

Sherwood Park News, Edmonton, June 13, 2006
Tooker's wife saw agitative effect of anti-depressant

Presentation at OLPH Church on June 21

by Terri Kemball
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Sherwood Park News - Suicide triggers a singular kind of grieving for survivors.

"It's a grief way beyond a death," said Angela Bischoff.

Bischoff felt the crushing blow of suicide two years ago when her husband, Tooker Gomberg, jumped off a bridge in Halifax.

Bischoff, who was raised in Sherwood Park, is on the verge of finishing a 24-city cross-country speaking tour designed to warn people about the dangers anti-depressant drugs pose to many patients.

The last presentation takes place in Sherwood Park on Wednesday, June 21.

Bischoff's husband was a firecracker of an environmentalist who spent a term on Edmonton city council and later ran against Mel Lastman for the mayoralty of Toronto.

What the public didn't know, is the high-profile activist had two bouts of depression after coming in second in the 2002 mayoral contest. "It burnt him out and he crashed," said Bischoff.

But Gomberg, surrounded by friends and immersed in alternative therapies, as well as taking anti-depressant drugs, managed to pull himself up.

"It was a profound healing process he went through," said Bischoff. "He was thriving again and had lots of energy."

After he recovered, the couple moved to Halifax where Bischoff had been offered a job.

Gomberg crashed again. But this time, with no extra health plan or money for alternative therapies, and lacking the community support he had before, he couldn't crawl out of his dark hole.

Bischoff says a psychiatrist put him on anti-depressants and Gomberg experienced the adverse reaction Health Canada now warns about -- agitation and suicidal thoughts.

"Agitation is a very potent predictor of suicide," said Bischoff. Health Canada confirms her statement in a public warning issued two years ago.

On the day of his death, Gomberg told Bischoff he saw no hope of coming out of his depression.

"He thought it was going to be like this the rest of his life and he just couldn't take it."

He jumped off a bridge that night. He was 48.

Bischoff, an activist herself, has made it her mission to educate Canadians about the need to monitor anyone on anti-depressants. She also highlights the myriad of alternative therapies available, including exercise, a healthy diet and talk therapy. Bischoff turned to these therapies herself to deal with her grief.

By the time her cross-Canada presentations wrap up next week in her hometown, Bischoff will have spoken to 1,000 people. And many of them will have spoken to her as she dedicates one-third of her presentations to inviting people share their stories.

The event begins at 7 p.m. at OLPH Church.

For more information on Bischoff and her cause, visit her Web site at www.greeninspiration.org.

Health Canada's site is found at www.hc-sc.gc.ca. Go to Advisories, warnings and recalls.