
3. Listen. Listen. LISTEN. This cannot be emphasized enough. Hang on to every word. Probe with questions for more information. Don't interrupt

unless it's for clarification. You want them to know what you're listening to what they're saying. Right now you're giving them the greatest gift they possibly might not even know they wanted; your full attention.

4. And that's it. Feel free to extend this as long as possible, just don't be a bother. They have things to do as well. If all works out however perhaps tomorrow, they will be the ones to approach you. Or feel free to approach them again tomorrow or after lunch or even another person if you feel so inclined. If it was this easy once why would you not do it again right?

If you followed my advice then I have good news for you: You just made someone's day, possibly even the highlights of their day. People who struggle, due to mental disorders, difficult lives and different circumstances usually don't have an opportunity to talk to others about it. Some choose to suffer in silence and never let out any cries for help, ultimately ending in suicide. To know that someone took the time out of their day (in this day and age especially) to talk to them heart to heart and listen to them is giving them an opportunity to remember that there are people out here who care. It will make them reconsider the next time the thoughts begin to creep into their head. And, with any luck, it would have made those thoughts less likely to appear in the first place.

I can make a sandwich in 40 seconds. It's going to be a simple peanut butter sandwich without the sides cut off. Not an excellent sandwich but one which will sate my hunger for a while.

I can also make someone else's days in 40 seconds. It won't be as easy to do and it might take longer than 40 seconds, going up to a few minutes even. And while it won't fill my hungry stomach I can always make a sandwich later.

But the people I talk to might not have a later.

So go out and start talking.

