

LAST THOUGHTS OF A SINKING MIND

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ABSTRACT

Famous personalities discussed below were once among us until they conceded to the last thoughts of their sinking mind. These last thoughts are often reflected in suicide notes. Suicide and suicide notes have long lasting and grave emotional and social consequences for the family left behind. The context of the suicide and the note has a very important correlation which is essential to the understanding of the suicide process. These notes are also vital tools in suicide research and are also been helpful in suicide prevention.

Key Words: Suicidal Thoughts, Suicidal Notes, Suicide

BACKGROUND

People belonging from all spheres of life, throughout the world have succumbed to suicide at some point in time. Some of the people leave suicide notes. A suicide note offers a glimpse into the motives behind the suicide and is only a fragment of what was going on in the mind of the person. Such notes have been used by researchers as tools to study the phenomenon of suicide and the validity of theories regarding it. It is estimated that 1 in 4 people who commit suicide leave a note¹.

This article includes a selected few famous people from all over the world who committed suicide and left notes. The biographical data and suicide notes were collected by literature search using key word suicide note, suicide thoughts, and famous people committed suicide.

Freddie Prinze (1954-1977), American comedian, known for his role in the popular 1970s television sitcom *Chico and the Man*. He shot himself in the head after a telephone conversation with his ex-wife. He left a suicide note which read; "I must end it. There is no hope. I will be at peace. No one had anything to do with it. My decision totally"².

Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890) renowned 19th century Dutch painter, died two days after shooting himself. He was largely unknown at the time of his death. His last words to his brother were "The sadness will last forever"³.

Kevin Carter (1960-1994) was South African photojournalist. He dedicated his career to covering the feuds in native South Africa. He died of carbon monoxide poisoning, at age 33. Carter's suicide note read:" I am depressed. I am haunted by the vivid memories of killings and corpses and anger and pain... of starving or wounded

children, of trigger-happy madmen, often police, of killer executioners... I have gone to join Ken [recently deceased colleague Ken Oosterbroek] if I am that lucky"⁴.

Lee Eun Ju (1980-2005), a South Korean actress, killed herself at age 24 by slitting her wrists and hanging herself. She left a suicide note addressed to her mother and written in blood, "Mom, I am sorry and I love you." Another separate note said, "I wanted to do too much. Even though I live, I'm not really alive. I don't want anyone to be disappointed. It's nice having money... I wanted to make money"⁵.

Wendy O. Williams (1949-1998), Lead singer of American Punk band *Plasmatics*, first attempted suicide by stabbing herself in the chest with a knife but changed her mind and called a friend to take her to hospital. She successfully attempted suicide a second time 4 years later, this time by an overdose of ephedrine. She left a rather different suicide note saying: "I don't believe that people should take their own lives without deep and thoughtful reflection over a considerable period of time"⁶.

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) English novelist, essayist, publisher who has several notable books to her credit such as 'To the lighthouse' and 'Mrs. Dalloway' and 'Orlando'; she wore a coat, filled it pockets with stones and walked into River Ouse near her home and drowned herself. In the suicide note she left for her husband she wrote: "I feel certain that I am going mad again. I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times. ... I begin to hear voices, and I can't concentrate. So I am doing what seems the best thing to do.... I can't fight any longer.... What I want to say is I owe all the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good... If anybody could have saved me it would have been you. Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness..."⁷.

George Sanders (1906-1972) was an Academy Award winning British Actor, was found dead at a coastal town near Barcelona where he has come on vacations. He was 65 years old at the time. In an autobiography written by his friend it was stated that Sanders had predicted that he would commit suicide at the age of 65. His suicide note stated: "Dear World, I am leaving because I am bored. I feel I have lived long enough. I am leaving you with your worries in this sweet cesspool. Good luck"⁸.

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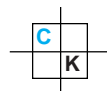
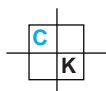
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Getulio Vargas (1882-1954), served as President of Brazil twice. He committed suicide during his second presidential tenure after a political debacle. Vargas shot himself in the chest, his popularly quoted last words were: "Serenely, I take my first step on the road to eternity and I leave life to enter history"⁹.

Nicolas Sebastian Chamfort (1741-1794), French writer, was an illegitimate child raised by a grocer's wife. He committed suicide leaving a suicide note; "And so I leave this world, where the heart must either break or turn to the lead"¹⁰.

Kurt Cobain (1967-1994) American Singer, Songwriter and lead singer of grunge band Nirvana, is one of the greatest names in music history. He was also known as 'the spokesman of a generation'. Cobain had attempted suicide once prior to his successful attempt. He was found dead in his house 3 days after his death by a self inflicted gunshot wound. Suicide note addressed to his imaginary childhood friend Boddah; "...I'm too sensitive. I need to be slightly numb in order to regain the enthusiasms I once had as a child... I have a goddess of a wife who sweats ambition and empathy and a daughter who reminds me too much of what i used to be, full of love and joy... I've become hateful towards all humans in general... Thank you all from the pit of my burning, nauseous stomach for your letters and concern during the past years. I'm too much of an erratic, moody baby! I don't have the passion anymore, and so remember, it's better to burn out than to fade away"¹¹.

Edwin Howard Armstrong (1890 – 1954) was an American electrical engineer and inventor of modern frequency modulation (FM) radio. Armstrong dressed in his coat and hat and jumped to his death from the thirteenth floor of his New York City apartment. His body was found the next morning by a maintenance worker. His suicide note to his wife read:

"May God help you and have mercy on my soul"¹².

DISCUSSION

Suicide notes ,seem to have one interesting aspect in common, the instinct of self-blame, where the person is unarguably directing the negative feelings of blame, inability to cope, hopelessness, helplessness and of giving in to their misery towards 'self' and love, compassion, perseverance to the family and friends.

Most of the available literature suggests that suicide notes that young age female gender, married, and subjects with religious beliefs more likely to leave suicide notes. Similarly suicide note-leavers feel the 'need' to express their last thoughts and beliefs to their loved ones¹³.

It has also been found that 50% of individuals who successfully commit suicide mention in their notes the difficulties they faced, in coping with the current dire circumstances in their life, which then finally led them to take away their life. Leaving a suicide note is not a random act before suicide, but it is meant to serve as an explanation, and to reveal their last wishes and concerns

for family and friends. If thoroughly analyzed and investigated suicide notes can help highlight the spectrum of sociocultural problems that the society of the respective region is facing.

But regardless of the causes and consequences of a suicide it is markedly clear that people belonging from any race, sect, ethnicity, religion, social background share the same common feelings of loss, deprivation, rejection moments before their death.

Families of people who commit suicide confront grief and loss like any natural death would bring but a spectrum of emotions follows beginning with the shock of unexpected death of the family member, feelings of shame, blame, confusion, and a sense of disconnection from the deceased because of 'not being there' long enough, that the person finally decided to take his own life. Feelings of isolation and being judged by society foster strongly in the family, and hence the recovery from such a tragedy is a long forbearing process. Suicide notes can be used to help relatives and friends to cope with an unexpected suicide of a loved one, because these notes were written primarily to justify and offer an explanation for the suicidal act¹⁴.

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