

Depression kills

Afflicted must be helped before it's too late



BARB CHURCHILL is a graduate student in woodwinds performance and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

About seven years ago, my best friend killed himself.

Larry was 38, a gifted bowler, and had many friends. However, no one knew that he was ill with depression.

If we had known, it's possible that he would be alive today, because suicidal depression is treatable.

"If you know that a friend or relative is suicidal, you must help them," said Ruth Few, clinical social worker at Lincoln General Hospital.

Call a crisis line, call the police, or call a pastor; but call someone. Do not fail to act.

Suicidal people aren't rational, and are incapable of making their own decisions. We should not feel bad about temporarily making decisions for suicidal individuals, because with treatment, their judgment will return.

"It's remarkable to see a person recover. Someone who was slow to speak and unable to concentrate becomes bright, alert and rational again," Few said.

People with depression, like Larry, have a physical, treatable illness.

In fact, 80 to 90 percent of people who seek treatment will find relief, with a combination of psychoactive drugs and therapy. However, there is still such a stigma that people like Larry refuse to get help. They say, "I'm not crazy. I'm not depressed. I don't need counseling." Then, they go off alone and pull the trigger, slit their wrists, or inhale carbon monoxide.

If I had known that Larry was sui-

cidal, I would have intervened.

But, no one knew. We couldn't help him. He wouldn't let us.

Maybe he was afraid that we wouldn't like him any more, that we wouldn't accept him.

This is common with people with depressive illnesses. The tendency is to isolate yourself. As Kathy Cronkite, author of "On the Edge of Darkness: Conversations About Conquering Depression," said in a speech in Lincoln recently, "Depression is the loneliest illness there is."

We often shut others out when we should be reaching out instead.

Depression has been diagnosed in about 17.4 million people, yet many still fail to understand the ramifications of this disease. That includes many people who are depressed but don't know it. Some researchers estimate that there are at least twice as many people that go undiagnosed with depression, including my friend Larry.

Since 15 percent of people with untreated depression will commit suicide, the disease is a major concern.

There are many misconceptions about depression. Depression, goes the myth, only affects the poor, the elderly, the chronically ill, the chemically dependent or the dying.

In actuality, depression is a nondiscriminatory illness, affecting all ages, races and economic backgrounds.

One of the most prevalent views is that people with depression are not sick, that they are just faking in order to get sympathy. This is completely false, as celebrated author William Styron, author of "Sophie's Choice," would tell you. As Styron states in "Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness," "The ferocious inwardness of the pain produced an

"

Larry might still be alive today if he had only realized that he wasn't crazy. ... He might have gone for help. Unfortunately, that never happened, and a life that mattered has been snuffed out."

immense distraction that prevented my articulating words beyond a hoarse murmur; I sensed myself turning wall-eyed, monosyllabic, and also I sensed my ... friends becoming uneasily aware of my predicament."

If an erudite man like Styron can be so diminished, imagine how bad it is to be a "normal" person with this illness.

Think about it. No other known illness changes the way that we think, the way we feel, and the way we live. When we are depressed, our personalities alter, and we fail to trust those closest to us.

My friend Larry obviously felt the need to remove himself from all of his friends. He told one friend he'd be one place and told another he had been to a different one. No one knew that he had died until we hadn't seen him in more than a week.

And by then, it was much too late.

Our society is made up of rugged individualists. This may be why so many people, including close friends and family members, inadvertently hurt people who are suffering with depression.

In Larry's case, he did try to reach out to his father. His dad told him to "pick himself up by his bootstraps." This attitude is prevalent among the uninformed public. Unfortunately, it is just plain wrong. It's like telling a person with a heart attack to just relax, take a few aspirin, and "please don't let the door hit you in the rear on the way out."

This advice certainly didn't help Larry. Instead, it told him that he didn't have a right to feel pain.

The general public, as well as our government, misunderstands and fears mental illness. In some instances, depression is far more treatable, yet people like Nebraska Attorney General Don Stenberg still get it wrong.

Recently, Stenberg made news when he said that depression should not be covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Stenberg's comment is alarming, saying that "neither state government, nor any private employer, can effectively operate if any employee is free to say they are mentally depressed, do little or no work and collect their full paycheck while the court prohibits an employer from firing the employee or reducing the employee's pay."

The attorney general needs his consciousness raised. No one wants to be depressed on purpose. Ruth Few agreed, and said, "It's absurd to think that the attorney general of Nebraska is so ignorant regarding depression."

There is no way in the world that a depressed person would miss work without honestly being ill. When most depressed people already have low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness, why would they want to sabotage themselves any further? Cronkite said depression wrecked her relationships, interfered with her schooling and ruined her life. Until she knew

that it was a treatable illness, and NOT a stigma, she couldn't help herself.

Yet people continue to fear the word "depression." As Cronkite said, "Wouldn't it be nice if I could just say, 'Hi, I'm Kathy. I have blond hair, blue eyes and depression?'"

Ruth Few agreed with Cronkite, and said we must move past societal misconceptions. Styron wrote in his book how hospitalization and drug therapy helped him. Cronkite said that she was only able to accept her depressive illness after a personal friend of her father's admitted that he too was depressed.

Yet, the message is too late for some.

Larry might still be alive today if he had only realized that he wasn't crazy. He was just sick, and could possibly get better. He might have gone for help. Unfortunately, that never happened, and a life that mattered has been snuffed out.

You do not need to live in fear of the darkness within.

Please, in the memory of my friend Larry, seek help if you feel despair, hopelessness, worthlessness, or are actively suicidal. Call 472-7450, the Counseling and Psychological Services Center at the University Health Center. Or, call Lincoln General Hospital at 475-1011.

It's too late for Larry. It doesn't have to be too late for you.

Clash of the titans

Preference between 'Dukes of Hazzard,' 'CHiPs' defines who you are



TODD MUNSON is a junior broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Every day we make choices. Cat or dog.

Ford or Chevy. Apple or IBM. Coke or Pepsi (off campus of course).

Beer that tastes great or beer that is less filling.

Then there is the important choice. The one that determines who you are as a person.

Are you a "CHiPs" person, or a "Dukes of Hazzard" person?

Out of the choices mentioned above, nothing can determine your character as can your affiliation to these two programs.

For eight years, young minds were molded and shaped by the actions of these two shows. Granted, on the surface, they are very similar, much as Coke is to Pepsi. They both starred very dapper men and both featured vehicular mayhem, all in one action-packed hour.

But once you've analyzed these two shows for most of your life as I have, you'll see the two are as fundamentally different as Chewbacca and Kermit the Frog. And the one you choose to like best says who you are as a person.

When "CHiPs" debuted, it was a breakthrough for television. The character of Ponch (the dreamy Erik Estrada) was the first Hispanic actor to star in a television series. Together, Ponch and John Baker preached the merits of obeying the law and practicing safe driving. Between arrests, they introduced America to the hippest trends: jet skis, satanic music, roller disco and ultra-white teeth. They were such good cops that they never once had to draw their weapons. Granted the show is an icon of '70s kitsch, but the message it sent was a positive one.

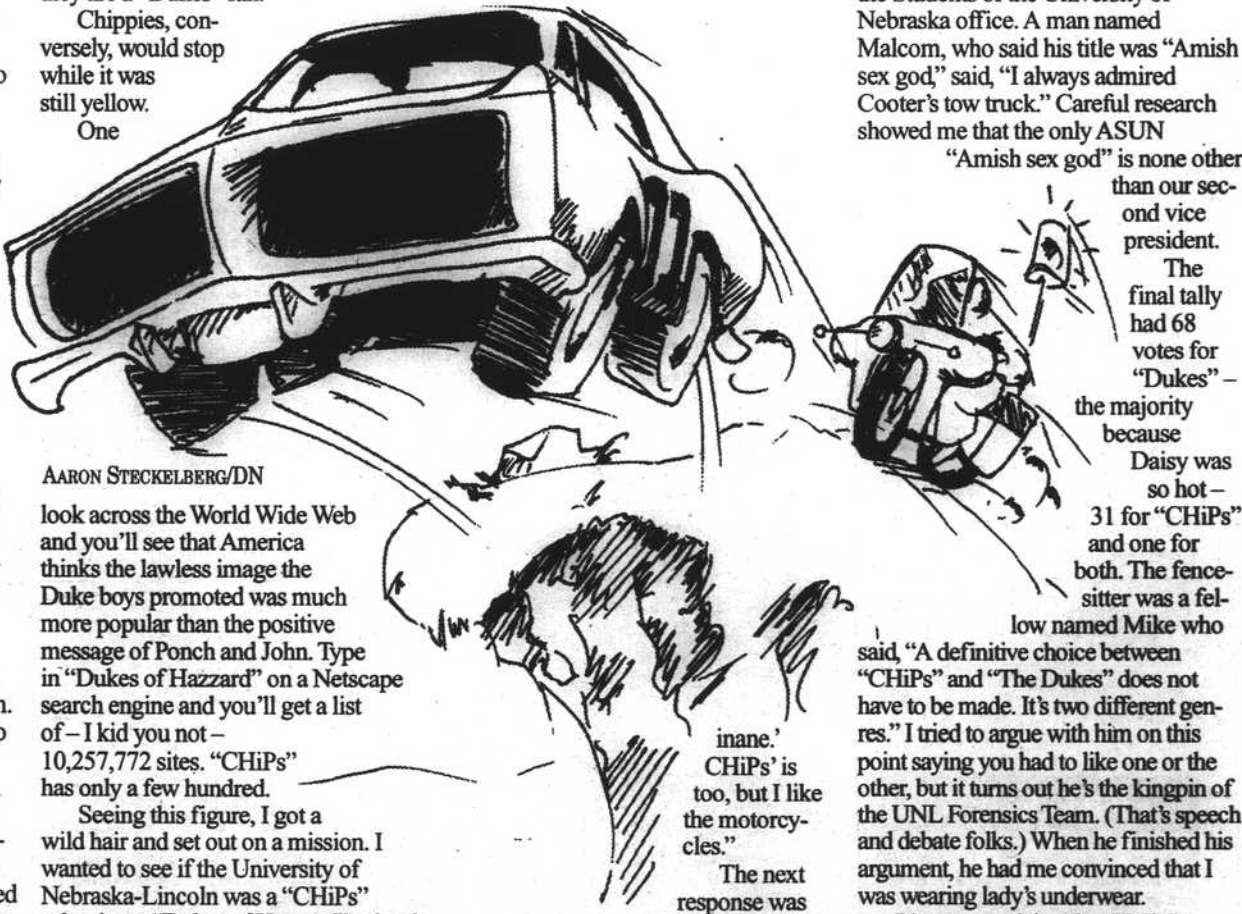
In 1979, the same year the Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" was born, "Dukes of Hazzard" hit the air. The show focused on two good ol' boys having some fun. For five of its six seasons, "Dukes" was consistently in the top 10 of the Nielsen ratings. When I watch the show today, I see nothing but dire filth. Bo and Luke weren't the heroes, but criminals who had you conned into cheering for them. If this show came out today, there is no way it would air. Let's see, the "good guys" smuggle moonshine, practice incest, and speed around in a souped-up muscle car emblazoned with a confederate flag, trying to escape the law. Oftentimes, these chase scenes featured a lot of gun-play or other weapons. The Duke boys usually managed to escape, but sometimes, they'd end up in jail — the only place you'd see a minority.

Because of this attitude of lawlessness presented by "The Dukes of Hazzard," I feel the show is responsible for our generation's lack of respect for the police and the laws they enforce. The next time you see someone speeding through a red light, chances are

they are a "Dukes" fan.

Chippies, conversely, would stop while it was still yellow.

One



AARON STECKELBERG/DN

look across the World Wide Web and you'll see that America thinks the lawless image the Duke boys promoted was much more popular than the positive message of Ponch and John. Type in "Dukes of Hazzard" on a Netscape search engine and you'll get a list of — I kid you not — 10,257,772 sites. "CHiPs" has only a few hundred.

Seeing this figure, I got a wild hair and set out on a mission. I wanted to see if the University of Nebraska-Lincoln was a "CHiPs" school or a "Dukes of Hazzard" school.

Last week, I cruised campus pretending to be a journalist and asked 100 people which show they liked better and why. I got some very interesting responses.

My first call was to NRoll. If you push the "# sign 903 times, you can actually speak to the voice behind it all. Mr. NRoll said, "I like 'CHiPs' more because 'The Dukes' is incredibly

inane.' CHiPs' is too, but I like the motorcycles."

The next response was the reason why I believe "Dukes" was so bad for young minds. Chris, who said he was majoring in anarchy, said, "Dukes' of course, because in one episode you can learn how to make a bomb."

Justin, an English major, said, "'CHiPs' is by far superior. It ain't got all those hillbillies."

Interested in what our student leaders thought, I called the Association of

the Students of the University of Nebraska office. A man named Malcom, who said his title was "Amish sex god," said, "I always admired Cooter's tow truck." Careful research showed me that the only ASUN

"Amish sex god" is none other than our second vice president.

The final tally had 68 votes for "Dukes" — the majority because

Daisy was so hot — 31 for "CHiPs" and one for both. The fence-sitter was a fellow named Mike who

said, "A definitive choice between "CHiPs" and "The Dukes" does not have to be made. It's two different genres." I tried to argue with him on this point saying you had to like one or the other, but it turns out he's the kingpin of the UNL Forensics Team. (That's speech and debate folks.) When he finished his argument, he had me convinced that I was wearing lady's underwear.

It's not surprising that UNL is a "Dukes of Hazzard" school. The signs are all around: Cars maiming bicyclists as they speed through red lights, students getting caught boosting lumber, rampant underage drinking, and a poor attitude toward minorities.

This is just another example of how television can rot your mind. Heck, it caused me to think of and write this drive.