



I chose what was popular because I didn't like who I was. Truth is I always wanted to be like my friend, Ronny. He was good-looking. Needless to say, that's not on my résumé. I never got a job based on my appearance. When Ronny walked into a room, girls would flirt with him, wave and sheepishly say, "Hi Ronny." When I walked into a room the girls would only say, "Hey Bob, can you ask Ronny if he wants to go out with me?" Ronny was also athletic. He could take two steps and do a flip. I can take 100 steps and I still can't do a flip. I can roll a little bit, though.

Ronny could jump off the high dive and do whatever he wanted with his body. I jump off the high dive and "splat"....the water does whatever it wants with my body.

Not only was Ronny good-looking and athletic, but he was the kind of guy I had a hard time with in school. See, I did really well in school... except for grades. Even when I did my best and took books home, or studied in study hall (now there's an idea!), the best I earned was a B. Now, there's nothing wrong with a B, but Ronny got A's even when he didn't study, and I don't ever recall seeing him take any books home. If that's not enough, on top of all this, Ronny's parents had money.

Can you relate to this at all? Have you ever looked to the heavens and screamed, "It's not fair! Why does this person have good looks, athletic talent, intelligence, and money?"

If I possessed just one of the four qualities Ronny had, maybe I could have stood up for what was right, helped Jack down from the fence, and become his friend. Or so I thought.

If you wait until you have everything society says you need before you do what's right, then you'll never be part of a Dignity Revolution. I can guarantee even if you have everything society says you need to be happy, without good choices it won't assure a great life!

I found this out one night when I arrived home to find my brother, Bill, waiting up for me.

I knew something was wrong.

"Bill, what's up?"

He answered, "Bob, it's Ronny."

Nothing could get me ready for what I heard my brother say next.

"Ronny is dead."

I'll never forget those words and the emotion and confusion that raced through my mind. When I asked how it happened I felt only more baffled when Bill replied, "Ronny got drunk and took his own life." Nothing could have prepared me for the news. How could it be? Ronny had it all – everything anyone could ask for. To this day, I can't find a talk to take away your past. I can't find a talk to take away your pain, and I can't find a talk to take away your problems, but you don't have to let your problems, pain, or past take away your choices. You still have a choice!

Ronny considered me one of his best friends, and because of that his parents asked me to speak at his funeral. They also asked if I would go with them to identify the body. I'll never forget walking into the funeral parlor with Ronny's mom and dad on one side and Ronny's girlfriend on the other. We stood there in tragic silence as Ronny came into the room, not with two steps and a flip, but on a cold, metal cart in a blue body bag. They unzipped the bag and there laid my friend.

Never to laugh again.

Never to dance again.

Never to do a flip, go to a concert, or play racquetball ever again.

Never to have another chance for a friend to be by his side during the hard times.

Lifeless.

Questions raced through my mind. Why? How could Ronny not know he was valuable? How could he throw his life away? He had it all! He was good-looking, athletic, intelligent, and his parents had money! If he didn't feel significant, how could I? If he couldn't find purpose in life, what hope was there? What chance did Bob have?

There are a lot of reasons why people have problems and struggle with depression and suicidal thoughts today. They range from chemical imbalances to not knowing how to cope with life's circumstances in a healthy way. In fact, if you have a chemical imbalance, please don't feel ashamed! Just as someone shouldn't feel ashamed about having a cold or the flu, you shouldn't either. Don't be afraid to get the help you need.

If you've been "labeled" with a diagnosis, whether ADHD, depression, Bi-Polar or some other condition, it's important to understand you're not "less" than others. Identify it and get the help you need. Please don't let your label limit you and convince you you're not worthy of dignity, love, and life! Some of my endless questions about Ronny were answered when his mom began unloading her guilty conscience to me. She gave me a glimpse of what Ronny's life was like behind closed doors, a life I never knew.

If Ronny did something wrong when he was young, his mother would hit him; not spank or discipline him. Hit him. No one deserves to be hit! NOBODY!

When he was three, he spilled some milk like all kids do. Ronny's mom went to backhand him across the face, but because he had been hit before, Ronny instinctively raised his tiny arm to protect himself. The back of her hand hit his elbow instead. She told me of her annoyance and anger as the physical pain stung her hand. She lost it. She started hitting, slugging, and kicking her three-year-old boy. She threw him against the wall. When she finally regained control from her anger, his body was so black, blue, and bloody that she had to keep him in the house for over a month so no one would see him and report it to the police.

Ronny's mom needed help and, unfortunately, she didn't seek or receive the support she needed so desperately. Instead, she treated her son like garbage without respect or dignity. Over time, Ronny started believing it was true, that he was worthless and unworthy of love or life. He believed he was just trash.

When he was seven, there were problems in the neighborhood and when the police came over, Ronny stood by his two sisters. "Are these your children?" the officer asked his mom. "These are my two girls," she said, referencing her daughters. Pointing to Ronny, she told him, "I don't know who that wild animal belongs to."

Tears flowed down her face as Ronny's mom confessed occurrence after occurrence of abuse to her son. If these were the stories she was willing to share, I can't begin to imagine how bad it really was for my friend Ronny.

Ronny never talked about any of the abuse. They were family secrets. So many of us believe our family is the only family with problems. No one else seems to struggle. No family seems to fight like ours. You can fill in the blank for the excuse you not to share what happens in your family with others. Maybe that was part of Ronny's problem; he pushed down the pain and hid behind masks and walls until it wasn't tolerable anymore.

When Ronny was 13, he started to fight back. "I went to hit him and he grabbed my arm," she said. Ronny sternly looked her in the face, "Mom, no more!" She swung her other fist at him. He grabbed that one also, and yelled, "Stop!" She lost her temper again and went ballistic. Screaming and struggling to gain control, she pulled his arm toward her. In a rage, her teeth clenched down on Ronny's wrist, sinking to the bone. Yes, Ronny required stitches because his own mother bit him.

I wish this entire story wasn't true. I wish it was a fictional example I made up for shock value and to make my point clear, but it happened. Sadly, it's all true.

Even knowing how horrible Ronny's home life was, I still can't condone what he did!

Why? Because Ronny isn't the only person who came from a dysfunctional, broken, or imperfect family. In fact, if you have a decent family, a mom, dad, or a guardian who you know cares about you, please tell them, "Thank you." No, really, do it! Give them a hug, a kiss on the cheek, and tell them you love them and are grateful for how they have cared for you. Oh, yeah, they might freak out! Because it's so out of the ordinary, they may even say, "What's up? Are you going to ask for money again?" But if you have an adult that cares – a parent, guardian, teacher, coach, mentor, aunt, or uncle, please say, "Thank you."

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