

Encinitas City Council Meeting - 10/13/10 - Oral Communication

Good evening councilors. I'm Keith Shillington, and I nominally reside on Leucadia Scenic Court.

We are a nation in multiple crises.

Our financial system has created a clean divide in the class system; a small number of people have assets, and a huge number of serfs have debt. Many are without healthcare. Over 12% are unemployed.

26,287 square miles of the Gulf of Mexico are still contaminated with oil from Deepwater Horizon.

There are 10,371 young people in Encinitas in the high risk group for suicide. Statistically speaking, one of those young people will be successful in committing suicide this year. And, statistically speaking, he's probably struggling with being gay.

I've come here tonight to speak to that young person. Don't do it. It gets better. I was teased and taunted a lot as a youngster. Occasionally I still am as an adult. In fact, my partner Bob Nanninga used to point out looking at pictures that I was the kind of kid he used to beat up when he was in high school.

Life is worth living. Really. Even when things seem their darkest. Take my past decade as an example:

I seem to have lost pretty much everyone close to me. 2002, my only sibling, my brother died in March. Taking Mom to his funeral remains the singly most horrific event in my life. Mom died in September of that same year. 2003, Dad died, seven years ago; and in that year the computer industry effectively crashed. In 2004, I and my beloved partner Bob opened a little coffeehouse modeled to be the kind of place I'd want to take my parents. And then, in 2008, a cascade of events started with Bob being bullied by our Medicare system, his reaction, to stop taking the medications Medicare wanted him to pay \$20,000 for which they called "excess benefits," Medications he'd been taking for over 18 years; which had kept him alive; and kept him contributing to our society in so many ways that we continue to find missing.

On Valentines Day, 2009, Bob's body ceased to be capable of supporting life; a common fungus having effectively digested his lungs. The second most horrific event in my life; and most globally impactful.

Bob's absence is still deeply felt by this community; and no number of words can express the black hole opened in my heart.

So, my young friend, it does sound pretty grim. But I'm here tonight to tell you. It's worth it.

In 1850, Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote in his poem *In Memoriam*:27,

I hold it true, whate'er befall; I feel it, when I sorrow most;
'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.

Two hundred and sixty years later; I echo this, and I echo it to you, my one young person of ten thousand; talk to someone, get through this, and one day, you'll know, like I do today, that I'm glad I failed my attempts when I was a teenager. Really glad. Sixteen years I had the privilege and honor to be Bob Nanninga's partner. Twenty two years I worked on the very cutting edge of technology. Five years spent creating and operating our local zocalo, the E Street Café. That's all out there for you, in fact, as a youth in the City of Encinitas you're set to do better. Stay alive, live, love and experience being. It's awesome in the long run. Look for "it gets better" on YouTube.