

*I didn't know you were suffering.* I was sitting at my desk where I work downtown when you jumped from the parking deck next door and landed on the sidewalk below. I didn't see anything or hear anything. I didn't know you existed until my co-worker announced to my neighbors in the office that someone had jumped. It was very novel to him. "You can see where a shoe popped off," he said as they craned their necks behind the glass window in the conference room. "It happened about 15 minutes before we went out for a smoke. If we had gone down earlier, we probably would have heard the splat."

*I didn't know you were suffering.* You took your life only a week after I met your ex-girlfriend. I reached out to send my condolences, and we became friends. I never met you, but I know you were a good person. I could see it in how much she hurt from losing you. I listened to her confusion and remorse as she recounted every possible scenario of what she did or didn't do. I watched as she acted out in frustration making poor decisions for her health and safety. Sometimes she said she did it because she knew you would hate it. There was no logic to that. Just a lot of anger and sadness with no place to go but toward herself.

*I didn't know you were suffering.* When I was in high school, you were my best friend's father. I spent a lot of time at your house hanging out with your son in the basement. You were very kind every time I saw you. When we would leave, you would grab your son in a bear hug before he could escape as he played the part of annoyed teenager. After we graduated high school, you divorced your wife, and I never saw you again. I only heard about your death from a mutual friend many years later. I reached out to your son, but we didn't talk much about your death. What could we say? We rarely see each other anymore, but I wanted him to know I was there if he needed me.

*I didn't know you were suffering,* but I knew something was wrong. I met you in an acting class. You had a sick sense of humor I adored, and we collaborated on a number of shows. Our paths strayed when I moved away, and we lost touch for several years. I visited you a few times when I went back home. It was great to see you, but I could tell you were depressed. You told me about the crippling migraines. You never said you were unhappy, but I could sense it in the cynical commentary and self-deprecating jokes.

But everything was a sick joke between us, wasn't it? When I asked my friends for humorous quotes to put in a forward for a book of my comics, you sent me a darkly funny one. I used it, and I signed a copy with a personal joke about a play we did together. I asked for your address so I could send it to you. You never replied, and I never followed up. I had no idea what was going on in your life at the time. Should I have reached out to you more? Was there anything I could have done to stop you from hurting so badly? Was I just one more friend who didn't care enough or show you just how much you were loved?

I didn't know you had died for several months after it happened. A friend contacted me to look at your facebook page. It took us a long time to find out it was suicide.

*I didn't know you were suffering,* but I know you are there. You are being bullied. You are being traumatized by war. You are suffering from a mental illness that takes control of your mind and spirit. You are chained to a routine of drugs and side effects fighting daily just to feel "normal." Or maybe to feel anything at all. You think no one can understand how horrible things have gotten because they have never been through what you are going through.

Regardless of how bad it has gotten, I am certain of one thing: Someone at this moment cares about you more than you realize. It may be your mother or your brother or your best friend. Maybe it is a person you haven't spoken to in years or the quiet girl you share glances with in class.

If all else fails, it is me: A stranger whom you have never met, but who cares because you are a human being. A stranger who understands that human beings are imperfect creatures who make mistakes and sometimes treat each other cruelly. A stranger who understands that whatever pain you are feeling--however insurmountable it may seem to you now--you do not need to face it alone.

I am certain of this because I know there are others like me. Others who won't leave their desk to see another person's suffering as a novel spectacle. Others like my friend who every year since losing her ex has walked to raise money and create awareness about the epidemic of suicide. I walked with her at those events and saw the truth with my own eyes: there are thousands like us. Strangers who may know nothing about you, but who know too well the pain of losing a loved one who they were too late to save.

*I didn't know you were suffering,* but I am willing if you let me. I am your friend or family member who doesn't see yet how much you are struggling. I am a guidance counselor at school who will listen without judgement. I am at a church waiting for you to ask for a helping hand. I am on a hotline waiting for you to call. I am the person in the hall you never met, but who asks how you are when everyone else is laughing.

I am nearby right now, and I will try to help you through your pain. I may have felt it, too. And if you can't find the will to reach out to me, I will try harder to see that you are hurting. I will try harder to notice when you withdraw and are not acting like yourself. I will try harder to reach out to ask how you are and be a part of your life. I will try harder to understand not everyone handles difficulty the same way. Because I didn't know you were suffering, but I am ready to listen. I am ready to help. I am ready to give you another option. We can face this together.



If you are in need of assistance now and do not know where to turn, contact someone here:

**24/7 Crisis Hotline: National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Network**  
**[www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)**  
**1-800-273-TALK (8255) (Veterans, press 1)**