

A Letter to an Unknown Friend

I'm writing this letter to some tired soul who is considering "checking out early", who wants to leave before the party is over. I don't know who that person might be. I'm no expert, but I've known desperate people. I'm not on the speaker's circuit; I am just a middle-aged woman with a bit of compelling experience to offer. I just need to read this letter out loud. Chances are, *someone* needs to hear it. Here goes.

Dear friend,

I am writing this to you because I've been made aware that you no longer consider your life to be of any value to anyone. I also know that you have given this a lot of intentional thought. You have a plan in mind. You've convinced yourself that everyone will be better off without you—your friends, your work associates, your family. You consider yourself a burden so you are really doing them a favor by checking out. Their lives can get back to normal when they don't have to worry about you. Stop right there. Hear me out. Please.

You don't know me...and I don't know you. But I have a story you need to hear. Four years and three months ago my son contemplated and completed the act you are considering. Todd was sick—we knew that. He'd been diagnosed months before and his condition and how to care for him had turned *all* our lives inside out and upside down. He was on a variety of medications; he wasn't comfortable with any of them. He couldn't even make peace with the diagnosis itself. And his dad and I weren't "mental health scholars"—we were newcomers to the subject, and to the *stigma*, of mental illness. Todd and Rex and I all had really strong support systems, but somehow the possibility of suicide had never come up. So on that fateful day, when we got that dreadful phone call, we were numb, disoriented... clueless. Totally clueless.

Todd was depressed and so very anxious; we knew that and it was scaring us *big-time*. His poor mind just wouldn't stop racing and his thoughts were so dark. He hated that. Is this sounding familiar to you? Is this where *you* live? Well, I don't blame you for wanting relief at any cost. I didn't blame Todd.

You won't hear me say that I understand what wanting to leave feels like; I don't. But I can tell you this: *I know what it feels like to be left*. And I can report that my life hasn't been better since Todd left. It's been worse. For a long time...worse. Years of worse. And I can't

promise that things are going to turn around for you if you choose life, or that they'll turn up for you, or get better for you. I think they will, I truly do. But if you can't see that, I can't force you to wear my glasses.

All I can say to you is this: When you reach the point where you can't come up with a single reason to stay alive one more day, then stay alive as a *gift to somebody*. Maybe you'll tell them. Probably you won't. But if you stay alive as a gift for one day, you may just be able to stay alive as a gift for two days. Then, who knows, maybe you can go for three, and then more. Because, my troubled friend, that's what people do...what *we* do. We stay alive for each other.

If you are still reading this, I *commend* you. I hope this has given you something of substance you can and *will* chew on. It's OK to ask for help. *Please ask for help*. Suicide is never the best option. Maybe my words can be a link to *life* that you will be able to pass on to another tired soul at some point in your journey. And now I'm putting my pen down and I'm just going to say it: *LIVE. Live. Please live*. It's a gift to *somebody*.

Sincerely — and I *do* mean sincerely,

Connie

I still haven't sent this to anyone. Do you know someone who needs this letter? Just give me the name and address. The stamp's on me...

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*By Connie Kennemer – February 27, 2010
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*(Inspired by William Ritter's book, "Take the Dimness Of My Soul Away".
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