

After familiarizing myself with the basic teachings of Unitarian Universalism, I came across the seven principles that you hold as strong values and moral teachings. I was deeply moved by the first and second principles; first, the inherent worth and dignity of every person and second, justice, equity and compassion in human relations. My daughter, Jamie, was brought up Catholic, but her heart and soul was much more aligned with the Unitarian faith. Jamie deeply loved life and her expression of that affected everyone she met. Her broad, bright smile, intelligent sense of humor and contagious laugh put everyone at ease.

So why did my beautiful, deeply loved daughter take her own life? After almost five years of my spiritual journey and meeting other survivors, reading extensively about rape and mental illness, attending many retreats, and raising awareness through the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention walks, I believe I understand more. So this Jamie's story.

Jamie died of a brain disease (diagnosed with bipolar II, depression, and PTSD) and after a long struggle that took all her energy and endurance and strength, took her own life on March 10, 2010 at age 21. Jamie did not want to die, she wanted to get better and continue to live a purposeful life.

Jamie was a ball of energy growing up. She was always intense with a bias for action and a flair for anything athletic. The pleasure she took in sports drew teammates and spectators into her orbit through the joy, talent and desire she displayed. Sometimes her physicality upstaged her incisive mind that, likewise, was often stuck in overdrive. But no matter which side of her personality had the lead, the combination was electric.

Yet Jamie had some dark moods, too. As early as nursery school, her teacher took me aside and told me sometimes Jamie fell silent seeming emotional and sad. In third grade Jamie's teacher told me that Jamie became visibly frustrated and upset if her work wasn't perfect. Perfectionism continued to be a theme in her life as she pursued every subject in school with a passion, always having to make that A or, in college, the deans list. As a percussionist and an athlete she would practice and work obsessively at each endeavor. And, at a young age, I do remember Jamie told me that she sometimes heard voices.

Most of the time, though, Jamie veiled any sadness with a radiant smile, cheerful attitude and ready sense of humor. These were her hallmarks and her periodic melancholy gave her insight into the pain that other people felt, deepening her compassion for anyone who was suffering. Jamie was a master of many things — from surfing to juggling, including hiding her depression with that bright, beautiful smile and her love for everyone with a heartbeat—especially special-needs kids, animals and red sox fans.

Jamie's bubbly nature became harder to maintain as she got older. As many kids do, she began experimenting with alcohol and drugs in high school. We were to learn years later that Jamie had been raped at age 16. She told no one at the time, instead, she carried around the guilt and rage for two years before finally opening up to me and her therapist.

Another blow came in the winter of that year. At the start of basketball playoffs, Jamie seriously injured her right knee partially tearing her ACL and damaging the cartilage, a difficult time because this was the year she was being

recruited to play college basketball. Though she continued to play, she would never reach her potential or measure up to her own standards. She would have four surgeries and be on and off crutches with some degree of disability for the rest of her life. She would sometimes self-medicate with alcohol and drugs, which only heightened her feelings of guilt and depression.

Most of her life Jamie seemed to possess an unshakeable exuberance and self-confidence. She was captain of three varsity teams in high school and a talented percussionist in the wind ensemble. She excelled at economics, statistics and math and was always at the top of her class. She was a dedicated volunteer, teaching drums to kids and working at ASP in the summer helping families in impoverished areas of Kentucky, Tennessee and Pennsylvania. She loved to surf, ski, cuddle with her dogs and pitch to her dad. She idolized her older brother and was loving to family and friends. She was especially loving and kind toward kids who struggled with a disability or had trouble fitting in. In her senior year of high school she drove a friend to school every day in hopes that she could help her with her learning disabilities. They adored each other.

In college at Williams I remember asking a basketball coach how Jamie was doing while she was trying to get back on the team and recovering from a knee surgery. She told me, "Nobody works harder than Jamie."

I have so many sweet and funny memories of Jamie from screeching and laughing and going crazy with her dogs and making them perform to eating spinach with her mouth open. That was Jamie!

But her struggles continued over the next four years. Sometimes she shone, excelling in her courses and playing some basketball, but at other times she sank into the abyss.

In February of 2010, she seemed to be doing well. She was home on medical leave, but she had started taking courses at Harvard Extension School to get ready for going back to college. She was getting therapy several times a week and was on medication. I slept next to her every night at this time to make sure she was safe. Even then, she would sometimes have terrible nightmares and would tell me she couldn't slow down her mind; her brain would attack and judge her. She sometimes would wake me up in the middle of the night, hitting her head with her hand. At some point, these periodic terrors rose to an unendurable level without my knowing it, so I couldn't help her. She killed herself on March 10.

I would like to remember how Jamie lived her life rather than how she died. Her daily victories through kindness, thoughtfulness, her pure love of family, friends—the intensity with which she lived and the many days she was victorious despite overwhelming odds.

Even though she took her own life, she would not want this to happen to any one else. We are already changing our attitudes about mental illness, opening doors to greater understanding and compassion, along with greater understanding of drug and alcohol addiction and greater awareness of the long-term devastation of rape. This can only give us hope that sufferers can be better understood and helped in continuing to live meaningful and purposeful lives.

When Jamie's journey ended, my spiritual journey began. There is a lovely place in Kingston called Hope Floats, which is a bereavement and educational center

for individuals and families who are grieving or facing other life challenges. Their mission is to help people cope with loss, support their healing, and nurture their physical and emotional well-being. I attended my first meeting in 2010, a few months after Jamie died. I was embraced, welcomed, and had the privilege of meeting many brave people who have lost someone to suicide. It felt like I was seven again and given a warm bath by my mom. I still continue to attend these meetings, now as a mentor, trying to help others who are facing unspeakable tragedy. One of these people is a courageous young woman who lost her mom to suicide, and we have built a close, loving relationship in helping each other navigate the depths of our own bewildering grief and loss.

Who would imagine that Jamie, who identified strongly with everyone who served and supported others, even in death, could continue to be such a powerful force for compassionate action in the world.

Deborah Neal  
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