

**POWER**  
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‘Do you know what you are doing?’”

He said the conversation that followed stopped him from doing the unthinkable.

Merrill went to the cemetery where grief-stricken people often go and said he stumbled onto his late girlfriend’s headstone. Five years before the girlfriend had taken her life following the death of a friend nine days earlier. Merrill, then, 16, was the last one to talk with her. She asked him if their friend was in hell. He assured her that he was not.

“That day we were having two completely different conversations,” related Merrill. “I was trying to give her comfort. She was looking to remove the last hurdle to end her own life.”

Merrill eventually emerged on his own will and set about to reclaim his life, but said the “fear of failure” emotionally paralyzed him. “I pretended that I was carrying on like everyone else.” But he wasn’t. Each day he would drive to the same spot where he would sit and watch the passing traffic until it was time to come home.

“Those cars and trucks represented people’s lives and all of the experiences that I was missing. When I was finally able to recognize that, a light bulb when on in my head. I stopped asking ‘why’ and realized that I’m here to do the best I can.”

He wrote a book entitled, *Fighting the Demon of Suicide* and was encouraged by a former teacher to have it published. He has donated the book to the Power UP Foundation, available through the website [www.powerupfoundation.com](http://www.powerupfoundation.com) with all proceeds going to actively support other charities and organizations that support mental health wellness.

**SUICIDE TRENDS**

Teen suicide fell off in the early 1990s and 2000s, but is trending upward again based on information collected by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) that reported a 6 percent increase among 15-24 year olds and 100 percent for 10-14 year olds, making it the third leading cause of death among young people today.

“The pressures of being a teen today are not like they were back when I was a kid,” said Merrill, who cited the dark glamour of Hollywood, today’s music and cyber bullying, among some of the influences. Some teens make “suicide pacts” on social networking websites and do follow through.

He said parents have to be aware of how they react to a death or a completed suicide because their kids are watching and drawing their own conclusions. In some cases, “Suicide becomes the cherry on top of the sundae that has already been built,” said Merrill.

The NCSL also found that among high school students:

- 19.3 percent have considered killing themselves
- 14.5 percent made actual plans (900,000 were made during an episode of major depression.)

NCSL findings suggest that boys are four times more likely than girls to die by suicide because the method they choose is more lethal: a gun, jumping from great heights, or hanging. Girls were more likely to take pills or cut themselves.

They consider it “romantic” and often will stage their appearance.

Gender differences in how teens plan and carry out suicide may hold answers on how to reach out to them and prevent suicide gestures and completed suicides.

**ATHLETE WITHIN**

“Whatever it is you want out of life, before you can see those goals, you have to take care of your body and get your mind organized in order to achieve them,” said Merrill, now 35 pounds trimmer.

He encourages all people to find a passion.

“Don’t do it with a six pack on your back,” he humored. “I’m not saying that you can’t kick back and have fun. Set some goals and go out and do something to get the sense of achievement and self-worth.”

For Merrill it is running.

He recently completed making a historic run covering nearly 2,000 miles to promote the Power UP message that “life is to be celebrated,” and raised almost \$30,000 for the foundation. “Run to the Keys” began on Oct. 4, 2009, in Fenway Park, Boston, Massachusetts, and concluded April 2, 2010, in Key West, Fla.

While on the six-month tour he spoke at high schools, universities and colleges and community organizations sharing about his early life experience with depression and suicide in language that young people can understand.

“Politicians, athletes and entertainers; all three groups have let us down because they are human,” he explained. “I don’t want to be anyone’s role model. I want people to believe in themselves and to always turn failure into inspiration.”

“Here’s the hand, but baby, you’ve got to take it.”

Merrill completed the last 50 miles of his run doing a “hobble” on one crutch (his underarms were black and blue from the trauma), after he sprained his ankle running at night. It swelled up to the size of a baseball requiring immediate attention. He was instructed to stay off of it for several weeks, meaning that he would have to abort the run.

“I used what was available to me to get where I wanted to go,” said Merrill. “I was not going to use adversity as my excuse.”

The same goes for the person with mental illness he said.

“Working out is not one of my top fun things to do. However it does help with my mental battles,” said Cory Dobbelaere who quickly became friends with Merrill through their shared passion and goals for mental health awareness.

Based on Dobbelaere’s personal experience he said for the person experiencing an episode of depression, writing a letter or balancing the checkbook can become an “insurmountable task.”

“I can get on a bike and ride five miles because I don’t have to concentrate. Plus it gives me a sense of accomplishment and boosts my self-esteem so I can go back to what I was doing later.”

His personal fitness goals include using the treadmill or walking every morning. “It clears my mind and helps me deprogram from what is generally a chaotic sleep.”

While he always has known the importance of physical well-being and how it plays an important

role in his own mental health he said, “Doug and the Power UP Foundation have renewed my faith in it.”

**TEEN STEWARDS**

Coach Merrill wants to see high school students behave as “stewards” of their high school, not just students, by identifying those who they rarely, if ever see in the weight room or library through the foundation’s Power UP Society.

He said the Power UP Society is not designed to make best friends of everyone, but rather to create an atmosphere that promotes higher academic success, improved physical fitness, and social maturity.

“What separates Power UP Society from the other organizations with the same goals is the fact Power UP Society members actively recruit their peers to attend the weekly Power UP workouts and weekly Power UP study tables,” Merrill explained.

Other social activities include, however are not limited to: Community volunteering, monthly motivational and inspirational speakers, end-of-year fundraisers, and discussion of issues that deal with youth physical and mental health.

Power UP will host its first community golf event June 25 at Heather Downs Country Club in Toledo. Visit [www.powerupfoundation.com](http://www.powerupfoundation.com) for details on how to register.

Future events being planned are Power UP 5ks, 10ks, and a 1 mile Fun Run for 12 and under.

School districts that wish to start Power UP Societies in their high school may contact Cyndi Abdon at [cyndi@powerupfoundation.com](mailto:cyndi@powerupfoundation.com).

**Tri-Adventure**



Mike Vernot/C-N Photo

Cyclists take off on a 36-mile loop during the 25th annual Tri-Adventure Race at Independence Dam State Park on Saturday. The race benefits the Naturalist Scouts. The race consists of cycling 36 miles, canoeing or kayaking six miles down the Maumee River or Miami-Erie Canal to the village of Florida and backpacking back. Preliminary results of the race will be posted at [www.maumetriadventure-race.net](http://www.maumetriadventure-race.net) by 3 p.m. today.

**OFFICERS**

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law enforcement service and sacrifice.

The president said he was proud of law enforcement officials who chose their careers out of a sense of calling to serve their neighbors, neighborhoods and “to live a life in service of others.”

“It’s a calling that carries immense risk,” he added, citing the uncertainty of what that next duty call might bring.

“Every day in America, families go about their

lives” — work at the office, dropping kids at school, said Obama, who was joined at the event by Attorney General Eric Holder.

“We often take it for granted, this cycle of life.” But, he added, “chance can change everything overnight.”

Figures from the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund show that officer deaths declined from 138 in 2008 to 116 in 2009.

That’s the fewest line-of-duty deaths since 1959, when there were 109,

according to the data.

More lawn enforcement officers died in traffic-related incidents in 2009 than from any other single cause of death, but the number killed by gunfire increased by more than 20 percent, according to the group’s report.

Some of those honored at the memorial service included the four officers killed near Seattle by an ex-convict; four who were shot to death in Oakland, Calif.; and three other police officers who were shot to death in Pittsburgh.



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**Students raise money for memorial**

AKRON (AP) — Students in Ohio have raised \$2,500 to help create a national park and monument at the Pennsylvania site where United Airlines Flight 93 crashed during the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Sandra Felt, whose husband died the crash, thanked middle school students Friday in Akron. The fifth- and sixth-graders ran laps and held other track events for pledges.

Her husband, Edward

Felt, was one of the 40 passengers and crew who died when the plane crashed into a field near rural Shanksville, about 65 miles southwest of Pittsburgh.

A groundbreaking ceremony for a National Park Service memorial at the crash site was held last November.

The group Families of Flight 93 is seeking \$3 million as the latest installment in federal spending on the project.