

A suicide story too important to hide

March 3, 2013 by Daniel J. Bauer

News this week of still another shocking student suicide in Taiwan should do more than only sadden and frustrate us. This is a story that parents and educators should jump on and seize for its educative potential.

That is not to say we want to beat up our young friends with the discontent that we feel in top-heavy, lecture-down hectoring in our homes or classes. A whopping majority of our university student population will readily agree that this was a tragedy that simply should not have happened. There will be little need to urge students to think, and to think deeply, of the countless negatives here.

We need to help students open up over a period of time, with sensitive and patient, step-by-step prodding, to grasp the truth that life (especially young life) is truly worth living, no matter how intense or awful emotional pain may sometimes become. There is something here as well about the fight that we cannot afford to surrender to.

There are points in our lives when like boxers we must slug it out with our doubts, our hurts, our failures, our feelings of shame and abandonment. If giving in means giving up on life, letting our life go, throwing our life away, then giving in is the one thing we must fight not to do.

The news appeared in Thursday's Chinese press. I looked for it in our local English papers, but could not find it. Nor did anything come on Friday, either. Presumably, most who read English newspapers in a Mandarin-speaking land are foreigners from the west. Another Taiwanese death? For what? Is that our concern? But of course it is. Whenever any young person leaves us for no good reason, all of us are the losers.

A young Taiwanese woman, jilted in what she once thought was love, leaps to her death from the sixth floor of an apartment complex. A sophomore in a Taichung college, she was, aged 21, reportedly getting acceptable grades, interacting with friends, and appearing to her family over the recent New Year break as a trifle distracted, but otherwise no different than her usual self.

Speaking of a loss like this one, we tread with

fearful steps indeed to avoid creating even the slightest impression that we are belittling or condemning a young woman who has now left us. Surely this student was only a troubled, not an evil person. She had no intent to hurt those whom she loved or who loved her.

Some may say the student's first big mistake was getting in over her head in a romantic and physical relationship in the first semester of her sophomore year. One Chinese newspaper implied it was common knowledge that for the past several months, she was holed up at her boyfriend's apartment for days and nights at a time.

How many first semester sophomores do you know who have the depth of character, the maturity, and the sense of responsibility required to maintain a healthy intimate relationship? Most of our parents and teachers are afraid to discuss this question with our youth.

Sexual intimacy in itself is not, of course, related to suicide. But fury at being dropped by someone you thought you had "won," and the sense of loss that results when a third party catches the eye of your beloved and pushes you out of the picture, may do a lot to make a vulnerable youth feel rejected and desperate.

To make a decision at age 21 that life is not worth living because someone you thought was a true friend betrayed you, is pure foolishness. We may not like speaking so bluntly, but we've no other choice. These are the words of truth.

If you are a woman and find yourself in undeserved misery because of a broken heart, ask yourself if you really want to throw your life away for a jerk. And if you're a guy, stop and get a grip. Why choke yourself because someone you thought you knew turned out unable to love you? End your life because of a broken dream? Why do that to yourself?

This loss of life by suicide, a loss that did not have to happen, gives us so much to ponder. By itself, however, pondering is useless. Here is a loss we should talk with our young people about, and talk about with courage and candor.

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Talking points:

1. This column says parents and university professors are often afraid to talk with young people about romance, sex, and suicide. Do you agree? The column says there are times when we must talk about these issues. What is your view? When should we talk, if we should?
2. The writer directly hints in this particular case of a relationship between the suicide of the sophomore student and her romantic life, her physical involvement with her former boyfriend. How do you feel? Is it fair (or logical?) to connect these parts of her life?
3. Some students may not want to read a column on such serious subjects as these. Does the column bother you? Is it too serious for a family newspaper?

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