

## **World Suicide Prevention Day Speech 2019**

### **Joshua Bell: A Personal Experience**

“Listen, don’t do anything like that! You have a life to live and live it out to the fullest. Create new beginnings, fill yourself with happiness. It may sound hard to do, but surround yourself with good people. Do this and you may be rewarded in the long run”. These words were said to me through a friend on June 21st of this year who was talking me out of suicide. Although this was not the full conversation nor the only one that we had, it is something from one of them that resonates with me. He went on to say “live life, forget the past, its history”. This saying is something that I say to myself every day now. It is the first thing I say to myself when I wake up and it is the last thing that I say to myself before I go to bed. It has become in its own way a motto to live by.

Today is September 10<sup>th</sup> - World Suicide Prevention Day. This year’s theme is working together to prevent suicide. You may be asking yourself “What is suicide”? Every year world wide about 800 000 people fall victim to suicide and about 250 000 others become suicide survivors. This meaning that they attempted but failed to do so, me being part of that number for the 2019 year. Suicide is the action of taking one’s own life by varying methods. Although the exact details are unknown, there are many different reasons as to why someone may think they have to do this. Depression, thoughts of isolation or a feeling of emptiness and loneliness. Social factors or just the thought that this is the only way to solve the pain that they are feeling either physically or mentally. For me most of these were the reasons why I attempted.

Back in elementary school, a time that I do not ever want to travel back to, I was not the one to put myself out there. I was the one who followed all of the rules; and when it came to friends and talking to people, I tended to wait until they came to me instead of me going to them. This never happened though. By grade five I had stopped talking to people entirely. Weather it be from something I did or they just did not want to talk to me because they thought I was weird and awkward. I was trying too hard to be seen and it did not work. The thought that came with not talking to anyone was that I was the problem. The feelings were sadness and loneliness. I did not know how to go about talking to people again or where to start so I just minded my own business and did not socialise anymore. I stopped putting myself out there in hopes that someone would come and talk to me. I did what made me happy in the meantime – or somewhat happy I should say. There were some students, and teachers, who would make fun of, pick on, bully or say some things to me over the course of late grade four to grade eight. Some of these things so bad, so unprofessional, hurtful and rude, that I did not want to go back to school for days after.

Over the years, the feelings I had started to set. I never had that friend that I could go to and tell them anything or to talk about anything without them being bothered. These feelings built up over the years and I did not know what to do about it so I just left it and did not tell anyone. It got even worse, to the point where some nights I would be up all night just thinking about what had happened that day and what had been said to me. Why people did what they did and said what they said. I could not just brush it off, and still can’t. Although now 6 years later I have a better understanding of how to deal with it and what to do about it. I have only recently started to

talk to people again and started to relax socially. The reason for being so up tight was with all the things that I have been told. That I should just die. That I was unwanted and that no one liked me. That I would be hunted down and killed if I ever thought that I had to do anything for myself because everything is handed to me on a silver platter. That no one would notice if I just turned around and killed myself. It was hard to even think that with some of the things that I had been told that people cared and that they would listen to what I had to say. With me starting to talk to people again, that feeling I had died down and had almost gone away. That was until between June 21st and June 25th when every single day someone had to talk me out of becoming heard “on the news for the wrong reason”. It had all built up again and this time to the point where I was ready to just give up and give in and would have done so if that person did not do what they did.

When I hear people talk about what someone in a depressive or isolated state looks like the most common thing, I hear is that they lock themselves away. That they are part of nothing and do nothing all day long. The fact of the matter is that this is very rarely true. Until a few minuets ago you probably would not have thought that this was me. Although I did start to withdraw myself from doing certain things, and did start to spend more time by myself, I had been doing this for a while so people just thought that it was normal. I am part of many thing and am very active in them all. So, this conception that people that feel like this just hide away is very wrong. They go about their day just like everyone else without not being noticed or having others know that they feel like this. Tucked away under the smile that I tried to wear everyday for 6 years, so that no one else would know about it, was this feeling that I had.

Suicide and all of the things that cause it are deadly and most often silent. Although many people may feel this way or have thoughts like this, they will not say something about it to anyone. I did not want anyone to know how I was feeling or what the thoughts were that were going through my head. Just like the almost 300 million other people world wide who are feeling like this right now, I was scared to say something about it. My reasoning for it very simple: I did not think that anyone would care. That no one would listen and if they were going to listen that they were really not wanting to. The thought that no one else could relate to it. All of this and I was fearful of what others will do when they found out. What they would do, say and act like afterwards. Now after I brought it to light, I know that I am not the only one who has felt like this before. Most of the feelings that I had being brought on from the past. A time when I was isolated and thought no one cared. A time when I would let what people were saying to me get to the bottom of me. Now I see that there are many people who care. There are many people that I can talk to and that will listen to what I have to say. Sadly, this only comes to mind after my attempt a few months ago. An attempt that lasted everyday for five days.

But what would have happened if I did commit suicide. This is a thought that comes to my mind now. What people would have felt and how all of the people that I talk to or have talked to in the past would be affected. How everything that I am involved in would have changed. How would my family have reacted if I did it? How would my friends and people that I am close to have reacted? How would the person that talked me out of it feel after I did it knowing that he tried his best and yet was not able to succeed? I often think about my impact on people and how it would

have stopped and how people would go on living their lives if I was not here. How much would everyone's daily routines and lives change? These are the thoughts of what happens to someone when they attempt but are stopped half way through and are shown that they matter and are cared for. These are the thoughts of fear for what I could have put others through if I did it. In the time from my attempt to now I have come to realize that life is a precious gift. It is a gift that is so precious and so unlike any other that we need to live it to the fullest making no regrets along the way. It is a gift that can only be granted to us by someone from above. And, although at times he can test us and see where we will fall, he shows us the right way back. For me, he did that through the person that was there for me. He came down to me through that person guiding me away from my decision that I had made. A person that I look at a little differently now having saved my life and gone through all the trouble that he did to do it. He having done that because I trusted to tell him the things that I did knowing that he would help, listen and care about it.

Suicide or the thought of it is something that can be brought on from a number of things as I have already mentioned. Depression, social life, past trauma and so on. It is not something that is easy to talk someone out of once they get their mind in it. For many people once they decide that they are going to do it they do and they let nothing stop them. But somehow because I trusted what he was saying was true and that he cared, that person was able to stop me. A real-life hero to some.

On this World Suicide Prevention Day, we follow that theme of working together to prevent suicide. Now, this does not mean just the action of suicide but it also means working together to help breakdown the stigma around it and all of the things that cause it. We need to bring light to the whole issue and not just to the end and what happens if nothing is done. We come together not only today but everyday, to lend a hand to that person that needs it most. To show them that they matter and that we care about them. To show them that we are here to help. We also thank the ones who have helped us throughout our struggles and have been there for us in our time of need. For me this means thanking as I have already many times, that person that was there for me and listened to me ramble on for days and then eventually lead me away from making the biggest regret of my life. It was something that he went out of his way to do but it was done because he cared. In him going out of his way to do that for me and through what he said to me in that time, he showed me that there is more to life than what is happening now or what has happened in the past. We each have a life to live and yes, although we do go through things, we can overcome them. If we look beyond where we are now, or where we have been, and we start looking at all of the things that are to come in the future, it can change our perspective. We are here for a reason and that reason is to make a difference in each other's lives. If you have ever felt like this, it is ok to feel this way. There is nothing wrong with speaking up. There are people that can help you and no matter what you need to talk about, or for how long, someone will listen to you and will care about it too. In this modern world today, it is important to know that when someone says that they are going to kill or injure themselves that it should be taken seriously. Even though it may seem like a joke and you are not being serious, it brings up a serious matter and many red flags as to how someone is feeling. It was because of this that I could joke around about how I was feeling and people not taking it seriously at all. This 'joke' needs to stop now.

As I draw to a close, I leave you to think about what it is that you, personally and as a group, can do to help others who may be in this type of situation. I also hope to have motivated others who have felt like this or have had thought like this to come forward and say something about it. Although today's focus is on suicide and not mental health, they are both very closely connected. It is important to know that no matter what happens that it gets better and that people are here to listen to you. As I was told during my attempt, you need to "think of everyone who will be affected" by that decision that you want to make. Even though things seem like they are not going to get better if you feel like this, they do. And you need to wait and see.

About a month after my attempt, I saw a quote that seemed like it was trying to tell me something. I leave you with it today. "Learn to enjoy every minute of your life. Be happy now and don't wait for something outside of yourself to make you happy. Think about how precious the time is that you have and how you want to spend that time – with your friends, family and people that you care about. Your life is precious and you need to see that".

Thank you very much for your time.