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PART ONE

This is Devin's story. It's a story of hope and hopelessness, of joy and pain and ultimately of life and death. Devin was a bright, funny, handsome teenager who was headed to college in the fall. Instead on February 2nd, his mother - my dear friend and radio colleague - buried her seventeen year old child, after he shot himself in his grandparent's basement.

My friend and I have traveled down similar paths. We are both transplanted northerners and we both found fulfillment behind a radio microphone. She and I share a great love for our children and we both know the pain being separated from their fathers. How close I came to being the one standing by my baby's grave is frightening. How close any of us come to burying our children is what is really scary.

Teen suicide is not something that happens to "those people" in "those types of families". It can and does happen in all types of families. This plague is no respecter of persons. Even children from loving homes snuff out their own lives. But how can that happen when we love them so much? As my friend said through her tears "sometimes we can love our children to death".

Both my daughter and my colleague's son were - by all accounts - well adjusted, personable kids who while not permanent residents of the honor roll did visit it every now and then. They were in academically rigorous programs. At some point each one tripped and fell into a crater of depression and despair. They were each screaming to get out and none of their parents could hear them.

A major stressor in both of their young lives was the breakup of their parents. Having been on the inside of that situation, I can honestly say I did not see that my divorce could have pushed my daughter to the brink. It hurt both of us, it changed both our lives and it caused both of us to blame ourselves. I knew my daughter had no reason to blame herself so, I admit, I was blind to that part of her suffering.

Devin's mom knew that the end of her relationship with his Dad was not easy on anyone, but she had Devin and three more children from her first marriage to provide for so she had little time to dwell on emotions. This is where the road splits and our journeys take different paths. She agreed to let her youngest son live with his Dad so he could go through an accelerated program in high school. She didn't worry much though, "My ex was a terrible mate but an excellent father." Besides, she knew he would have the support of an extended family with his paternal grandparents.

She admits that in the years that followed, visitation became increasingly difficult and expensive as her ex's family made her son less available to his mother. "Instead of visiting me several times a year in my home in the South, I would have to go north and visit him." That involved lodging expenses and leaving her job and her other children. "Then summer vacations and holidays started disappearing and I was relegated to letters, phone calls and texts messages," she reflects.

Her older children comforted her by saying, "Mom, when Devin is 18 he can make up his own mind. He can come and see you on his own." I could hear her crying softly in the phone as she said "If I had only known he would never live to be 18…."

I will finish Devin's story in the next installment of Parenting Solo but in the meantime I have an assignment for you. Go and wrap your arms around your teenager or a teen that you care about. Look them in the eyes and tell them that you love them unconditionally. Tell them that they can come to you with anything that's in their heart. Mean what you say. They very well may tell you something that they have been holding deep inside and it may shock you, but love them through it.

If you know of a teen in crisis please call 911 or have them call 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433) or 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).