

An unforgettable time in my life happened when I was in the 8th grade. I became very close to a girl I met in 6th grade. We started becoming closer and closer, by our 8th grade year we were best friends. It was a Friday in February that I last saw her. The last thing she said was “I love you, Happy Valentines Day,” while smiling and walking out the door to her bus. The next day there was a high school boy’s basketball game. The Falcons were winning when I got the call that my best friend had hung herself. I didn’t believe it at first until some girls from school came up to see me. I called her phone, but it was turned off. I went to my cousin who was sitting at the top of the bleachers with her two month old baby. I asked her if she heard what people were saying, and she said it was true. I started crying and dropped to the ground. It felt like my world was coming to an end. The person I trusted with everything, the one who was always there for me, the one who knew just how to make me smile even if I was having the worst day ever, was gone. I went back to my cousin’s house that night when the game was over. I called my mom but she was drunk. She told me she would call me when she had time to talk to me, which made me feel worse than I already had been feeling. I cried myself to sleep that night looking and holding on to a picture I had of my friend and I. The next day I went into my grandma’s room and told her what had happened. She told me it was okay to cry and that she was there to listen if I needed to talk. I couldn’t talk about how I was feeling because I didn’t know how I was feeling. There were all kinds of mixed emotions. I was sad because I lost my best friend, I was mad because she left me so soon, and I was shocked because she was such a happy person. She was the very last person I would ever expect to do that. She knew how to brighten up a day when the clouds were out and everyone was feeling blue. I had all kinds of things going through my mind; committing suicide was

one of the things. Then I went to a sweat with some of her family. When it was done that feeling went away because I realized that she would always be with me in my heart. I will meet up with her again in the future, but until then she will be watching over her friends and family. There is still not a day that goes by that she is not on my mind, but I will keep living my life with not only my dreams, but also hers. She wanted to do the same things I want to do. I will make her proud by getting off the reservation, going to college, and becoming a lawyer. After doing some research, I found out that almost everyone on the Rosebud reservation has been affected by suicide. Suicide is the leading epidemic on the reservation.

The reservations in South Dakota have the highest suicide rate. Suicide is the leading cause of death among American Indian youth aged 15-24. South Dakota suicide statistics are twice the national rate for people under the age of 34. The suicide rate on the reservations is at least four times that of the rest of the state. South Dakota is not the only state with a high native youth suicide rate.

Native youth are more prone to commit suicide than any other race in the age group of 15-24. More than 90% of people who kill themselves are suffering from one or more psychiatric disorder in particular: major depression (especially when combined with alcohol and/or drug abuse), bipolar depression, alcohol abuse and dependence, drug abuse dependence, schizophrenia, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), eating disorder, and personality disorder. Suicide happens more on reservation, but nobody knows why. Solutions to the problem continue to baffle community members and experts. The problem is a tangle of economics, education, and culture...The Indian Health service

reports suicide rates among Great Plains Indian teens as ten times higher than national numbers. Suicide is a large issue on reservations, but there are ways to stop it.

Depression and the other mental disorders that may lead to suicide are in most cases both recognizable and treatable. 50 to 70% of all suicides give some warning of their intentions to a friend or family member. Imminent signs must be taken seriously. The Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act was passed on October 21, 2004, which allows \$82 million in grants to colleges, universities, and American Indian Organizations for the development of suicide prevention programs. There are all kinds of resources out there to help anyone feeling suicidal.

Suicide is the leading epidemic on the reservations. Native youth are more prone to commit suicide than any other race in the age group of 15-24. The reservations in South Dakota have the highest suicide rate. Suicide can be prevented. Suicide doesn't affect just the person who is doing the act of suicide, but also affects the people around them.

Our reservation recently started a suicide prevention program RST Wiconi Wakan Health & Healing Center (in the Lakota language *Wiconi Wakan* means life is sacred). Ever since Wiconi Wakan opened I have been interested in it. I recently attended a trip to Hill City, SD that they sponsored. It was called the Wiping of the Tears ceremony. The purpose of this ceremony was to start the spring off fresh with no suicides and to wipe the tears of everyone who had lost a loved one in this past year. This took place in the Black Hills in South Dakota where we hold most of our ceremonies. About 150 people attending the ceremony and they ranged in ages from babies all the way to elderly tribal member. I liked the feeling I got after the ceremony because it gave me hope. As I

learned more about Wiconi Wakan I realized how much I want to help prevent suicide.

Wiconi Wakan is hiring six youth positions for the summer, and now I am waiting to hear back to see if I have been hired. Even if I don't get the position I have signed up to be a volunteer for the summer program. I believe in their motto that "Life is Sacred", so I want to help the younger kids on the reservation see that they are sacred and that they should value their lives. I know one day I will see my best friend again, but until that day I will continue to value my own life and will help others to do the same.

Rest In Peace Jessica Lee White Hat! 3-17-93*2-17-07

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