

## Coming out of the darkness

*Have you ever felt like nobody was there? Have you ever felt forgotten in the middle of nowhere? Have you ever felt like you could disappear?*

On Oct. 11 of this year she would have been 13 years old. Kaylee died by suicide Feb. 25.

There was no note. There was no message. There was no evidence.

Kaylee is the daughter of one of my lifelong friends. She leaves behind her mother, her father, her sister and many friends and other family members.

Suicide is the eighth leading cause of death in Minnesota according to *worldpopulationreview.com*, and the 10th leading cause of death overall.

I have considered suicide. I know many other people have also considered it. "Everyone would be better off if I was gone," is a thought that has gone through my head many times. Other times it has been some life event I think I can never recover from that gives me those thoughts. Sometimes I just have to get through one day at a time, sometimes even just one moment at a time is all I can do. Every moment and every day that passes makes it just a little



KATHY ROBB  
Columnist

easier to go on until I am ready to face the next challenge. Personally I try to find at least one thing about every day that makes it all worth

it. Sometimes it's difficult to find that one thing, other times, these "things" are everywhere.

It's OK not to be OK. Keep going. Breathe. Just don't quit.

It is also OK to talk about how you are feeling. We need to break the stigma about mental illness. There is no shame in being honest, talking about things and trying to get better.

Suicide does not discriminate. There is not always one single cause. According to [nimh.nih.gov](http://nimh.nih.gov), main risk factors for suicide include: depression, some medical conditions, chronic pain, mental disorders, substance abuse, physical or sexual abuse and the list goes on.

COVID-19 is not helping the situation either. People are losing jobs, unable to pay bills, provide for their families. These things are

taking a toll on many people's mental health. And then there's the "Mask or no mask" battle. I know someone who is in somewhat of a fragile mental health state who always wears her mask, except one trip to a local restaurant. She had a lot on her mind and accidentally forgot her mask in the car and didn't realize it until she was halfway up into the restaurant to pick up an order for her family (you know helping support local business).

When she realized she forgot her mask, she covered her face with her sweater and stayed away from everyone, when she got to the counter she apologized to the wait person. She was very loudly talked about by two other patrons of the establishment, "Who does she think she is. She must think she is special and doesn't have to wear a mask!" Obviously these two had no idea about the inner battle she fights on a daily basis but their rude comments certainly didn't help anyone's situation.

So, how can we help others?

If you see someone falling behind, walk beside them. If you see someone crying, lend them your shoulder. Include those

who are ignored. Start a conversation. Ask and listen, listen carefully and learn what the individual is thinking and feeling. Talk to them and let them talk to you.

If someone can get through a suicidal crisis, chances are they will not go on to die by suicide.

Suicide is preventable. For those struggling, there is support and help available. Call the Crisis Line and Referral Service at 218-828-HELP or text MN to 741741. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 800-273-8255 (free and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week). Talk to your family, your friends, anyone.

Someone does care. "We want to make a difference. We want this to stop. We need to start conversations. Let's talk to our kids, spouse, families. Helping one person can change it, it can mean the world to that one person. We can all get through each and every day with support." - Kaylee's mom

*The lyrics from the opening paragraph are from "You Will Be Found," one of Kaylee's favorite songs included in the musical Dear Evan Hansen.*

## MY VIEW

### Plant an extra row

I am writing this week in honor of my friends, master gardener Felicia Forder and 'Plant Aitkin' champion Jim Matteson.

The message is, please plan to plant a vegetable and fruit garden this year, and plant a row or two for those who are not able to do so. We must build our local food sovereignty and create food security for the residents of Aitkin County.



LYNN MIZNER  
Columnist

Seed catalogs have already started coming in the mail, so it's a great time to think about what you like to eat and grow some of it. If you don't have a garden space of your own, you could team up with a friend or contact Jim, who is working to build urban farming capacity in the city of Aitkin. He is working to establish community garden plots as well as helping those who need help with existing gardens. Gardening can be solitary fun, but it can be especially fun with friends.

Lakes and Pines in Mora, and Seed Savers Exchange in Decorah, Iowa, are just a couple of places to get free or inexpensive seeds. Or, ask another farmer or gardener to share a little seed or some seedlings with you. Gardeners love to share their love of growing. A great book for starting a food garden is *Gardening When It Counts: Growing Food in Hard Times* by Steve Solomon.

If you are intimidated by growing organically, ask a local grower to help you with tips about controlling pests and adding fertility without the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. There are many free resources available to use for mulch and compost. Row covers and companion planting can help you control pests naturally. Just ask for help or look online for videos about getting started with organic growing practices.

If you are new to growing food, start by growing something you like to eat. Potatoes are easy, as are green beans, lettuce, radish, kale and carrots. Even if you just grow a lot of one thing, there are opportunities to trade with other gardeners. Team up with neighbors and decide who will grow what veggies, and plan to trade.

Containers can be used to grow a lot of plants; vegetables with smaller roots like lettuce and kale, culinary herbs, and even trailing fruits like cucumbers and cherry tomatoes. A sunny place and some water are pretty much all that are needed.

Felicia was a longtime Aitkin resident and a phenomenal gardener. She swooned over my leeks the first year we met, and we chatted about gardening whenever we bumped into one another around town. She had a big-picture view of the world and participated in a number of environmental organizations besides master gardeners. Felicia's recent death was a huge loss to Aitkin County's gardening community.

Jim has been the music director for the Aitkin Farmers' Market for a number of years. He raised funds last year to purchase and build gardening equipment and wants to see urban farming "take root" in Aitkin. The Aitkin Farmers' Market will provide free vending space for urban gardeners who want to sell produce at the downtown market this summer. Just contact Jim or me at the Aitkin Farmers' Market page on Facebook @aitkinmfarmers.

## Killer monster snow goons

Bill Watterson, the brilliant mind behind Calvin and Hobbes, once penned a strip where Calvin looks out the window at night and excitedly observes the snowfall. Calvin, in his 7-year-old wisdom, notes that children love snow because they don't have to drive a morning commute.

As much as adulthood has shown me, Calvin is correct. However, I also can't help but hold onto some fondness for this time of year. The chill of winter has set upon us, and I have a nostalgic ache for Calvin's wintertime glee.

I suppose, in part, that fondness is borne of the privilege of consistently having a warm home to return to. I've never been an outdoors enthusiast, truth be told, and my nostalgia is very much built in having a good book to read in the warmth of a household hearth. While I built my share of snow goons and frozen modern art sculptures, like Calvin, the hot cocoa afterward is what sticks in my mind.



EVAN ORBECK  
Columnist

And there's the atmosphere. A fun fact I've come across is that snowfall and snow accumulation absorbs sound,

leading to the telltale silence of our winter season. Beyond that silence, snowy piles and drifts envelop and encase the world, alongside the hoarfrost and icicles. Winter traps the world in seasonal amber; it's a time for rest, meditation and peace.

But then those ugly responsibilities Calvin foresaw rear their malevolent head, particularly where commuting is concerned. Vehicles stored in the elements need their windshields defrosted, often early in the morning. Roads are hazardous; the going is slow and cautious. My damnable luck seems to hold that at least once a

year, if not more, I'll end up needing to drive in a white out blizzard, with the boundaries of the highway an absolute mystery. This November treated me to the experience once already. Whatever poetry winter holds, it's lost while working out in it.

We're also entering the holiday season. Some, I'm sure, hold that as a plus. While I enjoy this next month in its own way, it is very much on separate terms from winter itself. Where winter is a season of solitude, this period from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day is often a raucous spiral of busyness and celebration, and I think we are fortunate to have some slower paced winter left after.

Watterson featured winter quite frequently in his strips, and Calvin's antics regularly had a white backdrop of snow. As mentioned, there were his snow masterpieces but also numerous snowball fights and sled rides. There were also those

strips where Calvin's dad needed to shovel, juxtaposed against Calvin's winter world as a place of childhood. Snow was such a prominent theme of the comic that it was even featured in the famous last strip. Calvin and his tiger sledged off into another blank white field of snow, disappearing into the annals of his decade-long childhood. It's a rather appropriate length for a childhood, in retrospect.

A lot of social media space and ink has been spilled about drudgery of 2020 - quite fairly, I'd say. Fortunately, that year has an end in sight. Unfortunately, the turning of a calendar page isn't going to make problems like a pandemic or political unrest disappear. But much like Calvin, we'll soon have a big white sheet of paper to draw on, full of possibilities.

In the famous last words of that 7-year-old, "It's a magical world, Hobbes, ol' buddy ... Let's go exploring."

## Looking forward ...

Well folks, the Minnesota Twins announced with sadness last week that the annual Twinsfest and its winter caravan have both been canceled for this year.



JOHN WOODROW  
Sports Columnist

It was no surprise what with the world situation right now, but we always looked forward to the Twins coming to town and giving us a chance to visit, take pictures and find out the prospects for the upcoming season. Hopefully 2021 will be different and by this time next year we will be looking forward to a visit again.

There has been a lot of discussion as to why Section 7AAA was one of

the few that didn't feel the need to crown a Section football champion this season, opting to play the two semi-final games and leave it at that. It may hit a little closer to home this season because the Gobblers had an excellent chance to win the title and advance to the State playoffs. The Section final would have been the end of the line this year anyway due to the earlier restrictions but it doesn't ease the pain much when you could have added a nice piece of hardware to the trophy case. I do have to say that it was pretty nice to be able to watch area teams in action on YouTube and other live streams during the fall season. It's the wave of the future I'm thinking. I know it's not the newest in technology but it's pretty new to us.

I'm sure everyone is

aware by this time that the earliest that high school teams can start their winter drills is midnight on Dec. 18 pending any more restrictions put out by Gov. Walz.

My guess is if teams begin workouts the next Monday, Dec. 21, games would be able to be scheduled after the first of the year. At this stage nobody is getting their hopes up too high since things don't

seem to be slowing down, but if you need a positive thought look to 2021.

One of the casualties of the current "pause" is the bowling season and things have come to a halt at Aitkin Lanes. Hopefully leagues will get going again, probably in January and see where the season goes from there. Take-out is available but no bowling at this time.

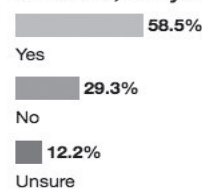


## online opinion poll

views from www.aitkinage.com readers

### ONLINE POLL

When the COVID-19 vaccine becomes available, will you get it?



**NEW OPINION POLL - VOTE NOW**  
Out of the following, which best describes how you feel for the most part?

Online polls are found at [aitkinage.com](http://aitkinage.com). Scroll down the page and look for it in the right-hand column.

### SUGGEST A POLL QUESTION

Do you have a good poll question? Send it to [kat.rob@apgecm.com](mailto:kat.rob@apgecm.com).

Visit the Age at [www.aitkinage.com](http://www.aitkinage.com)