

# THE CINCINNATI ENQUIRER

Wednesday • October 13, 2010

## Widow: Don't stifle suicide reaction

By Cindy Kranz • [ckranz@enquirer.com](mailto:ckranz@enquirer.com) • October 13, 2010

**MARIEMONT** - Jim Miller was a kid who never grew up. He was full of life and pranks and corny jokes.

That's why Nancy Miller never saw it coming.

A little over two years ago, her husband of 20 years left early from his job at Xavier University, drove two hours to Chillicothe and killed himself.

Friends soon organized a Jim Miller Memorial Mile in memory of the lifelong Mariemont resident. This year, the event has expanded into "The Warrior Run: The Race for Life," a 5K race and one-mile walk to benefit Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center's "Surviving the Teens" suicide prevention program.

• [Read more on the Runners High blog.](#)

Publicity for the Saturday event states that the run honors the spirit of Jim Miller, "who died by suicide in July 2008." It's Nancy Miller's most public way yet of breaking society's silence about suicide.

"It helps to talk about it," said Miller, 52, a mother of two teenage daughters. "That's the thing that we learned, more than anything. If you don't talk about it, it stays inside of you."

Jim Miller had a big personality.

He worked for 25 years at Xavier, where he ran the Gallagher Student Center and was adviser for student government.

"They say at the Gallagher Center that you could hear (his laugh) throughout the entire building."

Miller is in the Mariemont High School Hall of Fame for his track and cross-country careers. He coached his girls' recreational soccer and track teams, sometimes delighting the kids by spraying his hair blue for the meets.

Elizabeth, 19, is now a sophomore at Villanova University in Philadelphia, and Kate, 17, is a senior at St. Ursula Academy.

Holidays were his thing.

"For Halloween, he had so many blowups, and she hated it," Elizabeth said, referring to her mother. "A lot of times he'd blow them up in the backyard so she'd get used to it back there and then it would slowly move its way to the front yard."

The blowups will be up before Saturday.

"The race will come by here, and I'm sure everybody will expect them to be out there," Miller said.

The morning of July 28, 2008, seemed like any other. Before leaving for work that Monday, Miller said goodbye and kissed his wife. They talked three more times that morning about normal family logistics.

He left work at noon. When he didn't come home that night, his family was frantic, thinking he had been in an accident. They learned about noon the next day that he had killed himself in a hotel room in Chillicothe, where his parents were from.

He left a short note, but no clue to unravel the mystery of his death. He was 50.

An analysis by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that the suicide rate among 45- to 54-year-olds increased 20 percent from 1999 to 2004, a larger increase than in any other age group during those years. Experts are still searching for reasons why.

The Millers search for answers, too.

"I've learned a lot since then about depression and about reasons for suicide," Miller said. "Now I can look back and see little tiny signs."

In the month or so before he died, he lost 20 pounds but said he had stopped snacking. He also wasn't sleeping well. Co-workers noticed he was quieter, not as loud.

"Initially, I did blame myself, that I didn't see anything," Miller said. "And then, I was also angry at him, that he could have done this without telling us. But then very

quickly, I was like, 'What good does that do us? I can't bring him back.'"

She and the girls, then 17 and 15, went to separate counseling sessions for about eight months.

Today, tears still well up but the family has rebounded, thanks to Miller's resolve, along with the support from family and friends.

From the very beginning, Miller has been open about her husband's death.

"My Dad sat me down right away. He was like, 'You have had an awesome life, you had a great husband, you have a great family, you have a lot of really good friends, and this is not going to ruin your life. You need to hold your head high, you need to talk about it and you need to carry on. Everyone will be here to help you.'"

In the beginning, she said, everybody was afraid to talk to them, but once the Millers started talking about it, everyone else was more open.

Miller did a lot of research on depression and mental illness. She believes her husband suffered alone in silence for most of his life.

"People need to be aware that they can get help. They can take medication and live a functional life without having to deal with that on a daily basis."

As close as the Millers were, he never once gave any indication of depression, she said. His mother had died in February 2008, but Miller doesn't believe that her death precipitated his suicide.

"She suffered from mental illness her entire life, and he was not close to her at all, probably for that very reason," Miller said.

Unlike those who keep the suicide of a loved one burrowed deep inside, Miller continues to speak out.

"We can celebrate life, and we can celebrate Jim. It didn't take away from who he was in any way, shape or form. I don't know why he did what he did, but he was an amazing person."



Elizabeth Miller, left, and her mother, Nancy Miller, openly talk about Jim Miller's suicide. Nancy Miller is in charge of "The Warrior Run," a fundraiser benefitting Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center's Surviving the Teens, a suicide prevention program.

### Warning signs

Major risk factors are diagnosable, treatable mental disorders, such as depression, bipolar or schizophrenia.

Veiled threats ("You won't have to worry about me much longer," or "I can't do this much longer.")

Signs of self-hatred, feeling no good or incompetent.

Withdrawal, becoming less social.

Engaging in more risky, dangerous behavior.

Increased drug and alcohol use.

Source: Cathy Strunk, coordinator of Surviving the Teens, a suicide prevention program at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.