

SUICIDE IS PAINLESS

PRESENTED

TO

THE

ATHENEUM SOCIETY OF HOPKINSVILLE, KENTUCKY

MARCH 1, 2007

BY

JIM

LOVE

THOSE OF US WHO FALL INTO THE CATEGORY OF WHAT I CALL THE "LEFT HAND COLUMN" OF THE ATHENAEUM SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP LIST MAY RECALL AUGUST 1ST, 1966, WHEN A HOMICIDAL MANIAC WHOSE AUTOPSY SHOWED THE PRESENCE OF A BRAIN TUMOR SCALED THE "TEXAS TOWER" ON THE CAMPUS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS IN AUSTIN ARMED WITH AN ARSENAL INCLUDING AN M-1 RIFLE, A REMINGTON 700 HIGH-POWERED RIFLE WITH SCOPE, A 35 CALIBER REMINGTON RIFLE, A 12 GAUGE SHOTGUN, A .357 MAGNUM PISTOL, A LUGAR PISTOL, AND AN ITALIAN GALISI-BRESCIA PISTOL, ALONG WITH SURVIVAL EQUIPMENT, INCLUDING A CAN OF SPAM, AND FIRED ROUNDS FOR BETTER THAN AN HOUR AND A HALF.

WHEN THE CARNAGE WAS OVER, BROUGHT TO A CLOSE BY OFFICERS WHO STILL ARGUE OVER WHO HAD THE HONOR OF SHOOTING 24-YEAR OLD CHARLES WHITMAN, THERE WERE 15 DEAD, INCLUDING WHITMAN'S WIFE AND MOTHER, WHO HE KILLED THE PREVIOUS EVENING, AND 31 WOUNDED, THOUGH THERE ARE THOSE WHO ARGUE THAT THE DEATH TOLL WAS 15, WITH ONE PERSON INVOLVED LATER COMMITTING SUICIDE AND A WOMAN MISCARRYING A BABY.

THE TOWER, WHICH 7 FEET TALLER THAN A FOOTBALL FIELD IS FROM GOAL LINE TO GOAL LINE, OPENED IN 1937 AND BY THE YEAR OF THE TOWER MASSACRE, IT ATTRACTED 20,000 VISITORS A YEAR, MAINLY FOR THE SPECTACULAR VIEW OF AUSTIN FROM THE 28TH STORY OBSERVATION DECK, WHICH IS THE VANTAGE POINT FROM WHICH WHITMAN TERRORIZED THE AREA FROM 96 MINUTES.

SEVERAL PRIOR DEATHS HAD BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH THE TOWER, INCLUDING A CONSTRUCTION WORKER IN 1935, ANOTHER ACCIDENTAL DEATH IN 1950, AND THEN SUICIDES IN 1945, 49, AND 61.

THE TOWER WAS CLOSED FOR A TIME AFTER WHITMAN'S DEADLY RAMPAGE, BUT EVENTUALLY RE-OPENED, ONLY TO BE THE SCENE OF SEVERAL MORE SUICIDES AND SUICIDE ATTEMPTS.

ONE SUCH EVENT IS RECOUNTED IN WHICH A TEXAS RANGER WAS SENT TO THE CAMPUS IN AN ATTEMPT TO "TALK DOWN" A MAN WHO WAS THREATENING SUICIDE.

AFTER A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION WAS ESTABLISHED, THE NEGOTIATIONS BEGAN, WITH THE RANGER BECOMING INCREASINGLY FRUSTRATED WITH THE WOULD-BE SUICIDE.

HE FINALLY SAID, ''THINK ABOUT YOUR FATHER'', AND THE REPLY CAME, ''THE HELL WITH MY FATHER''.

THE RANGER PERSISTED, ''THINK ABOUT YOUR MOTHER'', AND THE RESPONSE WAS THE SAME, '' THE HELL WITH MY MOTHER''.

REACHING INTO HIS BAG OF TRICKS FOR THE MOST REVERED AND HALLOWED IMAGE HE COULD IMAGINE, THE RANGER SAID, ''WELL, THINK ABOUT THE GREAT STATE OF TEXAS''.

TO WHICH THE MAN HOLLERED, ''THE HELL WITH THE STATE OF TEXAS''.

THE RANGER RESPONDED IMMEDIATELY, SUGGESTING, ''JUMP, YOU SON-OF-A-BITCH, JUMP''.

AS THE SELF-PROCLAIMED ''KING OF THE LIGHTWEIGHTS'' AMONG ATHENAEUM PRESENTORS, I SUSPECT MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY WHO HAVE HEARD MY PAPERS OVER THE YEARS CAME TONIGHT WITH THE EXPECTATION OF ANOTHER IN A SERIES OF PAPERS WITH SOME ENTERTAINMENT VALUE (I WOULD HOPE) AND A LITTLE SHORT ON ACTUAL RESEARCH.

HOWEVER, SINCE I WENT TO THE TROUBLE OF ASKING MR. HAL KING--THE TWO-TIME ''HALL OF FAMER'' (NOT AS A MEMBER OF THE ATHENAEUM SOCIETY)--TO TRADE PLACES WITH ME BECAUSE OF MY BRIEF--AND ILL-FATED--STAB AT ELECTORAL POLITICS, (WHICH WOULD HAVE GENERATED A RATHER ENTERTAINING PAPER, I GUARANTEE), I THOUGHT IT ONLY FAIR TO EXPEND A LITTLE MORE EFFORT THAN USUAL TO PROVIDE AN AUDIENCE SUCH AS YOURSELVES, WHO HAVE MANY MORE OPTIONS FOR ENLIGHTMENT, EDUCATION, AND EVEN ENTERTAINMENT, WITH A PRESENTATION WORTHY OF YOUR ATTENTION.

THEREFORE, I PICKED THE ''DEADLY'' SERIOUS TOPIC OF ''SUICIDE''.

A woman, fair of face and long of leg is standing on the G.W. Bridge preparing to jump. "Life is no good to me!", she thinks and steels herself for the rush of air as she plummets to her doom.

Just then, a merchant-marine shows up, screeches to a halt and hops out of his car. "What are you doing?", he asks. She responds by saying, "Life is awful - I'm going to end it all!"

With a look of sincerest pity, the marine says, "Listen, don't jump. I'm about to be shipped out to the Mediteranean. Why don't you come along with me. I'll stow you away on the ship, and when we get to the other side of the ocean, I'll give you a little money to get started - you can start a whole new life! All I ask in return is gratuitous sex on the trip over."

The woman considers this, thinking "A new life! - for a little sex?" Not only would she get a new life out of the deal, but the marine IS kinda handsome - sex won't be so bad at all.

"OK", she agreed. And with that, the marine took her to the ship and they left port - she, stowed-away under a lifeboat.

Every day, the marine would bring her food and water and she would perform the gratuitous sex. Everything was great. But about 10 days into the journey across the sea, the ship's captain was walking the deck when he heard a noise from under the lifeboat. Looking under it, he found the beautiful woman.

"What are you doing here?", asked the captain.

"I'm sorry sir," she cried, "I'm a stow-away traveling to Europe to start a new life. I didn't mean to make a fool of you by hiding aboard your ship."

"Me?" the captain asked. "What about you?"

"What do you mean?" she asked.

To which the captain said, "This is the Staten Island Ferry."

I BELIEVE EACH OF US HAS A ''SUICIDE STORY''--THAT IS, THE ABSOLUTE LOWEST POINT IN ONE'S LIFE, WHEN, IF WE WERE SO INCLINED--AND THAT IS AFFECTED BY A WIDE VARIETY OF FACTORS, INCLUDING SOBRIETY, AGE, MEDICAL CONDITION, AND PERSONAL SITUATION--WE WOULD CHOOSE TO VOLUNTARILY END OUR LIVES

MINE DATES BACK TO A 9-MONTH PERIOD IN 1964 WHEN I FLUNKED OUT OF COLLEGE, LOST THE ONLY JOB I'VE EVER BEEN FIRED FROM, AND WAS DRUNK WHEN I WRECKED BY MOM'S BRAND NEW 1965 FORD FALCON CAR.

LEAVING THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AFTER 3 SEMESTERS AND 28 HOURS OF EARNED CREDIT WAS DIFFICULT FOR A PERSON WHO HAD UP TO THAT POINT IN HIS LIFE SUFFERED FEW--IN ANY--SETBACKS OF ANY MAGNITUDE, THOUGH--IN A PREVIEW OF THINGS TO COME, I DID LOSE THE RACE FOR SENIOR CLASS PRESIDENT IN 1961.

LIFE HAD BEEN REMARKABLY EASY FOR A MIDDLE-CLASS YOUTH WHO ''TESTED WELL'' AND WAS ABLE TO GENERATE WELL ABOVE PASSING RESULTS WITH A MINIMAL EFFORTS--AT LEAST UNTIL I GOT INTO ''BIG TEN'' CLASSROOMS WHERE MUCH MORE WAS EXPECTED, AND A COMBINATION OF FACTORS, INCLUDING AN ABSENCE OF ''FAMILIAR FACES'' ON A DAY-TO-DAY BASIS LED TO A MILD CASE OF DEPRESSION CULMINATING WITH MY DEPARTURE FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS IN THE WINTER OF 1964.

I WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO RETURN TO A JOB WITH THE POST OFFICE IN MY HOME TOWN OF SOUTH ELGIN, ILLINOIS AND I ACQUIRED A SECOND JOB AT THE HOFFER PLASTICS FACTORY, WHERE I WAS THE LONE MALE MACHINE OPERATOR AMONG 12 ON THE FLOOR, WITH THE ''FLOOR FOREMAN'' NAMED DELBERT HARRIS FROM WALLINS CREEK, KENTUCKY, IN CHARGE OF THE SHIFT AND TWO HENCHMEN---CHARLIE TRAIL, ALSO FROM WALLINS CREEK, AND DONNIE RAY THIGPEN, OF FORREST CITY, ARKANSAS.

I GOT CROSSWAYS WITH DONNIE RAY AFTER HE TRIED TO SHOW ME UP IN FRONT OF THE FEMALE MACHINE WORKERS.

I GAVE HIM 'THE FINGER'--IN FULL VIEW OF ABOUT 10 WOMEN--AND MY FATE WAS SEALED.

HE RAN TO DELBERT AND I GOT CANNED

SO I WAS TWO FOR TWO THAT FALL WHEN I ENROLLED AT MY LOCAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE TO AVOID THE DRAFT WITH THE VIET NAM WAR INCREASING IN INTENSITY IN THE SUMMER OF 1964 WHEN NORTH VIETNAMESE REGULARS ENTERED THE FRAY AND THE WEEKLY DEATH TOLL OF AMERICANS HIT THE '3-FIGURE' MARK.

EARLY THAT WINTER, I WAS SUPPOSED TO MEET ONE OF MY CLASSMATES FOR A NIGHT OF BEER DRINKING AND BOWLING IN WEST CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, A TOWN I WAS VAGUELY FAMILIAR WITH.

HE FAILED TO SHOW, BUT ANOTHER GUY I KNEW SHOWED UP SO WE SKIPPED THE BOWLING AND HAD A FEW BEERS IN THE BAR AT THE ALLEY BEFORE PARTING WAYS AROUND MIDNIGHT ON THAT FATEFUL EVENING.

I MADE A WRONG TURN AND ENDED UP IN A RESIDENTIAL AREA WHERE I WAS CONFRONTED BY A 'HAIRPIN TURN' WITH ONE INCANDESCENT LIGHT BULB ON THE INNER ARC.

I WENT STRAIGHT AND PLOWED INTO A PILE OF 'PATCHING MATERIAL' OF THE KIND USED TO 'SPOT PATCH' POTHOLES, WITH THE MATERIAL APPARENTLY DUMPED THERE AT THE END OF THE PAVING SEASON EARLY THAT FALL, AND IT HAD SINCE FROZEN SOLID.

THOUGH I DON'T BELIEVE I WAS DOING MUCH OVER 30 MILES PER HOUR ON IMPACT IN MY MOM'S NEW FORD FALCON WHICH HAD 12-HUNDRED MILES ON IT, THE VEHICLE RAN UP ON THE HOT PATCH AND THEN CAME DOWN, BENDING THE MOTOR MOUNTS, RUPTURING THE RADIATOR, BENDING THE GRILL, FRONT BUMPER AND PUSHING THE FENDERS BACK SUCH THAT I HAD TO CLIMB IN THE BACK SEAT TO GET OUT OF THE 4 DOOR CAR.

ON MARCH 23, 1994, THE MEDICAL EXAMINER VIEWED THE BODY OF RONALD OPUS AND CONCLUDED THAT HE DIED FROM A SHOTGUN WOUND TO THE HEAD. THE DECEDENT HAD JUMPED FROM THE TOP OF A TEN-STORY BUILDING INTENDING TO COMMIT SUICIDE. HE LEFT A NOTE TO THAT EFFECT INDICATING HIS DESPONDENCY. AS HE FELL PAST THE NINTH FLOOR, HIS LIFE WAS INTERRUPTED BY A SHOTGUN BLAST PASSING THROUGH A WINDOW, WHICH KILLED HIM INSTANTLY. NEITHER THE SHOOTER NOR THE DECEDENT WAS AWARE THAT A SAFETY NET HAD BEEN INSTALLED JUST BELOW AT THE EIGHTH FLOOR LEVEL TO PROTECT SOME BUILDING WORKERS AND THAT RONALD OPUS WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO COMPLETE HIS SUICIDE THE WAY HE HAD PLANNED. ORDINARILY, DR. MILLS CONTINUED, "A PERSON WHO SETS OUT TO COMMIT SUICIDE AND ULTIMATELY SUCCEEDS, EVEN THOUGH THE MECHANISM MIGHT NOT BE WHAT HE INTENDED" IS STILL DEFINED AS COMMITTING SUICIDE. MR. OPUS WAS SHOT ON THE WAY TO CERTAIN DEATH NINE STORIES BELOW AT STREET LEVEL, BUT HIS SUICIDE ATTEMPT PROBABLY WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL BECAUSE OF THE SAFETY NET. THIS CAUSED THE MEDICAL EXAMINER TO FEEL THAT HE HAD A HOMICIDE ON HIS HANDS. THE ROOM ON THE NINTH FLOOR FROM WHENCE THE SHOTGUN BLAST EMANATED WAS OCCUPIED BY AN ELDERLY MAN AND HIS WIFE. THEY WERE ARGUING VIGOROUSLY, AND HE WAS THREATENING HER WITH A SHOTGUN. THE MAN WAS SO UPSET THAT WHEN HE PULLED THE TRIGGER HE COMPLETELY MISSED HIS WIFE AND THE PELLETS WENT THROUGH THE WINDOW STRIKING MR. OPUS. WHEN ONE INTENDS TO KILL SUBJECT A, BUT KILLS SUBJECT B IN THE ATTEMPT, ONE IS GUILTY OF THE MURDER OF SUBJECT B. WHEN CONFRONTED WITH THE MURDER CHARGE, THE OLD MAN AND HIS WIFE WERE BOTH ADAMANT. THEY BOTH SAID THEY THOUGHT THE SHOTGUN WAS UNLOADED. THE OLD MAN SAID IT WAS HIS LONG STANDING HABIT TO THREATEN HIS WIFE WITH THE UNLOADED SHOTGUN. HE HAD NO INTENTION TO MURDER HER. THEREFORE THE KILLING OF MR. OPUS APPEARED TO BE AN ACCIDENT, THAT IS, THE GUN HAD BEEN ACCIDENTALLY LOADED. THE CONTINUING INVESTIGATION TURNED UP A WITNESS WHO SAW THE OLD COUPLE'S SON LOADING THE SHOTGUN ABOUT SIX WEEKS PRIOR TO THE FATAL ACCIDENT. IT TRANSPIRED THAT THE OLD LADY HAD CUT OFF HER SON'S FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND THE SON, KNOWING THE PROPENSITY OF HIS FATHER TO USE THE SHOTGUN THREATENINGLY, LOADED THE GUN WITH THE EXPECTATION THAT HIS FATHER WOULD SHOOT HIS MOTHER. THE CASE NOW BECOMES ONE OF MURDER ON THE PART OF THE SON FOR THE DEATH OF RONALD OPUS. NOW COMES THE EXQUISITE TWIST. FURTHER INVESTIGATION REVEALED THAT THE SON WAS IN FACT RONALD OPUS. HE HAD BECOME INCREASINGLY DESPONDENT OVER BOTH THE LOSS OF HIS FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND THE FAILURE OF HIS ATTEMPT TO ENGINEER HIS MOTHER'S MURDER. THIS LED HIM TO JUMP OFF THE TEN-STORY BUILDING ON MARCH 23RD, ONLY TO BE KILLED BY A SHOTGUN BLAST PASSING THROUGH THE NINTH-STORY WINDOW. THE SON HAD ACTUALLY MURDERED HIMSELF, SO THE MEDICAL EXAMINER CLOSED THE CASE AS A SUICIDE.

I CAN REMEMBER PUTTING MY HAND UNDER THE RADIATOR TO DETERMINE WHETHER I COULD DRIVE THE VEHICLE, AND THE FIRST THOUGHT THAT ENTERED MY MIND WHEN THE HOT ANTI-FREEZE HIT MY HAND WAS, "YOU OUGHT TO JOIN THE ARMY"'. .

THAT WAS THE WORST THING I THOUGHT I COULD DO TO MYSELF UNDER THOSE CIRCUMSTANCES.

FORTUNATELY, I SOBERED UP, STRAIGHTENED OUT, GRADUATED FROM JUNIOR COLLEGE, CAME TO KENTUCKY, MET MY WIFE, GRADUATED FROM MURRAY STATE...AND THEN GOT DRAFTED.

AND...YOU KNOW...I WAS RIGHT. JOINING THE ARMY WAS THE WORST THING I COULD HAVE DONE TO MYSELF, AND CERTAINLY NOT AS PERMANENT AND PAINFUL AS SUICIDE.

(#3)

ONE OF THE PIECES OF INFORMATION I CAME ACROSS DURING MY RESEARCH, WHICH WAS CONDUCTED EXCLUSIVELY ON THE INTERNET, WAS THE FACT THAT THERE ARE 6 SURVIVORS OF EACH SUICIDE, WHO ARE INTIMATELY AFFECTED BY SOMEONE CLOSE TO THEM WHO TOOK THEIR LIFE.

IN THE UNITED STATES, THAT FIGURE IS ESTIMATED AT 4 AND A HALF MILLION PEOPLE, BASED ON THE 3-QUARTERS OF A MILLION PEOPLE WHO COMMITTED SUICIDE BETWEEN 1980 AND 1984.

THAT AMOUNTS TO ONE OF EVERY 65 AMERICANS, WITH 6 NEW SURVIVORS ADDED EVERY 16 MINUTES, FOR THAT'S THE FREQUENCY OF SUICIDES IN THE U.S.

I BECAME A SUICIDE SURVIVOR IN THE SPRING OF 1996, WHEN MY FATHER DECIDED THAT HE DIDN'T WANT TO TURN 90.

AT THE AGE OF 89 YEARS AND 364 DAYS, ON SATURDAY MORNING, MAY 25TH, 1996, JAMES T. LOVE OF ROUTE TWO, VIENNA, ILLINOIS, WAITED FOR MY MOM TO GO TO THE BEAUTY SHOP AND THEN GOT A PISTOL AND A CHAIR AND SAT DOWN IN THE FRONT YARD OF THEIR HOME ON STATE ROUTE 146 ABOUT 5 MILES OUTSIDE OF TOWN AND SHOT HIMSELF.

PART OF HIS TAKING HIS LIFE WAS UNDERSTANDABLE--THAT IS, HE WAS USED TO FEELING WELL FOR MOST OF HIS LIFE AND HIS HEALTH HAD DECLINED IN RECENT MONTHS.

COUPLED WITH THAT WERE SOME SIGHT PROBLEMS, THOUGH HE HAD JUST BEEN EXAMINED AND FITTED FOR ONE OF THOSE DEVICES WHICH LOOK LIKE A JEWELER'S GLASS, AND HEARING PROBLEMS REQUIRING HIM TO LISTEN TO RADIO AND T-V BROADCASTS MUCH TO THE CHAGRIN OF MY MOTHER, WHO COULD HEAR PERFECTLY WELL..

HOWEVER, THE LAST STRAW--AND I'VE HEARD SEVERAL PEOPLE MENTION THIS UNDER SIMILAR CIRCUMSTANCES--WAS THE LOSS OF HIS DRIVER'S LICENSE WHEN HE COULD NO LONGER PASS THE ANNUAL TEST ILLINOIS REQUIRES AFTER A CERTAIN AGE.

HE OBVIOUSLY PLANNED THE EVENT, PARTICULARLY SO MY MOM, WHO HAD BEEN MARRIED TO FOR 61 YEARS, WOULD NOT FIND HIM, BUT HE LEFT NO NOTE, AND SADLY, I COULD ONLY VAGUELY REMEMBER OUR LAST MEETING SINCE, BECAUSE OF HIS HEARING PROBLEM, WE DIDN'T CONVERSE ON THE TELEPHONE, AND IT HAD BEEN SOME TIME SINCE WE'D MADE THE HOUR AND A HALF DRIVE TO SOUTHERN ILLINOIS, FEELING NO SENSE OF URGENCY BECAUSE THE GENERAL OVERALL HEALTH OF BOTH MY PARENTS WAS GOOD.

LITTLE DID I KNOW WHAT HE WAS THINKING, NOR DO I KNOW TO THIS DAY.

IT'S HARD NOT TO SYMPATHIZE WITH SOMEONE WHO IS A DAY SHORT OF 90, WHO CAN'T HEAR VERY WELL, HAS LOST MOST OF HIS SIGHT, AND HAS HAD HIS FREEDOM TO DRIVE TAKEN AWAY FROM HIM, BUT AT THE SAME TIME, I CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL SOME GUILT FOR NOT SEEING IT AS A POSSIBILITY, THOUGH THE REMOVAL OF HIS GUNS--AND HE HAD SEVERAL LONG GUNS IN ADDITION TO THE PISTOL--WOULD NOT HAVE DETERRED A RESOURCEFUL MAN LIKE MY FATHER, EVEN AT THE AGE OF 90.

ENOUGH OF THAT...HERE'S SUICIDE JOKE NUMBER TWO..

A BLONDE HURRIES INTO THE EMERGENCY ROOM LATE ONE NIGHT WITH THE TIP OF HER INDEX FINGER SHOT OFF.

"HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?" THE EMERGENCY ROOM DOCTOR ASKED HER.

"WELL I WAS TRYING TO COMMIT SUICIDE" THE BLONDE REPLIED.

"WHAT?" SPATTERED THE DOCTOR. "YOU TRIED TO COMMIT SUICIDE BY SHOOTING YOUR FINGER OFF???"

"NO SILLY!" THE BLONDE SAID. "FIRST I PUT THE GUN TO MY CHEST, AND I THOUGHT: I JUST PAID \$6,000.00 FOR THESE BREAST IMPLANTS, I'M NOT SHOOTING MYSELF IN THE CHEST.

"SO THEN?" ASKED THE DOCTOR.

"THEN I PUT THE GUN IN MY MOUTH, AND I THOUGHT: I JUST PAID \$3000.00 TO GET MY TEETH STRAIGHTENED, I'M NOT SHOOTING MYSELF IN THE MOUTH."

"SO THEN?"

"THEN I PUT THE GUN TO MY EAR, AND I THOUGHT: THIS IS GOING TO MAKE A LOUD NOISE. SO I PUT MY FINGER IN THE OTHER EAR BEFORE I PULLED THE TRIGGER."

SUICIDE AS A CAUSE OF DEATH IN THE U.S. RANKS 11TH ON THE LETHALITY LIST BETWEEN SEPTICEMIA AND CHRONIC LIVER DISEASE, INCLUDING CIRRHOSIS, AND WELL BACK OF HEART DISEASE, CANCER, STROKES, RESPIRATORY DISEASES, AND ACCIDENTS, WITH UNINTENTIONAL FATAL INJURIES RANKING NUMBER 5.

SUICIDE IS THE THIRD LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH FOR THE YOUNG, THAT IS, THOSE AGES 10 TO 24, WITH AN EVEN 1700 AMERICANS BETWEEN THE AGES OF 15 AND 19 TAKING THEIR LIVES IN 2-THOUSAND 4, WHICH IS THE YEAR I OBTAINED DATA FOR.

BILL MAHER SAYS SUICIDE IS MAN'S WAY OF TELLING GOD, 'YOU CAN'T FIRE ME..I QUIT'', WITH THE TAKING OF ONE'S LIFE PRIMARILY A MALE ACT IN THE U.S. WITH ALMOST 4 BOYS AND MEN KILLING THEMSELVES FOR EVERY ONE FEMALE.

GUNS ARE THE PREFERRED METHOD, ACCOUNTING FOR OVER HALF, WITH HANGING OR SUFFOCATION NUMBER TWO.

IT IS ALSO A 'WESTERN PHENOMENON', WITH 13 OF THE 14 HIGHEST SUICIDE RATES IN THE UNITED STATES POSTED IN STATES WEST OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER.

ONLY WEST VIRGINIA AMONG EASTERN STATES RANKS IN THE TOP 14--AT NUMBER 8.

THAT RATE IS ABOUT 16 SUICIDES PER HUNDRED THOUSAND POPULATION.

KENTUCKY, BY THE WAY, IS IN A TIE WITH KANSAS FOR 16TH PLACE--AGAIN BASED ON 2-THOUSAND 4 FIGURES--WITH THE RATE IN THE BLUEGRASS PUT AT 13 AND A HALF PER HUNDRED THOUSAND POPULATION.

HISTORICALLY, ANNUAL SUICIDE RATES IN THE U.S. HAVE BEEN 'STABLE', RANGING BETWEEN 12-POINT-4 TO 10-POINT-7, WITH THE LATEST RATE 11-POINT-1.

AND THAT'S MY LITTLE STORY ABOUT SUICIDES, WHICH IS ACTUALLY A
''BACKUP'' TO A BASEBALL PAPER CONCERNING THE RECENT DEATH OF HANK BAUER.

AS FOR THE ATTEMPTED HUMOR, LET ME QUOTE..'LAUGHTER IS THE OTHER WAY
OF REACTING TO THE RAW DEAL OF OUR BRIEF EXISTENCE. WHILST CLOSELY RELATED
TO SCREAMING, IT IS LESS SHRILL AND MORE CONGENIAL. AND IT SEEMS TO PRODUCE
IN HUMANS SOME AS-YET UNDISCOVERED ENZYME THAT DULLS PAIN AND GIVES A
FEELING OF PLEASURABLE ACQUISCENCE. SCIENTISTS STUDYING TEARS OF SORROW
HAVE RECENTLY DETECTED A CHEMICAL THAT CANNOT BE FOUND IN TEARS OF JOY--IT
SEEMS THAT BY WEEPING WE PRODUCE INFINITESTIMAL AMOUNTS OF AN INTERNAL
NARCOTIC THAT HITS RECEPTORS IN THE BRAIN, AND, IN TURN, DULLS OUR PAIN.

ME, I WOUND UP IN THE ARMY....THE SON-OF-A-BITCH ON THE TOWER TOOK THE
TEXAS RANGER'S ADVICE..HE JUMPED.