

Tragedy Of Living Life on a Reservation

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I live in the lower part of Red Lake. Red Lake is located in the upper part of Minnesota. It is a closed reservation. There are only two reservations including Red Lake in the whole United States that are considered "closed" and not open to the public. Suicide is a big issue in Red Lake, just like the rest of the United States. In Red Lake, March 21 would be the day that no one will ever forget. One of the high school students by the name of Jeffrey Weise, 16 years old, gunned down nine people before taking his own life. Seven others were wounded. Before 3/21 and after 3/21 suicide has been big issue in Red Lake.

In studies it has showed that woman are more likely to attempt suicide than men are. Also when men attempt suicide they are more likely to succeed than woman are. For the past five years, Fred Desjarlait has kept a database of suicide attempts and completions by Red Lake tribal citizens. Last year, 69 teenagers attempted suicide. Since January, 15 youths have tried to kill themselves. 3.3 times higher than the national average and account for 40 percent of all suicides in Indian Country U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona told the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs during a June hearing. In the whole of our United States there are around 30,000 people that commit suicide in a year. The greatest increase in suicide rates has been in the age group of 15 to 24 years old. Since March 21, three teenagers on the reservation – including Red Lake High School shooter Jeffrey Weise – have taken their own lives, compared with three suicides during all of 2004 (*Red lake Nation News*).

On my reservation suicide is a common thing. There have been three suicides during 2004. I have lost a friend of my mine during the year of 2003. She was a beautiful person from the inside out; she was always laughing and having fun. When I found out the news that she had died, I would have never thought about it being suicide. I would never think that recently my close cousin who was 15 years of age would commit suicide in May of 2005. The worst part of suicide is not knowing why. Suicide is the worst way to get out of depression. There are

certain medications that are said to work on depression. Psychotherapy and medication are the two primary treatment approaches. For some people antidepressant medications can make psychotherapy more effective. Someone who is too depressed to talk, for instance, can't get much benefit from psychotherapy or counseling. So therefore they need to seek help by taking medication. Red lake shooter Jeffrey Weise was on Prozac until the day of 3/21.

Regardless of age, gender, race, or socioeconomic status, people can suffer from depression that can lead to suicide. It is estimated that 19 million American adults suffer from depression every year. Depression is not a weakness; it is a real medical illness. People who suffer from depression are not just moody for a few days. They experience long periods of feeling very sad and lose interest in social and daily activities. Many feel they have no concentration and no energy. Depression can change the way a person feels, thinks, and behaves. Fifteen percent of people diagnosed with depression will commit suicide

(<http://www.ask.com/web?q=What+percent+of+people+commit+suicide+that+have+depression%3F&qsrc=0&o=0>).

This is a medical fact and it is scary. How as Indian people can we help this on our reservation? We do have a lot of poverty and despair. Is life such a hopeless thing? One person can help another by just talking. If someone looks like they are crying out for help we need to take it seriously.

After my cousin killed herself, I got really depressed. My parents were fighting all the time and I always felt it was my fault. It was a helpless feeling. Each day was harder and harder to get through; it was like the world turned its back on me. The sad thing about it all was that I didn't tell anyone. I kept it all inside. Keeping everything inside makes things even worse. Until finally one day, I was riding the bus home from a softball game. Me and my close softball friends were getting into deep conversations on life, so I broke down and told them everything, with their advice and support my days got easier and easier. Today I am still missing my cousin to the fullest, but when I'm grown I want to make a difference in my community and do whatever I can to change suicide rates.

Tradition years back say that death was a good thing. It was a celebration for my ancestors to "go home." Go to a special place. We never even thought about suicide. When someone had illness, we had pow-wows, sweat lodges, ceremonies, and cared for whoever was suffering (Demore 1979). In today's world Native American people are not even close to being as spiritual as before. I believe that if my Native American people were more involved in our religion, our people's suicide rates would go down. Spirituality is critical for children and teenagers because it gives us something to believe in. We need to know that the creator is there for us and we need to turn to prayer to get through the hard times in our lives. We are not taught about spirituality in school unless it is a catholic school, so these things need to be taught in the home. Our Native American ancestors use to have so many teachings about life, but so much of that is lost.

There are 33 languages of the Native American people. Only 2% reported that they had grown up in a home where English and another language was spoken about equally. Little percentage of my Native American people can speak our language fluently (<http://www.native-languages.org/>). Once we lose our language we will lose our people. If we could keep our language strong our cultural ways would be even stronger. If we as children got more involved in our traditions, I feel the suicide rates would go down. We need to be in touch with who we are as Indian people. There is always hope. As a Native American person, I will do anything to change the life of others and my community.

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