

Names are changed to honor client confidentiality.

Thoughts of Suicide

Scott, 38, has had thoughts of ending his life. He's gay, and from day one, he's felt his father's rejection. His memories include his father's irate response over Scott's disinclination to be active in sports. Sports was just one example. There were numerous occurrences, many that included cruel remarks and physical abuse.

In terms of their non-existent father-son bond, Scott summed it up succinctly: "My dad has always hated me." Understandably, his pain cuts to the very core of his being.

Dr. Daniel Gottlieb, a psychologist and author, maintains that "alienation and prejudice is the greatest source of suffering in our souls and in the larger world."

In one of our counseling sessions, Scott showed me a suicide note he had written. It included a message earmarked for his father—a message he needs to say to his father in person rather than on paper after the fact. This is what he wrote:

"Dad: treat your children with respect and get to know the people they are. Show some interest in the people your kids have become and be proud of them, no matter what they do or how they behave, even if that is different from what you would do. Don't be afraid to tell them they are loved and that you are proud of them. They need to hear that."

For Scott, overcoming the effect his father has had on him entails a route that transcends suicide.

This is what I told him: "Your father is good for you in developing psychological muscle—stamina on the order of dignity. You can't go yet. You have something to show your dad. He needs to see that you're bigger than his meager opinion of you, and that you've overcome his spirit-crushing treatment. Your soul needs that and so does his."

Scott is challenged to love and accept himself despite his father's narrow-mindedness and tiny heart.

"Your opinion of you should far outweigh his opinion of you," I said. "And someday, when you're old and gray, lying on your deathbed, you can look back and celebrate what you have overcome and say—with peace and utter conviction—I won!"