ISSUE NO. 434 • NOVEMBER 8TH, 1984 • $1.50 U.K. £1.20

Rolling Stone®

STEVE MARTIN
All of Him

DEAR MOM AND DAD
Teen Suicide in America

TOM WOLFE
'The Vanities'

PLUS...
Prince's New Tour
Yoko Ono
Ed Begley Jr.

CONTENTS

ISSUE 434: "ALL THE NEWS THAT FITS"

ED BEGLEY JR.
Playing Trivial Pursuit with the star of 'St. Elsewhere.'
By Mark Morrison 23

BANANARAMA
Their single "Cruel Summer" is heating up the charts.
By Michael Goldberg 54

Features

STEVE MARTIN *His batting average was sinking, but now he's back on the scoreboard with 'All of Me,' his hottest movie since 'The Jerk.'* **By Kenneth Turan** 16

TEEN SUICIDE *Thirty-four percent say they've considered suicide. Scott Difiglia did it.* **By David Breskin** 26

WYNTON MARSALIS *The new bad boy of jazz is also the darling of the classical crowd.* **By Steve Bloom** ...37

TOM WOLFE *In the tenth chapter of 'The Bonfire of the Vanities,' the Celebrated Writer descends into the social inferno and tries not to get singed.* **By Tom Wolfe** 49

Random Notes

HUEY LEWIS *Mr. Nice Guy goes back to prep school for a reunion in New Jersey. Plus, news on Bruce Springsteen, Sting and Queen.* **By Christopher Connelly** 10

National Affairs

THE FOOLS ON THE HILL *A short list of airheads, sleazebags, racists and double-dealers who shouldn't be reelected to Congress.* **By William Greider** 13

Music

YOKO ONO *Forever Mrs. Lennon.*
By Christopher Connelly 53

Records

RICKIE LEE JONES *'The Magazine' is her most cryptic work so far.* **By Don Shewey** *Also reviewed: David Bowie, Joan Jett, Daryl Hall and John Oates and more....* 65

Departments

LETTERS 7
THE CALENDAR 70
THE CHART 73
TECHNOLOGY 74
MISCELLANY 91

COVER: *Photograph of Steve Martin by Bonnie Schiffman, Los Angeles, September 1984.*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BONNIE SCHIFFMAN; DAVE HOGAN/LGI (INSET, TOP); PETER MARTIN (INSET, BOTTOM)

FRANK SINATRA
A bobby-soxer remembers her idol. From a book by John Rockwell 42

DEAR MOM

Dear Mom, Dad, Chuck, Family and Friends,

I am sorry I had to go and do this. I know I am running from a problem that is nobody's fault but mine. I know I'm letting a lot of people down. I just can't take the pain and hurt I have brought upon myself. I could never be happy again without Kathy. I went and blew everything we had. I wouldn't be happy again because there is always a place in my heart for her and I knew I could never love anybody else again. I don't want you to blame this on Kathy 'cause it's all my fault. I want all of you all to help her through this, help her with anything she needs. I didn't do this because it's the new fad in Plano, I just couldn't take the pain inside me. I really hate myself for everything I've done, and I can't live with myself for putting myself and Kathy through all the pain. I ruined all the dreams me and her had together. I am really sorry for letting everybody down. Mom and Dad, I really love you a lot and I'm really sorry. Thanks for putting up with all my shit for so long.

All my love forever,
Scott

The story of Scott Difiglia and all other teenagers who consider suicide the best revenge

BY DAVID BRESKIN

ROPE, RAZOR, GAS OR GUN: THERE ARE any number of ways to do it. And there are any number of teenagers who choose death but feel deep in their bones death chooses them. It chases them up the rough bark of the tree, into the smelly two-car garage, into the cool gleam of the antiseptic bathroom, into the barrel of the shotgun that says: *Fuck You. Help. I'm dreaming. No tomorrow. No pain. End game.* It also says, in America, in 1984, epidemic.

While suicide rates for adults have remained static, rates for adolescents and young adults fifteen to twenty-four years old began rising in the mid-1950s and had tripled by 1978. Some 5000 adolescents now take their lives each year. For every adult suicide there are ten suicide attempts, but for every adolescent suicide there are fifty to one hundred attempts – up to a half million a year. (Girls attempt suicide three times more frequently than boys; boys succeed four times more frequently than girls.) Suicide rates for ten to fourteen-year-olds have tripled as well, and psychiatrists report increased suicidal behavior – from fantasies and threats to attempts and deaths – in children ages six to twelve.

Complicating this profoundly disturbing picture is the sneaking suspicion that suicide among the young may be, like herpes and the common cold, contagious. The suspicion is sparked by the growing awareness that teenage suicides and attempts tend to cluster: four suicides in four weeks among classmates at New Trier West High School outside Chicago; five in New York's Westchester County area in twenty days; five in Columbus, Ohio, in one month; three in a small Milwaukee suburb over three months; six in six months on the west side of the Dallas suburb of Plano, also accompanied by a rise in attempts. Why the increase in young suicide rates? Why the cluster phenomenon?

Dr. S. Kenneth Schonberg, who specializes in adolescent medicine at Montefiore Hospital in New York and frequently speaks on suicide, bemoans the endless supply of speculation: "Drawing a straight line between a fact and a real reason is very hard. Everything I've heard put forth as reasons falls into the category of good conversation over coffee."

CHARLES DIFIGLIA WAS BORN INTO A close-knit Italian family in Brooklyn, the only child of a laboring father and a seamstress mother. After high school, he headed to the University of Missouri at Rolla for a degree in engineering. Elaine Grass was a young St. Louis secretary, fresh out of high school, who'd grown up with four brothers in the small Mississippi river town of Ste. Genevieve. In September of his sophomore year, Charlie spotted Elaine at a fraternity dance, to which she'd been escorted by a pledge. It was no contest. Charlie and Elaine were engaged in February, married in June of 1964. They bought a car and a house in a St. Louis suburb, and on May 11th, 1965, Elaine gave birth to a baby boy, Scott.

She'd always wanted a girl, but what a prize was Scott: blond and blue-eyed, the kind of kid nursery-school teachers go gaga over. Brother Chuck was born, in Scott's shadow, a year and a half later.

Charlie laid out of school two years, supporting the family with a job at

M AND DAD

Ryerson Steel – he still works for the company – and then went back to school at Washington University to finish at night. It was a grind. He wasn't home much. Up from blue-collar ain't easy. But the neighborhood was nice, and the kids were playing baseball and soccer by the time they were in kindergarten, and they'd build forts in the rafters of the garage and in the caves down by the creek and burn incense and play kick-the-can and get into all kinds of soft childhood trouble with their tight little rat pack of friends. (Occasionally, they benefited from the moral lessons of Dad's paddle.) Scott scored good grades, was well liked and starred at sports. He wrote "I am #1" on whatever he could get his hands on.

When Ryerson transferred Charlie to Dallas in 1976, it was a step up – he'd be running fabrication. They bought a house on Buckle Lane in Plano, the newest street on the newest edge of a new-money town that would grow from 17,000 in 1970 to 100,000 today. It's a town fierce in Camaros and Corvettes for the kids, Benzes and BMWs for the adults, fierce in competition.

Scott was no longer number one. Scott rebelled. Why do we need this big house? Why don't we move back? Why do I have a curfew? Why should I go to school when I can just go out and get a job? His grades went south with his attitude, while he set about the business of finding himself an identity among the cliques: the Jocks, the Freaks, the Ropers, the Socials – four big groups picking from the pool of transplanted executives' baggage trying to survive the shuffle.

Scott Difiglia in 1983

Scott was quiet, shy and strong and short. He matured quickly, sporting a mustache at twelve, but was so self-conscious about his hairy legs, he almost never wore shorts. Even in his own backyard he'd wrap a towel around his legs before jumping into his family's postage-stamp pool. At night, during puberty, he'd scream from the pain in his legs. Repeated X-rays showed nothing. He never grew past five feet six. This did not please him.

Scott was a relentlessly hard worker – away from school – and a compulsively dedicated record keeper. He ran a paper route, mowed lawns, collected eggs on a farm, inventoried a country & western clothing store, framed houses, welded propellers. Secretly, he kept notebooks full of records about the money he made and where he spent it and what he spent it on. He kept records of every fish he caught, where and when he caught it and what lure he hooked it on. He kept records, endless records, of baseball players' batting averages and other vital signs. He kept records of his music cassettes – how many, where he bought them, how much he paid. He cared about his money. He fancied himself as extremely independent. His money was his ticket out of childhood.

Scott was rarely a troublemaker. In the eighth grade, he engaged in a little petty theft at a local school with some running buddies (along with loose change, they stole the school's bell so the kids couldn't be Pavloved into class the next day), and when found out by the police, he was so embarrassed he left the police citation on the kitchen table and ran away. Elaine and Charlie tracked him down thirty hours later, in a friend's backyard clubhouse. Elaine insisted he see a therapist, and *see* him he did. Scott did not say a word. Later, pronouncing the experience a waste of time and money, and the therapist a full-fledged queer, he refused a second trip. He wasn't forced back. Things seemed okay to his folks, Scottwise. And yet his temper bubbled under, and every so often blew: heavy arguments with father and girlfriend, his hand punching the brick wall of the house (broken fingers) and his bedroom closet door (hole in door). Once he was fixin' to use a baseball bat, fixin' to end an argument. His dad talked him out of it.

Eventually, in high school, Scott found his identity in two things: being a Roper and loving a girl. After having fallen out of the orbit of Jockdom (being number eight or number twenty-three held little allure) and making a short detour into Freakdom (rock & roll T-shirts, longer hair, Elaine searching his room for drugs and finding none), he settled on life as a Roper. Life as a Roper meant listening to Willie Nelson and Alabama, chewing to-

DAVID BRESKIN, *a freelance writer living in New York City, profiled jazz great Miles Davis in RS 405.*

bacco, wearing "gimme" caps, driving a pickup and maintaining the all-important tobacco-tin circular imprint on your jeans' back pocket. It meant getting your own side of living beef through the school's Future Farmers of America (FFA) program and taking ag courses. It meant not having to get the best grades or going to the best colleges. It meant hunting for pheasant and dove and rabbit and fishing for bass and developing a half-empty Coors can as an extension of your right hand. Scott did all these things. He started with one cow and ended up with four cows . . . and one fox, as they say, named Kathy.

RESEARCHERS HAVE BEEN TRACKING WHAT KIDS SAY ABOUT how they feel. In one study, thirty-four percent of teens said they "seriously considered" suicide; thirty-two percent said they had made plans; and fourteen percent went so far as to say they'd made an attempt. (Roughly nine of every ten teenage attempters know another attempter.) Another study found twenty percent of teens claiming they were "empty, confused and would rather die than live." A survey of high-school and college students asked the question, "Do you think suicide among young people is ever justified?" Forty-nine percent said, "Yes." Kids say the darndest things, but the consensus is clear: young people are increasingly dangerous to themselves.

There is not the same consensus on the issues of contagion and clustering. Some experts think these geographically isolated rashes of youth suicide are a genuinely new phenomenon, beginning more or less in the late Seventies. Others point out that suicide epidemics were noted in scientific literature as early as the nineteenth century; what's new is only the public's awareness. When Freud and his cronies got together to stroke their beards over the subject in 1910, it was in response to a series of Viennese schoolboy suicides.

Perhaps the most historically celebrated spur to young suicide was Goethe's novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, published in 1774, when he was twenty-four. Young Werther was a regular Mr. Sensitive of the Romantic set, who had a very heavy unrequited thing for a married woman, and ended it with a gun. Soon, all over Europe, romantic young men were dressing like Werther, talking like Werther and committing suicide like Werther. *Young Werther* was banned in several cities and countries. In 1936, in Budapest, eighteen young people killed themselves during the brief popularity of "Gloomy Sunday," which became known as the Hungarian Suicide Song.

David P. Phillips, a sociologist at the University of California at San Diego, presents the most recent and most compelling evidence of suicide contagion, which he labels "the Werther effect." Phillips tracked suicide rates in Britain and the United States over a twenty-year period and found an immediate increase after front-page suicide stories in newspapers; the more publicity, the larger the rise (Marilyn Monroe triggered a twelve-percent jump). He went on to link front-page suicide stories to auto fatalities: three days after a story, auto fatalities increased by more than thirty percent; the more heavily publicized the suicides, the greater the rise in auto deaths. He discovered the age of the dead drivers correlated with the age of the suicide in the story; the average time between accident and death dropped from more than four days to one day (indicating more lethal, perhaps more suicidal, crashes); and that single-car accidents rose the most after "pure" suicide stories, while multiple-car accidents rose the most after "murder-suicide" stories. Phillips also found that plane crashes – both noncommercial and commercial – increased after murder-suicide stories, and that homicides increased immediately after heavyweight championship prize fights.

All this suggests that human beings – the only animals known to kill themselves deliberately – are highly suggestible animals. The implications lead to compelling questions: In these teen clusters, do the subsequent suicides "model" their behavior on the previous ones? How should the press behave in the wake of a suicide? Should schools hush up or play up a student's suicide?

SCOTT AND KATHY WERE LOVERS AND FIGHTERS. UP AND down, on the telephone. Shoe boxes and shoe boxes of letters, notes, faded poems mistakenly put through the wash and carefully recopied. They broke up, they put themselves back together. Again and again. Steady for more than three years. She was quiet, good-looking, hotheaded, just like him. A Roperette. Though they welcomed her in their house, Elaine and Charlie Difiglia were not always thrilled with the match: Kathy – her name has been changed for this story – had a troubled family life, and Scott often got caught up in her problems. Scott always was attracted to damsels in distress, even before Kathy. Scott never talked about Kathy. Scott never talked about anything that mattered. Couldn't.

Scottwise, they thought the summer of '83 was perfect.

Elaine and Charles Difiglia in front of their Plano, Texas, home

PHOTOGRAPH BY TIM BOOLE

They had more downs than ups. He threw away the "engagement" ring he'd bought her, threw it out of sight. Late at night he'd find her at the front door and slam it in her face. One time she went over to Steve Trueblood's house, where all Scott's friends would hang and play poker or Monopoly and get 'faced. She went over and she was yelling and knocking on the windows, and finally Scott came out. They scuffled, and he knocked her down, and out, and briefly into the hospital.

The last straw came when Scott came back from pheasant hunting at Christmas 1982 and found out Kathy had been flirting (and so on) at a party, and that was it. No more trust. He wanted to marry Kathy, have kids and real dreams – his parents always told him, kiddingly, how gorgeous their kids would be – but that was it. She wanted to get back together. He said, no, better find someone else, baby. They got back together for the senior prom – he rented the tux, they took the pictures – but it was just for old time's sake. He spent his free time with Trueblood and the boys. Once in a while he'd come home tanked and shuffle into Chuck's room to sleep on the floor 'cause there were small-craft warnings on his water bed.

To Scott's parents, the summer of 1983 was "perfect." Over the years, they'd been ferociously conscientious parents (attended every ballgame, scrutinized every report card, watched for every danger) and now they were ready to send him out into the world. Scott had turned his act around in school and graduated with no trouble. He'd flip-flopped on college plans, deciding not to go to school in Waco, but rather to go with one of his best friends to a two-year college in Paris, Texas, for a technical background in welding. He'd been down before to visit Alec, a big-brother figure for years, who used to live near Paris, in Pittsburg. Alec had started a welding business in Frisco, not far from Plano, where Scott was spending the summer sweating his ass off. Everything was comfortable and cozy. Plans were solid. On weekends, Scott and Chuck and Dad, three boys in a boat, angled for bass. Pretty picture.

In the middle of August, Elaine flew up to St. Louis to go to a class reunion and a niece's wedding and to visit her mom. Her dad had died the summer before, and she hadn't been back for a long time. She brought Chuck with her. Charlie would drive up with Scott the next week and get there a few days before the wedding on the twentieth.

Early that week Scott went down to Paris to register and got rolled up in red tape. He'd come back a day late, and he was behind in his work at Alec's shop, and he wanted to make some extra money for school, and maybe an eleven-hour drive with Dad would not be so hot. He decided to blow off the trip, period. He called his mom in St. Louis, and she said okay. Charlie did not want to leave him home alone. In his eighteen years, Scott had never once been left alone. Elaine said, "What difference does it make, because next week he is going to be on his own in college."

On Thursday night, with his family gone, Scott had the boys over to play pool and drink. On Friday afternoon, he told Alec at the welding shop, "I have a date with Kathy tonight." Alec sighed, "Oh, Scott, your momma ain't gonna like that." Kathy came over to spend the night. A major reunion. Scott felt like a new man: Clint Eastwood, Burt Reynolds, et cetera. But afterward, Kathy told Scott she had been seeing another boy. Touché.

The next day, at the shop, Alec's wife, Nan, noticed that Scott's eyes were red. Scott said he hadn't been sleeping, only got two hours of sleep last night. Nan didn't ask why. She figured he'd been out drinking with the boys, and was worried that if she inquired he'd think she was keeping tabs on him for Elaine. Just before Scott left the shop, Alec and Nan asked him if he knew that couple who had gassed themselves in a garage earlier that week. They were the fourth and fifth teen suicides in Plano since February, and the word of mouth was, you know, Romeo and Juliet. Scott said Kathy knew them, he just

knew them by face and name. Alec: "Why the heck did those kids do that?" Scott: "Because their moms and dads didn't want them to date. Shoot, if that was me, I'd just do it behind my parents' back." Alec: "I've been down, but I've never been so down I could do that." Scott changed the subject. He said that he had to go home and clean the pool before his dad got back and that he was going water-skiing. Nan, a new mother, said, "Boy, you better have a good time now, 'cause before you know it, you'll be married and tied down with kids."

That night he wrote Kathy a letter: he couldn't sleep anymore; he hated himself for all the hurt; how could he have expected her to take him back; he'd never be able to love another; he'd be waiting for her if she ever changed her heart. He signed it, as was his custom, "Your Hubby Forever," and drew a teary eye at the bottom of the page. When his parents and Chuck returned from an all-night drive at nine on Sunday morning, August 21st, they found Scott sitting by the pool. Strange, Scott never got up early on weekends.

He said he had gotten up to go skiing, which he did, but not till hours later. When he came home that evening, he and his mom sat at the kitchen table and had a long talk. They talked about the wedding, the family. He asked if anyone said anything bad about him because he didn't go. Mostly, they talked details, preparations for school, now only five days away. They had a meeting set up for Monday evening with his roommate's parents. He had to get new tires for the truck before that. Elaine also asked about Kathy – she'd seen he'd put some of her pictures back up – and he said it was no big deal. "Don't forget, you're going away to school, Scott." Elaine felt bad about having been away. Scott had lost weight. Elaine figured it was from all that welding in the heat of the summer. Monday night she'd make Scott's favorite meal: how he loved fried chicken and mashed potatoes and corn rolls.

THE PLAIN BUT SIMPLE TRUTH IS THAT NO one knows why people commit suicide. Suicides are infuriatingly absent. They're never around to explain themselves, and they probably couldn't anyway. So all we have is a frame and no picture. Why does one person in a given moment respond to life's difficulties with this permanent solution, while another soul in similar straits decides, dammit, to go for a jog or a beer? To account for the stunning increase in youth suicide, a second question must be answered: What makes Johnny more prone to kill himself in 1984 than he was in 1954?

There are many so-called reasons – sociological, psychological, economic, technological, historical, anthropological, biochemical and philosophical – that account for the disastrous condition in which we find our hypothetical Johnny 1984.

First off, chances are Johnny's parents are divorced. Suicides come disproportionately from broken homes, and the increase in young suicides parallels the giddy divorce rate, now over fifty percent and the highest in the world. Married or divorced, Johnny's mother works outside the home. She prides herself on how quickly she goes back to work after Johnny is born. (That the father is absent or away at work is a given.) His parents subcontract responsibility for raising Johnny to day-care surrogates, nurses and sitters, and to Johnny himself. As a result, he may not have "bonded" with his mother when he was an infant – a deprivation some psychologists think critical in the later development of suicidal teens. There's no extended family around for him, not with the geographic mobility for which Americans are famous. The moving is hard on him. He must keep readapting to new environments. One teen suicide in Houston treed himself and left a note: "This is the only thing around here that has any roots."

American parents spend less time with Johnny than any other parents in the world. While he's a teenager, they spend an average of fourteen minutes a week communicating with him. By the time Johnny graduates from high school, he'll have spent more time with his blue, flickering, electronic parent than doing anything else but sleeping: he'll have seen 20,000 hours of TV, 350,000 commercials, about 18,000 killings. The family doesn't have to talk, they watch. On TV, problems resolve themselves in 30-minute spans. It's his only problem-solving role model, and it's unrealistic.

That his life is not as exciting as the life on TV may come as a disappointment. His pain comes as a nasty shock, and he'll learn to escape rather than cope. He has far more access to booze, dope, pills, coke, than any previous generation of kids, and at an earlier age. He also has easy access to the genitals of the opposite sex, and the sooner he scores, the more difficulty he'll have with intimacy later on. Chances are increasing that he will be sexually or physically abused by an adult at an early age.

Competition is tremendous. If he is middle or upper-middle class, his parents have already told him he had better start running, and fast, because the pie is shrinking. The number of his peers has doubled in twenty years, but the opportunities haven't. There are only so many spots on the basketball team or in the law firm. He feels pressure to be perfect. This "cohort effect" means he lives in a downwardly mobile, increasingly Darwinian world. It's called, trendily, the end of childhood.

Johnny quickly learns that good grades and other tangible achievements are the currency in which he trades for his parents' approval and concomitant permissiveness. The parents see the equation differently: they provide material well-being; he delivers good grades in return. His parents are permissive because it's easier to say yes than no. Besides, they don't know what rules are valid anymore. Everything in this world is negotiable now: everything is shades of gray, and all that matters is green. They treat the kid like a little adult because they want him to be a little adult. They seek his *friendship* and fear his disapproval. When they give him too much freedom, he secretly desires rules; but they don't want to tell him about sex, about values, pain, problem solving, living with limitations. All is uncertain, nothing is shocking, everything is tolerated. Even suicide, with each passing example, becomes less taboo.

All told, Johnny 1984 lives in a bizarre warp of freedom and pressure at a stage of his life when neither is appropriate: when pressure makes him brittle and freedom's just another word for everything to lose.

Chuck's trying to be a rock, but friend Alec feels rage.

Chuck Difiglia and Alec Parker on Scott's pickup truck

ON MONDAY MORNING, AUGUST 22ND, SCOTT asked Alec if he could get off work early to get those new tires for his truck. He'd been bugging Alec for three weeks about needing some time to do that. Alec said he'd let him off at 3:30. Fine. Two hours into the work day, the phone rang in the office. Alec picks up; a girl for Scott. Odd, he never got calls at work. Scott spent five, ten minutes in the office on the phone. Doubly unusual. At 12:45, Scott called his mother at her office in Addison, where she works as a tax assessor. He said, "Mom, don't forget to get extra soap, mouthwash, toilet paper, all those things. When I get out to school, I don't want to be nickeled and dimed to death." Elaine told him she had the whole list made out, she was going shopping, and don't forget about the tires and the meeting tonight. "Don't worry about it, Mom, I've got it all under control." When Alec came back to the shop at 1:30 from a late lunch, he saw Scott was "just elbows and nails" working on the props, anxious to leave. Alec was kind. "Hell, Scott, go home right now. This way you can clean up and go out and get you a nice lunch or something and go buy you some tires. I'll finish up the work, no sweat." Scott wrote down his time, 1:45, and left. He did not go to get tires.

Around 3:00, Scott called Kathy from his house. He was sorry, sorry, sorry for the ruined dreams. He was calling to say goodbye. Are you leaving for school early? "No." Where are you going? "Nowhere. There's a gift for you in my truck." *Click*.

Immediately, Kathy and a girlfriend, Laura, drove to the house. They were about ten minutes away. When they got there, the girlfriend was too scared to go in. She stayed in the car, with the windows up, the doors shut. Kathy walked past Scott's truck, through the front door, through the kitchen, a right turn to Scott's room, an open doorway . . .

"On August 22nd, 1983, at approximately 15:12, this officer was dispatched to 3332 Buckle Lane in reference to a threatened suicide. Upon arrival at the residence, I was contacted by Kathy. Kathy and Laura were at the residence, and they advised that the complainant had shot himself in the head. Upon entering the residence, I was contacted by Jerry Smith, neighbor on Buckle Lane. He advised that reporting party had contacted him upon finding the complainant and advised him to call police. The complainant was found on the bedroom floor at the foot of the bed. He was on his back. He had a .22

PHOTOGRAPH BY TIM BOOLE

rifle on the floor, on his right-hand side in the doorway. The boy was wearing jeans and a light-colored shirt. There was a lot of blood, and apparently the bullet exited the left side of the complainant's head. His eyes were swollen shut and he had labored breathing."

His suicide note lay on the bed, among a scattering of pictures of Kathy and him as a couple. In the truck, Kathy found his gift: an envelope containing $200 in cash and a suicide note especially for her. The note told her he'd treated her bad but needed her bad, how he had to do it because he'd probably never get her back, told her to go live the happy life he could never give her and to buy a new engagement ring with the money, to replace the one he'd thrown away. Kathy stood, reading Scott's letter over and over, trembling and crying on the summer lawn. Suicide is the best revenge.

Jerry Smith called Elaine first. "Elaine, there has been a terrible accident." Elaine knew it: her house had burned down. Jerry hesitated. A long, shrieking silence, then: "Scott has been shot." Elaine raced home, weaving through traffic and denial: this is not happening to me, things will be fine. Jerry called Charlie: "You have an accident at the house. Scott got shot." Charlie said, "Jerry, you have to be *kidding* me!" Jerry: "No, they are doing everything they can to keep him alive." Charlie called Elaine. Damn, no answer. He headed straight for Plano General. Elaine came home to a swelling audience of children in front of the house, just released from school's first day. The paramedics were putting Scott into the ambulance. She didn't see him. They wouldn't let her in the ambulance. As soon as it left, with Elaine in pursuit, neighbors arranged for a cleaning service to quickly take care of Scott's room.

The family met at the hospital: Elaine, disbelieving; Charlie, in shock, asking which of his boys was it; brother Chuck, at last and alive, after being notified at his girlfriend's house. Technicians, doctors and a hastily summoned priest surrounded Scott in the emergency room and attended to business. Charlie made one thrust in, only to be booted out. Alec arrived just in time to see Scott dragged into a helicopter, which would fly him to Presbyterian Hospital in Dallas. The whirring chopper finally brought Elaine down to earth: this is real, and real is unspeakable. The family was offered a ride to Presbyterian, but Charlie refused. He didn't want to be left stranded at the hospital without a car. It was the sort of nonsense thought that makes sense to a father whose son has a hole in his head. So Elaine and Chuck piled into Charlie's car and drove, anesthetized by panic, through bumper-to-bumper rush-hour traffic to the hospital, thinking: How could Scott have been that careless loading or cleaning his gun? How? In the chaos, no one informed the Difiglias that Scott had left notes. Suicide was what happens to the raving neighbor.

At Presbyterian, they saw Scott in intensive care. Charlie: "I just couldn't believe . . . if you would have told me that was my son there, it didn't even look like him. Some of the body was Scott, okay . . . but the eyes were black, the head was swollen. The tongue was just literally hanging out of his mouth. I had never seen anybody shot before, especially in the head. For some reason, I thought it would just go in one end and out the other. And it looked like he was hooked up to every damn piece of equipment in the hospital." Charlie did not cry. He had phone calls to make, family to collect in St. Louis and New York. He was afraid that if he started crying he would not be able to stop.

IN THE PREINDUSTRIAL WESTERN WORLD, THE BODY OF A suicide was frequently spat upon, hung on public gallows, left unburied for vultures or dragged through the streets to be buried at a crossroads with a stake through the heart and a stone on the face. Such condemnation, along with the small matter of roasting in hell, was what passed for suicide prevention.

But in 1984 a Texas teenager is liable to be out cruising, bombed, on a Friday night, grooving to tunes, when he hears, "Hi, this is Bette Midler on 92.5 KAFM-FM. You know, it's very hard to be alive in this world, the way things go. You watch TV and you get real upset. Sometimes your friends give you a hard time. You might be feeling really, really bad and you don't have anybody to talk to. But if this happens, please call my friends at the Dallas Suicide and Crisis Center. Call 828-1000 any time of the day or night, because everybody needs somebody to talk to about what's bugging them. Nothing is so bad that it won't get any better. I know, 'cause I've been in the same place as you."

This radical change in approach – away from taboo and Satan's sparks licking the heels of the hanging man, toward compassion, hand holding and psychodynamics – bolsters our faith in the preventability of suicide. Says Dr. Susan Blumenthal, head of the Suicide Research Unit of the National Institute for Mental Health: "Almost all adolescent suicides can be prevented."

In 1967, there were some 50 suicide-prevention centers; by 1973, there were more than 400. Still, there's little statistical proof that answering crisis-center phones prevents suicides. So the centers are hitting the streets and schools: speaking in front of teachers, parents, children; showing films; writing curricula on suicide prevention for health classes; organizing self-help groups for two particularly risky types of people – attempters (many of whom try again and again, and some succeed) and the survivors (the family and friends of victims have a suicide rate nine times that of the general population). The former director of the high-profile Dallas Center, Mark Fisher, maintains an enthusiasm for prevention: "Our goal is to help youngsters, sometime during junior high or high school, learn the warning signs of suicide in the same way they would learn the warning signs of an impending heart attack, and come up with sort of an emotional CPR: that when you know someone who's suicidal or you recognize suicidal things in yourself, you know exactly what to do – the people to contact and the resources available."

The note said he'd treated her bad but needed her bad.

The "warning signs" approach is written into all literature and prevention programs for parents and teens. It goes like this: At least four out of every five teens who commit suicide give warnings or leave clues. They don't really desire death. They may, in fact, have unrealistic fantasies about death (hovering over the funeral to see who's sorry now and who their *real* friends are) and hope to get caught in time, saved, rescued, shown love and affection. If they're not noticed sliding down, down, down, it merely confirms what they feel inside (no one cares, no one understands) and death becomes the only option. Getting there was the hard part, the suicide itself was easy. Suicide is viewed as an act of communication and is always addressed to someone. The final act is but the period at the end of a long sentence that no one's read.

The most common warning signs are changes in eating or sleeping patterns, deteriorating grades, loss of interest in favored activities, loss of sense of humor, clinical depression, withdrawal, drug and alcohol abuse, the giving away of valued possessions. A surprising number of young suicides actually talk about it beforehand, most often with friends. But friends dismiss it as selfish manipulation, or joking not to be taken seriously, or a confidence not to be betrayed to the enemy, i.e., anyone in a position of authority. So students across the country are being informed it's better to lose a friend temporarily than a person permanently. They're being told to watch for what's called "the precipitating event" – a major loss of a friend, lover, parent, sibling, or possibly the loss of status or a shocking change, as in unexpected pregnancy or fear of pregnancy among teenage girls. They're being told to openly discuss suicidal feelings and not to feel ashamed or guilty, nor to try to cheer up a friend by discounting his pain – as in, "Hey, man, you don't know how good you have it." Most important, the preventionists tell the students, steer the kid to an adult – preferably a teacher, counselor, doctor, therapist or psychiatrist.

The problem with this last suggestion is that most adults run from suicidal teens as they would fire or high places. Who wants a life in his hands? Clearly, kids will have to try to save themselves. Across the country, more and more schools are devising peer-counseling programs, responding to suicides with classroom discussion, memorial assemblies or, as an alternative, even gruesome slide shows of heads blown off and the like. The schools that refuse to discuss the subject openly (rationale: talking about it puts the idea in kids' heads) are increasingly considered neolithic.

This disturbs Dr. David Shaffer, chief of child psychiatry at Columbia's New York State Psychiatric Institute and the leader of a three-year, million-dollar study of teenage suicide: "It's significant that in an area where there's been a recent outbreak of suicide [New York's Westchester County area], they have a very highly developed 'preventive' approach. My own view is that faced with an increasing willingness to talk about suicide, coupled with increasing rates, there's a reason to suspect that the two may be linked. If you assume you can lower the threshold of the vulnerable kids, by making the act seem less bizarre, horrific or unnatural, then you might also predict that talking about suicide in a matter-of-fact way, or giving examples of kids that commit suicide with whom the child can identify [which prevention programs do], would help lower the taboo against suicide.

"Five days before a boy's recent suicide, he had a very meaningful rap session, under psychiatric control, in which the topic of suicide was discussed. I don't know there's any evidence that ventilation – the talking about something – necessarily prevents it from happening. And you would predict that it would *facilitate* it happening.

"Warning signs? My experience in the pilot phase of this study is that these signs have not been present. There's no empirical evidence to tell anybody what are the precursors of death. I think people are making very rash generalizations. They're not admitting to themselves how much knowledge they don't have, and they're basing programs on that which may or may not be harmful, never mind helpful."

ELAINE AND CHARLIE SPENT THE NEXT TWENTY-FOUR HOURS at the hospital, deep in the dream time of impossible loss. The doctors told them they could speak to Scott, that he might be able to hear them even though unconscious. They said: We're here. We love you. Fight this. You're going to be okay. They were back and forth between his room and the waiting room every fifteen minutes. Friends had congregated, fifty strong, to show support and wait for news. Family was on the way. Chuck was sent to spend the night at a close friend's, but he first had to go home to get some clothes. He found himself walking into Scott's room. He noticed Scott's stereo was still on. The tape had run out on Alabama's "Love in the First Degree": "Baby, you left me defenseless/Now I've got only one plea/Tuck me away inside your love/And throw away the key/Cause I'm guilty of love in the first degree." He also noticed something else. The cleaners had missed the blood on Scott's dresser. Chuck was scared, scared and brave. He cleaned it up.

Kathy was at the hospital. She was incoherent, shaking. She told Charlie she had the money, she wanted to give back the money. Kathy was committed to the hospital for observation. Her girlfriend Laura had told the investigating officer (in the panic of the scene), "Kathy always said if Scott committed suicide, she would try, too." Both the girls told the officer Scott had called Kathy a few nights earlier and *told* her he'd been drinking, gone to sleep, woken up, saw a gun was next to him, tried to fire it, but it wouldn't fire. Kathy had been carrying this secret inside her, like a smuggler of contraband, and now, with a real bullet fired, it had burst inside her.

On Tuesday, Elaine and Charlie learned Scott left suicide notes. They did not blame Kathy. They knew Scott pulled the trigger. They still didn't believe it, but they knew it. Scott was excited about school. Elaine had talked with him [*Cont. on 78*]

For a free recipe booklet, write Hiram Walker Cordials, Dept 16AS, P.O. Box 32127, Detroit, MI 48232. ©1984.

That's what it's like to write with a RollerBall.

The Parker Vector Rollerball glides so effortlessly over the page, it feels like writing on a cushion of air.

It's because of a free flow ink system unique to Parker: the "collector." It's an arrangement of 72 tiny fins that hold back the ink when it's flowing too quickly and dispense ink when there isn't enough.

The ink in a Rollerball is the purest we've ever made. It's water based, which means that it soaks into paper rather than lying on top. So your words remain perfect, never smudged or blotched.

The result is a pen that writes with the qualities of the finest fountain pen, and the convenience of a Rollerball.

Make your mark with a Parker

©1984 TPPC

PARKER

Suicide

[*Cont. from 35*] just two hours before. His friends hadn't a clue. Maybe, maybe, there was a deranged madman sneaking around Plano, forcing kids to do these things. They also learned his brainwave test showed nothing. Absolutely no sign, no nothing, no life. They decided to donate his organs. They did not want his death to be in vain. Scott's heart was extremely strong, but the doctors could not find a recipient. The kidneys they would take. The doctors also wanted Scott's skin. Charlie had a hard time with that, and declined. He told the doctor, "I'd at least like to bury a son." At five o'clock, the Difiglias and all their friends stopped waiting for miracles. The machines were unplugged.

'A waste. I swear, if Scott walked in, I'd whip his ass all over that room, just because of what he has done to his family and to me. I would say, "Get your ass back there and go to work." Such a waste.'

There was an open casket for the family. It was excruciating. Scott did not look like Scott. Chuck was also upset that Scott was dressed in a suit. He wished he were wearing his blue jeans. The church was packed for the funeral. The doctors released Kathy from the hospital for the service, trying to shock her back into reality. Elaine and Charlie included her as part of the family – she rode in the same car, sat in the same pew. When they went up to the altar to put some special things on the casket – a family picture, his favorite cap – she followed with a rose. The procession to the cemetery was a mile or two long. Hundreds of people. Tears, words, prayers. One of Scott's Roper friends put a can of Skoal on the casket. And Charlie buried a son:

SCOTT C. DIFIGLIA
May 11, 1965 – August 23, 1983

BE NOT SAD, FOR THE PRIZE OF PEACE IS FINALLY MINE

"THERE IS BUT ONE TRULY SERIOUS philosophical problem," wrote Camus, "and that is suicide." Camus was saying nothing Hamlet hadn't already. To be, or not to be: that is the cliché. And that is still the question. But for those teens who feel empty and hurt and out of control, the question becomes to feel or not to feel. A teenage girl who answered with two attempted suicides now puts it this way: "It was a black cloud of depression. It envelops you. You cannot get out. You don't think life will ever get better. You can't conceive of it. You can't imagine it. You can't even dream it. And you're gonna die anyway: life's this long corridor with all these doors, and death is the last one, so why not now? It's so painful to live that it seems less painful to die. I felt great satisfaction. I felt great calmness. It was real decisive. I was finally taking fate in my own hands. I had some control. As opposed to being a victim."

The suicide embraces death, while we spend our lives fearing it, avoiding it, postponing it. His death is a staggering slap in our face, a total rejection of our world. He insults us, then proves inaccessible even to our anger and discomfort. The suicide has the last word.

"YOU KNOW, I STILL CATCH MYSELF, every now and then," says Charlie. "I'll look out the window and see the truck and say, 'Oh, Scott's home!' " I keep forgetting that Chuck is driving the truck." Elaine and Charlie wanted to sell the truck. It's the first thing they see when they get home from work. Chuck wanted to keep it. In Plano, kids are known by their cars, and Scott was known by his brightly striped Toyota pickup. Elaine thought it would be hard on Scott's friends to see it on the streets. "Mom, that's crazy," said Chuck. "That truck didn't kill Scott."

Elaine, Charlie, Chuck, Kathy, Nan and Alec, family and friends: these are the suicide victim's victims. They are the survivors. Their suffering began when Scott ended his. It is a suffering full of denial and anger, confusion and guilt and, most of all, memory. "We had always considered ourselves extremely lucky . . . up until Scott," says Charlie. "Everything had gone so well for us," says Elaine. "Nothing will be the same."

Nan wishes she'd pried about Scott's not sleeping. She wishes she had back her parting comment, about Scott being married and tied down pretty soon. But she's not only angry with herself: "At times, I still get so mad at Scott, that he could hurt not only himself but Elaine and Charles and Chuck, too." A good friend to Elaine, she thinks that "Elaine always had a feeling, deep down inside, had a fear

that something would happen with Scott. Days and days afterward, she'd say to me, 'Sometimes I feel so relieved, now I don't have to worry about him anymore.' And then she'd say, 'I feel so mad and I feel so guilty, how could I think that I'm *relieved*?' "

Alec's last image of Scott was on the stretcher, being carried to the helicopter. He stills feels rage, tempered with wistfulness: "A *waste*. I swear, if Scott walked in my front door, I'd whip his ass all over that room, just because of what he has done to his family and to me. And I would say, 'Get your ass back there and go to work.' Such a waste. Before Scott did this, my neighbor used to say, 'You're gonna have a hard time keeping that boy.' I said, 'What are you talkin' 'bout?' He said, 'That boy is *good*.' I said, 'I know he is.' I said, 'I'm keeping him. I'll get the money up there to where he *can't* leave me.' " This summer, Chuck does the welding at Alec Parker's shop.

Kathy was eventually released from the hospital. Sometimes she'd call Elaine, at two or three or even five in the morning, and talk for hours. Elaine recommended a psychologist in Plano, and Kathy entered therapy. At Christmas time, she attempted suicide, mixing pills with liquor, pain with guilt.

Chuck tries to be a rock. He's protective of his parents: after what happened, he doesn't want to cause them any trouble or concern. He won't really talk about it with them. He knows it upsets them. He decided against counseling, saying, "It is over, and it is done with, and there is nothing I can do about it." He refers to his brother's suicide as "the accident." After he had a fight with his girlfriend, Elaine found him crying like a baby, harder than she had ever seen him cry. When she said "Chuck . . . , " he immediately responded, "Mom, don't worry about me. I'm not like Scott." He knew what she was thinking.

Chuck: "I am angry, but I don't get angry every day about it. Sometimes I think of neat things. I wonder if he is watching me catching a big fish or something like that. He taught me how to fish. I pray for Scott. Every day, when I go to sleep. I pray good things. I wish I knew he was watching what I was doing. I always go in his room, sit on the couch and listen to his stereo. When we first came home, I made a suggestion that we open up the drapes and let the sun come in. So we did. And it has been open ever since." When the family put a Christmas tree on Scott's grave, Chuck hung a favorite fishing lure as an ornament. That hurt.

For Elaine and Charlie, the guilt was crippling at first. The first time they ever left Scott alone, and look what happened. "You think, maybe I should have done this, maybe I should have done that," reflects Charlie, "to a point that you can almost see yourself pulling the trigger." The .22 rifle Scott used was a Christmas present from Charlie. There are no guns in the house anymore.

Elaine enrolled herself and Charlie in a Survivors of Suicide group (SOS) sponsored by the Dallas Suicide and Crisis Center. It met for eight weeks and helped immeasurably. (Charlie swears they were the only people there not angry at the victim.) One of the ways Elaine works through her grief is to talk about it. She did an interview with a local television station and in October traveled to Washington to testify in front of the House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families. She warns parents, prods them to communicate with their kids, tells her story. She feels better about losing Scott if the meaning of his death helps others live.

Another way she copes is by investigating the question *why*. She wonders if Scott's drinking was worse than they thought. Her father was an alcoholic. She wonders if he had some kind of biochemical imbalance that made him susceptible to aggression coupled with depression. She wonders about Scott's unaffectionate, uncommunicative nature. Even in the crib he did not like to be held, squeezed, kissed. What could have caused it? What might this have caused him to do, eighteen years later? Why did our son feel so worthless? Elaine reads all the appropriate books and knows the answers are in the grave.

Pain comes at the oddest times. When Charlie checks in Scott's room to wake him up in the morning, it's like the amputee feeling sensation in the missing limb. Or Elaine, awash in tears over the first warm pops of springtime: "Scott couldn't wait to get outside." Or the sad song in church, or the bad news on television, or the shameless Baptist minister who claimed in the local paper that the Plano kids' suicides were caused by "parents who didn't love them." Or how about the front-page headline in the *San Antonio Light*, "PLANO: WHERE SUICIDE IS PREPPY." Or the banner at a rival high school's pep rally: "KILL PLANO BEFORE THEY KILL THEMSELVES." Or, in February, when a family in the neighborhood's fourteen-year-old son blew himself away with a .357 Magnum, and they went to help but hurt all the time. Or, in May, on Scott's birthday, instead of having their long-planned observance at home, the Difiglias found themselves at another funeral: a former friend of Scott's, who'd argued with him a week before Scott's death, had put a shotgun barrel in his mouth.

Elaine feels closest to Scott in his room. All his pictures are still up. In them, he holds great fish and plays great soccer. Elaine's moved her rocking chair, her ironing board and a telephone into Scott's room. She spends a lot of time there. It's her room now.

Charlie feels closest to Scott at the cemetery. "I kind of feel as though I have a captive audience." He heads out there three times a week, twice after work and on Saturdays. He didn't like looking at the dirt on the grave, and got some sod to cover it up. And he feeds the sod and waters the sod and makes sure it looks lovely. He does it so steadily and so assuredly that people visiting the cemetery mistake him for one of the grass crew, one of the cemetery staff. Charlie laughs, "They get out of the car and come on over to me and say, 'I want you to take a look at this, Martha is kind of leaning . . .' I have to tell them: 'Wait a minute! I don't work here. I just happen to have one of these. I have a son here.' " And then he begins again, watering the grave. ●