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THE ENDLESS WAVE

Skateboarding, Death
& Spirituality



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An excerpt from the book

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Suicide, Skaters and Me

I just worked at a funeral service that thankfully, we don't see too often. It was for a middle-aged man who was a husband, father, camp director and artist. At age 47, he decided that the depression he was battling was too much and he took his own life.

When it comes to describing the amount of grief and emotional anguish felt by the family, I am truly at a loss for words. The amount of devastation that suicide creates in its path is incalculable. I know this because I am an eyewitness to it. This funeral wasn't just sad or painful, it was tragic. To see a son now fatherless is something that you never forget. As much as his mother, aunts, uncles and grandparents tried to console this boy, they all knew nothing would bring back his father.

This book is about discussing death and dying through the lens of two skateboarders. You knew this when you decided to start reading. We know that suicide is a very difficult topic but feel that it must be discussed. If you or someone you know is having suicidal thoughts, please, stop reading and seek help immediately.

I am not an expert on suicide, but I do know that men, 45-54 equate to 80% of all suicides in the USA. For those men in this demographic who still skate, I feel it is vital they are aware of this shocking statistic.

From what I have learned, there are 9 key reasons why people take their own life:

Depression

Traumatic stress

Substance abuse

Loss or fear of loss

Hopelessness

Chronic pain and illness

Feeling like a burden to others

Social isolation

Cry for help

I have known three skateboarders who have committed suicide and all but one were in this category. They were all men and I spent quite a bit of time with them. One was Warren Bolster and I've shared with you some of his stories. The second man, unfortunately, is someone I can't write about for reasons of confidentiality.

But the third man is someone who I can write about. His name was Martin Streek. Martin was a very well-known Toronto disc jockey and worked for many years at CFNY/The Edge. Our paths crossed because he was into longboarding back in the late 1990's. Martin was a pretty big deal in Toronto and to have him rolling around with my little crew of skaters was quite cool.

After one particularly bad fall, where he shredded his back with road rash, someone managed to take a photo and it appeared in the first edition of *International Longboarder Magazine* (of which I was the founder and co-publisher).

The times that I spent with Martin were pretty wild. He was a pretty intense guy to be with. He had a manic energy that was both amusing and alarming. I think it had something to do with his rock 'n' roll lifestyle. Oddly enough, we had more than just skateboarding in common.

We were born within 2 months of each other and we both had wide-ranging tastes in music. Although I had at one point in my life spent time working in the music industry, I was nowhere near Martin's level. From here, our similarities started to decrease. When I first met Martin, I was married (for over a decade) and living in suburbia with two kids. Martin, on the other hand, had a bachelor pad downtown. I can't speculate on his relationships, I am quite sure he had several hundred admirers!

In writing this piece, I looked up Martin on the internet. There was of course an immense amount of shock when the news first broke. But tied together with the story was the news that Martin had recently been fired from the radio station where he had dutifully volunteered and worked for 25 years. At the time of his dismissal, CFNY's ratings were suffering. They cleaned house and Martin was the last of the old guard to be sacked.

From the *Toronto Star*:

Streek's body was found at his apartment on Monday night, two months after he was let go from his 17-year on-air gig at 102.1 The Edge and mere hours after he'd updated his Facebook status with a cryptic and rather foreboding message: "So ... I guess that's it ... thanks everyone ... I'm sorry to those I should be sorry to, I love you to those that I love, and I will see you all again soon (not too soon though) ... Let the stories begin."

"Nobody saw this coming," said Alan Cross, noting that Streek had been pursuing several other projects since parting ways with The Edge.

"I saw him at the Nine Inch Nails/Jane's Addiction show. We sat together. He looked healthy, he looked fine. He looked like I would expect him to look. He was on his way to California to do some white-water rafting with a friend. He said, 'I've got some things planned,' and we just left it at that because he seemed to be okay. And that was the last I saw of him."

Paul Smith, Streek's agent for the past 15 years, was in a similar state of shock.

He spoke with his friend just before he left for California and he was in good spirits. Streek hadn't seemed terribly down about losing his job, either.

"He was so happy and vibrant and comedic and jovial and full of life and laughing and smiling that this is the last thing in the world I would expect Martin Streek to do, to walk off this earth on his own terms," said his friend and fellow Edge announcer Darrin Pfeiffer.

"That's why I'm so shocked. If he got hit by a bus, we'd still be sad, but it'd be like: 'Well, that happens. People get hit by buses.' But for him to take his own life, it's now sadness mixed with frustration mixed with a sprinkling of anger ... I love him like a brother, but I'm also pissed off at him. I'm pissed off that he would do something like this and leave us all so sad."

An article about Martin by Bert Archer in the Globe and Mail was even more telling. David Marsden, Martin's former boss hinted at one of the possible underlying reasons for his suicide.

This was not unfamiliar territory for Mr. Marsden, who'd been through several firings, a name change, and now works a 10-hours-a-week jockey gig at Oshawa's 94.9 The Rock. "What we are on the radio is what we is," Mr. Marsden says, remembering the last time he saw his old protégé. "When your job disappears, you ask, 'Who am I,' and too often the answer comes back, 'Nobody.'

Men are very much defined by their jobs and careers. When I think about the inner turmoil that Martin was going through as a result of being fired, I am sure it was soul destroying. When we value our job so much that we lose track of relationships, it can be a warning sign.

When it comes to suicide, I think it is the surprise that shocks people the most. They just didn't see it coming. And yet, hindsight can give us some additional clues. Beyond the termination, there was a breakup with a girlfriend that could have added to Martin's anguish (although very little was written about this). Perhaps there were money troubles as projects that Martin thought were coming to fruition, never did. Beyond the 9 reasons, there may

have been other factors. All we know is that Martin didn't have an opportunity to deal with his suicidal ideation before it became an actual suicide. That is the tragedy of suicide.

I know that within the next year, I will again be at another funeral that is a result of suicide. I will stand solemnly with the mourners, trying my best to be of support. I will notice their expressions of deep and monumental grief. Like them, I will search in vain for an explanation.

If this article has resonated with you and you know someone who is juggling with one or many of the 9 reasons for suicidal thoughts I urge you to be part of the solution. Take the time to spend time with that person and listen. Just being there for someone can make all the difference between life and death. There are a huge number of resources out there. It is just a question of how to get someone to start the process of seeking help.

Martin Streek was someone who I met through skateboarding and I'll never forget how much I enjoyed just hanging around with him. The truth is that while I only spent a small amount of time with Martin, his death still affects me to this day.

Update as of January 2024

Note:

Biker Sherlock was mentioned in this chapter in the original publication of this book. Biker was a professional skateboarder who won many medals at the X Games. He was also the founder of Dregs Skateboards. Dregs was an advertiser of mine for many years. Biker could sometimes be a difficult person to deal with. But he had a passion for action sports that was truly deep and genuine.

Biker died on December 2, 2015. Initially, it was believed that he committed suicide due to depression from brain injuries along with business troubles. However, a new theory has emerged that strongly suggests he was murdered. This is based on a forensic analysis by Scott Roder and his team at The Evidence Room.