

# A Mothers Letter to Her Son's Friends

Dear Charlie's Friends,

I'm writing this letter because June 4th was the second anniversary of Charlie's death. He would have been 26 years old. I'm hoping this letter will help you understand why he committed suicide. As private as Charlie was about many things, I believe he would have wanted me to write this. ,br> If this letter will help you identify the symptoms of depression, I will be satisfied. Had we all known that his behavior was symptomatic of depressive disorder, we could have helped him. I do not blame anyone including myself. We were not educated to see the signs of depression.

Charlie had called me, telling me there was something very wrong sometime after Christmas. He called one night when I was asleep and he was crying. Inability to sleep or sleeping too much as well as excessive crying are two of the symptoms of depression. I misinterpreted these signals thinking that it was hopeful that Charlie was asking for help. I had arranged for counseling several times and he did not follow through or continue.

I gave him at least 5 people whom I have heard of related to young people. One therapist had a consulting psychiatrist in his office and I told Charlie that in the case that he ver needed medication, this might be the therapist to choose. This was the therapist he chose. The therapist did not refer him to the psychiatrist although I do believe the "work" he did with the therapist was helpful to him. If doctors and therapists do not recognize symptoms of depressive disorder, it is no wonder that we who are untrained cannot recognize these symptoms. Charlie was also losing weight. Fifteen pounds off his large frame was a lot. Rapid weight loss is another symptoms. Excessive weight gain is also a symptom. He was also experiencing stomach aches and irritable bowel syndrome. The medical specialist he was going to put him on medication for this condition. Charlie had also undergone a number of medical tests. The medication was not helping. The tests had come back negative. Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain are all symptoms of depression.

Withdrawal and isolation are symptoms. Closer to the end of his life, Charlie wasn't returning phone calls. His brothers and sisters were in town and we had to persuade him to come to family dinners. He would tell us he was too tired or he had to work late. When he was at the house, he certainly did not seem depressed, maybe more reserved than usual but he interacted with people present. Withdrawal and social isolation are classic symptoms of a suicidal person and we now know that was happening. Several of you have told me how Charlie was staying home and not going out. Not participating in usual social activities as well as thoughts of death or suicide are symptoms. Charlie told none of his family about thoughts of suicide. The note he left said "This isn't something

I thought about for days, weeks or months, it is something I've thought about for years."

He was in a fight in October and was very remorseful about it although he didn't feel he started it. Irritability, aggression and a marked increased energy are symptoms. Some of you have told me Charlie participated in several fights. He was a sensitive young man who had shared he could never go to war and kill anyone. The aggressive behavior doesn't match who he really was.

I spent an afternoon with a friend of mine after Charlie died. He is a psychiatrist. After talking about Charlie's life and sharing with him the letter he left, my friend said, " Charlie had manic depressive disorder." My sister suffers from this illness. In manic depressive disorder the people feel alternate highs and lows. I know now, beyond a doubt, that this illness is what he suffered from and untreated and undiagnosed, led him to his death by suicide. In the note he left he said, "when I've been down, I've been really down, and when I was up, I was really up." I know now he fought this silent internal war for years.

I have learned a great deal about major depressive disorders. I hope never again to be fooled by the "mask and smile" of someone I know when these symptoms are present. Often, people who don't know a person is suffering from depression and its unbearable symptoms, will think that they can "snap out of it", or "buck up", or that "it's all in their heads." If they only knew that with medication, this is impossible.

The treatment for depression is a combination of cognitive therapy and medication. He did not get the medication. I now know that he couldn't live without chemical therapy to alter his thinking pattern and take care of the physical symptoms. Many famous people from this illness such as Abraham Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Patty Duke, Beethoven and Vincent Van Gogh.

Charlie valued all of his friendships and had a wonderful life with you, his friends. I know he's in a better place and has finally found the inner peace he longed for here. I feel privileged to be his mom and to have connected with him in a special way. I miss him terribly.

I hope that none of you blame yourselves. None of us were looking for the symptoms of an illness. It is my hope to have helped you better understand why your friend died.

With love ..... Charlie's Mom