

I realized that my sister didn't want to die; she wanted to stop suffering.

Testimonial from Marie-Hélène Côté, bereaved and care recipient



In 2004, I was recovering from cancer. I'll always remember what my sister said, in our last conversation. She told me: "You, you're sick for real. For me, it's all in my head." Those words struck me so much. In my view, mental illness is no less important than cancer. We were each living with a health

problem that we didn't choose.

Mental health problems are still so stigmatized in our society. The prejudices expressed—sometimes without recognizing them—make it hard for someone to accept their condition. My sister didn't accept her mental illness. She minimized her experience—and her suffering.

My sister was in psychiatric care at least three times. She tried to commit suicide several times. She was suffering so much she didn't know how to live with it. On November 10, 2004, I learned that Catherine had committed suicide. When my brother told me on the phone, I yelled so hard because I couldn't believe that such a tragedy could have happened. It seemed unreal.

It was a short while after the funeral that my own family and I contacted JEVI for help—and especially help for our two teenagers. When we called JEVI, they proposed a family meeting.

It was scheduled for the early evening. My husband went to get our youngest at his elementary school. I went to get my eldest, just 14 years old. We went together to eat. The supper was as usual; we each talked about our day. And we talked about the upcoming meeting. We explained why we were going to JEVI, what we would be doing there, and that it was an opportunity to ask questions and talk about what the suicide meant to them.

When we got in the car to go to the meeting, my eldest son said he had a friend at school who was talking about suicide and that it was worrying him a lot. I said again that JEVI was a good place to talk about it.

Our meeting took place in several steps. First, we were welcomed by a caregiver. He took the time to listen to us. Then he described the different steps involved in mourning the loss of a loved one. This was really important for me. It let me know what was to come and to understand that my reactions and emotions were normal. We continued by going over our questions. At this point, my son talked about the situation with his friend at school. I saw in my partner Éric's eyes that he couldn't believe someone so young could be confronted with suicide. My son had several concerns, and the caregiver guided him in terms of what he could do in the situation.

Once back at home, I told them that if they had other questions or wanted to return to JEVI, either as a family or individually, I would be happy to support them in the process.

In the following months, some days and even some weeks weren't always easy. I can't tell you how many times when I was alone I cried in the car and all the things I allowed myself to say to my sister. The simple fact of knowing about the cycle of grief helped me to experience my emotions fully.

With time, my grief healed. I realized that my sister didn't want to die; she wanted to stop suffering.

Catherine was an extraordinary person. She was creative, an artist, a sensitive and generous person. I miss her still. It cannot be said enough how essential it is to get help when someone has suicidal thoughts—and to reach out for care when someone is grieving a loss by suicide. JEVI helped my family and I get through the pain of that experience.

JEVI continues to offer the service of personalized meetings after the death of a loved one. Thanks to your donations, your involvement, and your participation in the fundraising activities, the organization is able to maintain its essential services.

819 564-1354

**Direct call to a JEVI caregiver
Monday to Friday, from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm.**

24/7 provincial help line: 1 866 APPELLE (277-3553)