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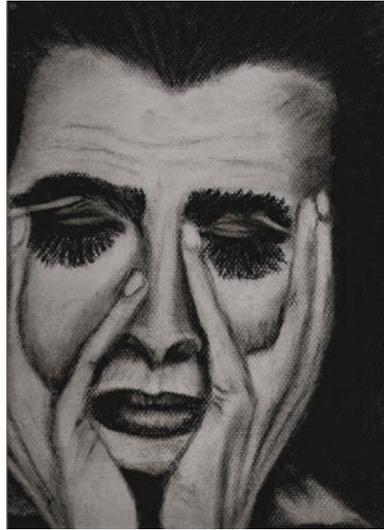
# Dying for peace

by Janine Browne

You don't have to know how I feel to help me -  
but you can help me by listening to how I feel.

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Imagine a place where no-one can reach you, no-one can keep you company. A place that severs your connection with life and the consequences of your actions.

### Talking about why I wanted to end my life

It was more about ending my pain than my life—feeling desperately alone. The loneliness wasn't about not having support or love, it was the loneliness that comes from not being able to 'voice' how I felt, believing that no-one could keep me company in that space. Believing I couldn't withstand another moment, let alone the lifetime beyond that. Believing the only way I could stop how bad I was feeling was to die. It wasn't as though I made a conscious choice to attempt to end my life—it was about believing in that moment that I had no choice.

### Why didn't I talk about it - get help ?

Although I had people around me that did care, that did love and support me, when I was in that space I didn't feel I could reach out—depression robs you of your voice. I didn't believe anyone could make it better either. I remember feeling that no-one understood me, no-one knew what it was like for me, no-one could say or do anything that would change how I felt - which intensified my feeling of being totally alone.

What helped was to accept that no-one could possibly know what it's like for me, it's my experience alone and I couldn't continue making others wrong for 'not getting it'. People didn't necessarily have to 'get it' either, just being able to get the stuff out of my head, put words to it, hear myself say it, or express it through another form, like poetry and art, helped me move out of that space.

People didn't have to even say anything, just hearing my own words and having the physical presence of someone. Someone to 'sit' quietly with me in that dark space and in doing so validate my existence. That's what helped the most and that's why I don't keep my deadly thoughts a secret anymore—I talk about it.

What helps me stay out of that space now ?

Challenge thoughts . . . tell someone

Trusting that those darkest moments **do** pass. Telling myself, "Stop! You can't go there—get out of this space NOW!" If I'm beyond doing that, I 'talk it' - tell someone I'm having these thoughts, which is a really tough thing to do. You're already in a space where you feel extremely vulnerable, so it can seem like an insurmountable risk telling someone how you feel.

Write it down

Having more than one ways to communicate my pain helps me through dark times. If not through talking, then through writing—just getting the stuff out of my head and onto the page without worrying about spelling, grammar, or neatness. When it's there on the page I can then question and challenge it.

Say it another way

If I can't find my own words then using the words of others ie saying to someone, "Hear this song—this is how bad I'm feeling right now. Read this—this is what it's like for me right now."

Make an appointment

Picking up the phone and making an appointment with my Doctor or Psychologist. I think a Psychologist is as essential as a family Doctor, particularly through the tough times—and we all have them.

Self protecting - doing good stuff

When I was hospitalised with severe clinical depression, six years ago, I gained an insight into why I felt the way I did—learned some coping skills, how to deal with my past, intense emotions, self-destructive thoughts and depressive cycles. I learned the importance of self-protecting, shielding myself from negative influences and surrounding myself with people and things that helped me feel good. Balancing out the dark times —challenging the self harming mindset by allowing myself to experience the 'good stuff'.

We should be teaching kids these skills, it's fundamental, it's as important, if not more important, than reading, writing and maths. They need to know how to challenge belief systems, negative thoughts, self doubt and think critically about the world around them.

Medication

I also take medication. Untreated depression has proven to be more harmful to my health and well being than prescribed medication. If you've got diabetes and you don't take your medication you risk losing your life—if you suffer depression and don't take medication (if it is recommended) you also risk losing your life.

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Having survived, what do I see as the meaning of life now ?

Survival, exploring my full potential and how I can make a difference to my own life, that of others and our world. Accepting that life isn't easy. Accepting there's both light and dark, good and bad makes me less likely to feel so bad when things go wrong.

Unfortunately everything around us is telling us that a successful life is about beauty, the accumulations of material possessions, achieving, having lots of money, living the life of celebrities—it's not.

When I began challenging all of this, that's when I found purpose and real meaning in my life. That's when I started to feel successful because I was staying connected with myself and the world around me, I wasn't conforming to imposed ideals. I think staying connected with who we are and being true to who we want to be is really important—being original and authentic [as enormously difficult as that can be].

Maintaining a connection with nature is a big one for me — it gives meaning to life. Unlike human nature, it never disappoints—provides an escape from the toxicity of cultural trends. Takes me out of self obsession and personal paranoia. Serves as a reality check, that; “Hey, this is not all about me, I'm a part of something so much bigger, something really amazing and I want to know more about it.”

“Your pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding.”

Kahlil

[www.reachout.com.au](http://www.reachout.com.au) [great for young people]

[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) [both these websites also provide additional links and resources].

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