

‘It’s worth giving life another day’

The message 3 years after attempting suicide

Earlier this year, Katy Coffin, a student at Eastern Maine Community College, made a video in which she discussed her own suicide attempt three years earlier. The video attracted hundreds of shares and thousands of views.



ALEX STEED

I spoke with Coffin earlier this week, and she shared some of her reflections.

What rings especially true about what Coffin, 23, has to say is that she didn’t even realize counseling services existed before she hit a crisis point.

When I was 17, I had a nervous breakdown, which prompted me to pursue counseling on my own. Beforehand, I’d thought counseling and psychiatry generally existed in film exclusively. Even after hitting a crisis point, my father, who was well intended but uneducated, took my decision to seek counseling as an affront and expressed his disdain for the idea.

Coffin’s message is a useful one both for students at particularly vulnerable points in their lives as well as parents and communities seeking to be more supportive of students in crisis.

The following are Coffin’s words:

“I had attempted suicide in 2012; I decided [to] tell my story and how I didn’t think I would ever see another day. One thousand days later, I am here thanks to help from my mom and various counseling services. Treatment and medication helped me to get to a better place.

“I had to speak publicly about it because a young man from Bangor High School had taken his own life that year [2014]. I was so dumbfounded that it could happen in our community. I’d wondered if it could have been prevented had he been able to get help for what he may have been facing. It lit the fire in me to speak publicly about what I had been facing before my attempt.

“The reaction to the video I made was huge. Thousands of people saw it, and hundreds shared. I got these messages that were so moving. One came from a mom of a young teen who had taken his own life. She said that she shared the video so that her son’s friends could see that it’s worth giving life another day — so they don’t see suicide as an option.

“There is a lot of stigma around suicide. For those who are considering it, they might think that seeking help will lead to stigma at school or the workplace because of what it suggests about mental health. People should know that seeking help should not be stigmatized. That’s one way we all can be supportive. People seem a lot more receptive to conversations about mental health today than was the case even a few years ago. But still, finding help can be a hard thing to do because of what we perceive people might think or say.

“In the video, I had said that suicide is selfish in that it removes the self from the Earth. But it does not come from a selfish place. It comes from enduring a lot of hurt, a lot of pain, and a lot of damage. People don’t know what other people are going through or what their struggle is.

“If you start to feel desperate, you need to find someone that you can call at the drop of a hat. If you don’t have a person like that, it is important to pursue counseling services. I didn’t even realize that there were several counseling centers in my area, and other people might not realize the same.

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GEORGE DANBY | BDN

Social Security zombies are standing in the way of fraud prevention

BY CHRISTOPHER BURNS
BDN STAFF

Americans are getting older and, according to Social Security records, some are getting really old. According to Social Security records, nearly 6.5 million Social Security Americans age 112 or older are still kicking.

Yet it’s doubtful so many Americans have reached such a ripe old age. As of Sept. 20, the Gerontology Research Group had confirmed only 44 people age 112 or older were living. Ten of them live in the U.S. The oldest confirmed Mainer, who died in 2008, was 110 years old.

In fact, the Social Security Administration’s inspector general concluded in March nearly all these 6.5 million supercentenarians in the U.S. were likely dead because they reported no earnings nor received Social Security benefits. What classified them as live was that their records had no listed dates of death. The inspector general confirmed only 13 cases in which the people were alive and drawing benefits.

The missing death information doesn’t just tip the age scales in Social Security Administration files. It represents a problem for many government agencies, as well as banks, insurance companies and other businesses that rely on Social Security death records to prevent possible identity theft and fraud.

Not on the Numident

Every year the Social Security Administration processes death information for about 2.8 million people; 94 percent of this information comes from family and state bureaus of vital statistics in the form of death certificates and the U.S. Treasury in the form of returned benefit payments, Social Security spokesman William Jarrett said in an email.

For instance, the Maine Office of Data, Research and Vital Statistics processes and verifies about 13,000 deaths each year and sends that information to the Social Security Administration, according to Kim Haggan, director of statistical services.

Once the Social Security Administration receives this death information, it enters that information into its electronic record-keeping system called the “Numident,” which replaced the old paper record system in 1972.

“The Social Security number remains in the Numident but is flagged as deceased so no program fraud can occur,” said Sean Brune, senior adviser to the agency’s deputy commissioner for budget, finance, quality and management.

The dead person’s record is then added to the Social Security “death master file,” which many public- and private-sector entities use for fraud and identity theft prevention.

Missing death information represents a problem for government, as well as companies that rely on the information to prevent misuse

According to an audit by Social Security Inspector General Patrick O’Carroll, most of the 6.5 million people whose death information is missing from the Numident, and hence the death master file, were born before June 16, 1901 — more than 70 years before Social Security started using electronic records and decades before Social Security even began.

The inspector general, though, could not determine why the Numident did not have their death information.

But if the number holders never received benefits, it’s likely that the Social Security Administration never confirmed death information from these people, as the administration “do[es] not verify reports of death received on non-Social Security beneficiaries,” Jarrett said.

The absence of death information is problematic because a range of federal programs, especially public assistance programs, rely on Social Security’s death records to prevent improper benefit payments. In addition, many other entities in the public and private sectors rely on them to prevent fraud and identity theft.

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Back to Business
Keep your workers (and business) healthy D4

MICHAEL CIANCHETTE
AND CYNTHIA DILL



Mike and Cynthia call it quits, but first predict the ‘16 elections

Mike: Cynthia, are you breaking up with me?

Cynthia: My goodness, no. I’m declaring my independence for your sake, Mike, and the sake of the country. You’re bright and funny and so reasonable ... and a Republican! You really need to run for president.

As for me, I’m thinking of becoming a Sumo wrestler. Did you know they compete to make babies cry?

Seriously, though, since it is our last column before the 2016 election, we owe our readers a few predictions, don’t you think?

Who’s going to win the GOP primary for president?

Mike: I’m only 31, and the Constitution we Republicans love so much requires candidates to reach age 35. So I predict Gov. John Kasich will be the last man standing, ultimately edging out Ms. Carly Fiorina. Yet guessing the GOP race is like predicting the 2018 women’s luge gold medalist — no one knows, but many have favorites! I’m pro-Julia Clukey, yet not backing a candidate yet.

I hope we’ve proved that people can disagree vehemently while still being civil, laughing, and, yes, being friends

What about your side of the aisle? Hillary Clinton has lots of \$1,000 friends in Cape. Does she have the Democratic nod locked, or will voters feel the Bern and hug the Biden?

Cynthia: If Republicans love the Constitution so much, why are so many of your presidential candidates talking about “anchor babies” as if the 14th Amendment didn’t exist?

And since when does someone’s religion determine their suitability for office?

Democrats will nominate Hillary Clinton as their candidate, but it will be a battle and she will go into the general election wounded by those in the party who administer ideological purity tests.

What about the 2nd Congressional District? Bruce Poliquin has taken heat lately for losing Maine jobs thanks to his reluctance to support the reauthorization of the Export-Import Bank. And Republicans are no longer singing his favorite tune about debt and deficit. Is he a one-hit wonder?

Mike: There is an interesting academic debate about jus soli birthright citizenship, but at this point it is just that — academic. And the Constitution prohibits religious tests for office; you’ll notice most Republicans voiced such responses.

Meanwhile, Bruce hasn’t voted against the Ex-Im Bank since there have been no votes, although he has expressed concerns. But today to November 2016 is longer than his entire tenure in office thus far, so don’t count him out just yet. I think we’ll see Rep. Poliquin Part II in 2017.

So who will lose in the general against him? Emily Cain of the Perpetual Campaign or Joe “I don’t need Nancy Pelosi” Baldacci?

Cynthia: Wholesome family values are rightly associated with

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