

NEVER KICK A BLOKE WHEN THEY ARE DOWN - IT IS UNAUSTRIAN

ABALINX 6 May 2016 Peter Adamis



Painting courtesy Ben Quilty.

Late last night, I happened to find myself meandering at the rear of my garden listening to the sounds of night. I walked up to the garden balcony to look over the hedges into the adjoining public reserve and heard a cry of distress.

As I looked over the hedge I saw a very young man in his late teens and early twenties pleading about family issues and seeking help. In his voice I detected a cry of anguish and much hurt from one still yet to realise his full potential and dreams.

I observed him pacing up and down, talking on his mobile to someone he obviously knew, but was receiving a negative response. At one point he let out a loud scream of anguish interlarded with an expletive demonstrating the deep pain that he felt of either not being understood and/or not being heard. Whatever the case may have been, any sane person may have been moved by the remonstrations of this young chap and I for one wanted to go down and comfort the young fella in his time of need.

I watched him walk to and fro attempting to reach out and again communicate with the same or another via his mobile to no avail. He sat down with hunched shoulders and put his head between his hands, shaking and began crying uncontrollably. He looked around as if to make sure no one could see him as he continued his sobbing in the quietude of his surroundings unknown that I was watching the poor bastard in his moment of anguish. I felt sorry for him and was about to go down and tell him that no matter what challenges life brings upon us, it's still worth living.

Seeing this young bloke brought back many unpleasant memories of my friends who taken their lives whilst I had either served and worked with in a military and/or in a civilian capacity. I remember being advised of one mate who shot himself whilst on the rifle range after he had completed his duty for the day. I thought of another mate who shot himself because he was separated from his family. In this case his widow ended up murdering their two children because she could not cope. Then the suicide of a young man who was the life of his group when I was working with a welfare group in Melbourne really brought home to me the value of life and the reason we as adults need to reach out to others in time of distress.

Although most if not all of the examples I have spoken of above are in the past, they are not forgotten and their memories remain with me forever. I remember their laughter, their joy of being with mates and family, of their hopes and dreams and what they were going to achieve once they separated from the Australian Defence force.

Would they be accepted and acknowledged for their skills, knowledge and work ethics I wondered? Who would know that these young men and women who had served their country were endowed with so much knowledge and experience that their counterparts in the world outside would feel threatened. It is no wonder they suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Although all suicides and hardship cases affected me, the one that had a devastating effect on me was a young soldier in Ballarat who had enlisted in the local Army unit to be amongst others of his age and ilk. He was a likeable young fellow, full of beans and eager to be amongst men and women he could relate to. At that time I had just been given the responsibility of raising my four sons alone after a four year battle involving numerous family Law Court appearances. It was difficult time and yet somehow my boys and I found the means to survive. I had made a promise to my four sons that no matter what the challenges we faced, I would be there for them. To this day, I have kept my promise and continue to do so.

The young man who had committed suicide did so by sleeping in his car, with a hose protruding from the exhaust and into the vehicle. One can assume that it was a lonely and quiet death unseen by others and apparently not missed by those who may have been responsible for his care. It was not the manner of his death that haunted me but the note that he had left for his father. The note was simple and to the point. It said: *"Sorry dad, it is not your fault"*. This note was handed to me by the constable that had found him dead curled up in the car in the locked shed. I since found out that this young man had been left to fend for himself in his father property on the outskirts of Ballarat. The father according to my enquiries had remarried and could not have his son in the same house with his new spouse.

A few years ago, I read a news report of a young man whose bodily remains were found under bridge near the Windsor street station heading towards the south. The reason why this bridge was recognisable was that as a youngster I would often play on the train tracks and hiding in the caverns below the bridge watching the trains flash by. It was dangerous game, but one that challenged my sense of adventure at a time when I should have been at home studying. But that another story.

This young man had been living beneath the bridge and coming out to beg for food during the day. It appears that he was so exhausted from hunger that he did not have the energy to seek help from anyone. The story according to news media was that he was a young man who was alienated from his family in Queensland and that he had no friends or relatives he could seek help from.

These case and many others that I came across during my time with the military and welfare gave me a strong sense of family responsibility and a retention of links to friends and relatives. As such, as my four sons grew up and I remarried to a wonderful lady, Yovanna, my promise to my four sons did not diminish nor was it reduced to the level of "Boys you are on your own".

Having said all of the above, my mind flashed back to the young man at the beginning of the article and watched him walk away drying his tears with his sleeve and to a home which I now have come to realise is a place designated for those who need support. Sounds of material and rubbish bins being kicked, the slamming of the front door slammed shut and a quietness once again descended upon the neighbourhood. I said to myself at least he has a roof over his head and tomorrow is another day which may be brighter than today.

It is obvious why I wrote this article and it does not take an Einstein to work it out. My message to parents is that at one stage in your lives and I hope that it does not come to this, we will be confronted with similar scenarios where we will be tested severely with regards to the behaviour of our children and friends who need help and a supporting hand. Yes resources will be stretched to the limit, your stress level will raise, anxiety will take over, anger and grief will become the norm, blood pressure will rise and your health will be affected.

Furthermore your nerves will be frayed, your sense of right and wrong will torn apart and your mind will become jangled and confused with thoughts you would not think possible. My advice in such situations is to remain calm, look at the long term view, make short term and achievable goals, don't lose sight of your objectives no matter what ails you or challenges you face and above all don't give in to the adversities that you face.

Our children and other people's children are our future and we who have experienced life grew up in a world devoid of technology as we now of it today and the values we developed were passed on by a generation of parents who struggled in their own way to make life worth living. Never give up on your children and never give in to the easy way out that have display a life of paradisiac that will only produce hallucinating and shallow outcomes. Therefore whenever you see a young man and/or woman in distress, don't be so quick to judge them for you too can come to grief at one point in your life. I grew up embracing the Australian way of life where "you don't kick a bloke when he is down: and that in Australia we believe in a "fair go for everyone". It un-Australian.

This is also a reminder to remember our men and women who have witnessed the horrors of war in places like East Timor, Solomon Islands, Rwanda, Afghanistan, Iraq and other God forsaken places we are not privy or aware of. Many of these young men and women suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) and are finding it difficult returning to mainstream civilian life. As for the young fella from the previous evening, I wish him well on his journey and hope that life is not as bad as it seems. Never give up is my motto for each day is a different day. Let us reach out and support those who need our help and not judge them by what we see. Suicide crosses all cultural and religious barriers and is not confined to the unfortunate only.

This article was never about me but for all those young people that have lost their way and for the parents who are struggling to make ends meet. I can truly say that after a life time of 66 years on this earth, I know what it is like to raise four sons alone, suffer broken bones, psychological stress, living alone, deep depression, three heart attacks and a cocktail of chemicals and stem cell treatment to overcome a deadly and aggressive stage 4 cancer.

Yet despite all these challenges, life is always worth living and we must move forward with the same adventurous spirit that that has spurred us throughout life. I say let us use that old and familiar cliché of “Seize the day” and never let the bastards get you down.

As always, my apologies for the poor grammar, punctuation and savagery of the English language. The views are my own and I can only but try to demonstrate some sanity in a world enveloped by inconsistencies and mythological environments create by political strategists and behaviourists.



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