


ON VETERANS AND SUICIDE AND LD 60

I find it devastating to refer to a young person in the past tense. I knew Jacob George only briefly. I met him at a Veterans For Peace convention where he stood out because of his charm and his amazing musical skills. He was a singer songwriter. He was also an Afghanistan War veteran. He was a rising star. He was... He was... He killed himself on September 17, 2014.

In another part of my life I led discussion groups at Togus's psychiatric ward weekly for about three years. The groups focused on veterans' poetry, and the patients were encouraged to use their therapeutic journals to search out material for possible poems. I am no psychiatrist, but my guess is that many of these young men and women were suicidal. They were fortunate enough to have someone in their lives get them into that ward where these amazing nurses and doctors could work with them. Not to mention their fellow patients who would gather in what we Vietnam veterans refer to as "rap groups."

So how do these narratives relate to LD 60? We used to refer to suicide as a "permanent solution to a temporary problem." Time is the key factor. Even though we are talking about a relatively small percentage of the "suicide population" when we refer to veterans, we are often looking at young people with much potential. Someone might have reached Jacob before he took that fateful step of annihilation. Someone did find the Togus patients in time. So what if a loved one finds out that a young veteran in their community has suddenly applied to purchase a weapon? If given a day or two to inquire why, and then, if appropriate, to uncover a moment of intense distress that might have led to that purchase, a "rap" with her or him could save a life.

Sure, sure there are many "what if's" weaving their way through this scenario, but if my loved one is saved from committing suicide because there was someone who had the time and the empathy and, yes, love to step forward and offer an ear and a heart, then it is well worth the time and the so-called "red tape inconvenience" to pause a person's slide into oblivion. LD 60 could offer that moment. Please find it in your hearts to pass this bill forward into the hands of your fellow Mainers. You may be saving a life. Thank you.

Doug Rawlings 
Chesterville, ME
7/15th Artillery
Vietnam II Corps
7/2/1969 to 8/9/1970