

We would all be a lot nicer to each other Community Comment August 14, 2014 Mike Goldsby

You can't tell what is going on inside someone just by looking at them. If we really knew each other's struggles and problems, we would probably be a lot nicer to each other.

A friend told me how surprised he was by the sudden suicide death of Robin Williams. My friend said, "By most measures he was successful, creative, financially well off, he had everything to live for. I just don't get it."

Robin Williams had been very open about his struggles with depression and substance abuse. But even in the interviews I saw, he made jokes about those serious problems.

Depression and substance abuse are both considered contributing factors to suicide. Julie Philips, Professor at Rutgers University writes that other factors include economic pressures, increased abuse of prescription drugs, health problems and social isolation. But there is seldom if ever a single root cause.

It is tempting to look at Robin Williams and imagine that he was immune from all of those factors. He was born in 1951 and He had an upper middle class upbringing. He was initially shy, overcoming that during high school drama classes.

He started as a stand-up comedian and patterned his style after Jonathan Winters, another comedian who was open about his struggles with mood disorders. Williams was in a successful television sitcom by 1978. He was both a comedian and a serious actor and won an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor in the film *Good Will Hunting*.

He did a lot of charity work and had done six USO tours to entertain troops overseas in Iraq and Afghanistan. He was against war but really supported the troops. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel released a statement, calling Williams a "true friend and supporter of the troops."

So, despite professional success, financial success, fame and purpose, Robin Williams died by suicide. This tragedy is usually very private but it became public immediately.

People thought they knew Williams and that made the death very puzzling to many. Why? Who? How?

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More adults die of suicide than car accidents or breast cancer. Twice as many people die of suicides than homicides. It is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. Veterans are one of the high risk groups and over 20 American Vets die from suicide each day.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number is 1-800-273-8255.

1-800-273-TALK.

I hope good can come from something so baffling. Check in with the people around you. Ask them how they are doing. Exchange a few kind words. To quote Robin Williams from "Dead Poets Society", "No matter what people tell you, words and ideas can change the world."

This is Mike Goldsby for Community Comment