

# Fatal Judgments

Teens use a final solution  
for temporary problems

By Bob Evancho

*The thought of suicide is a great consolation: by means of it one gets successfully through many a bad night.*

— Nietzsche

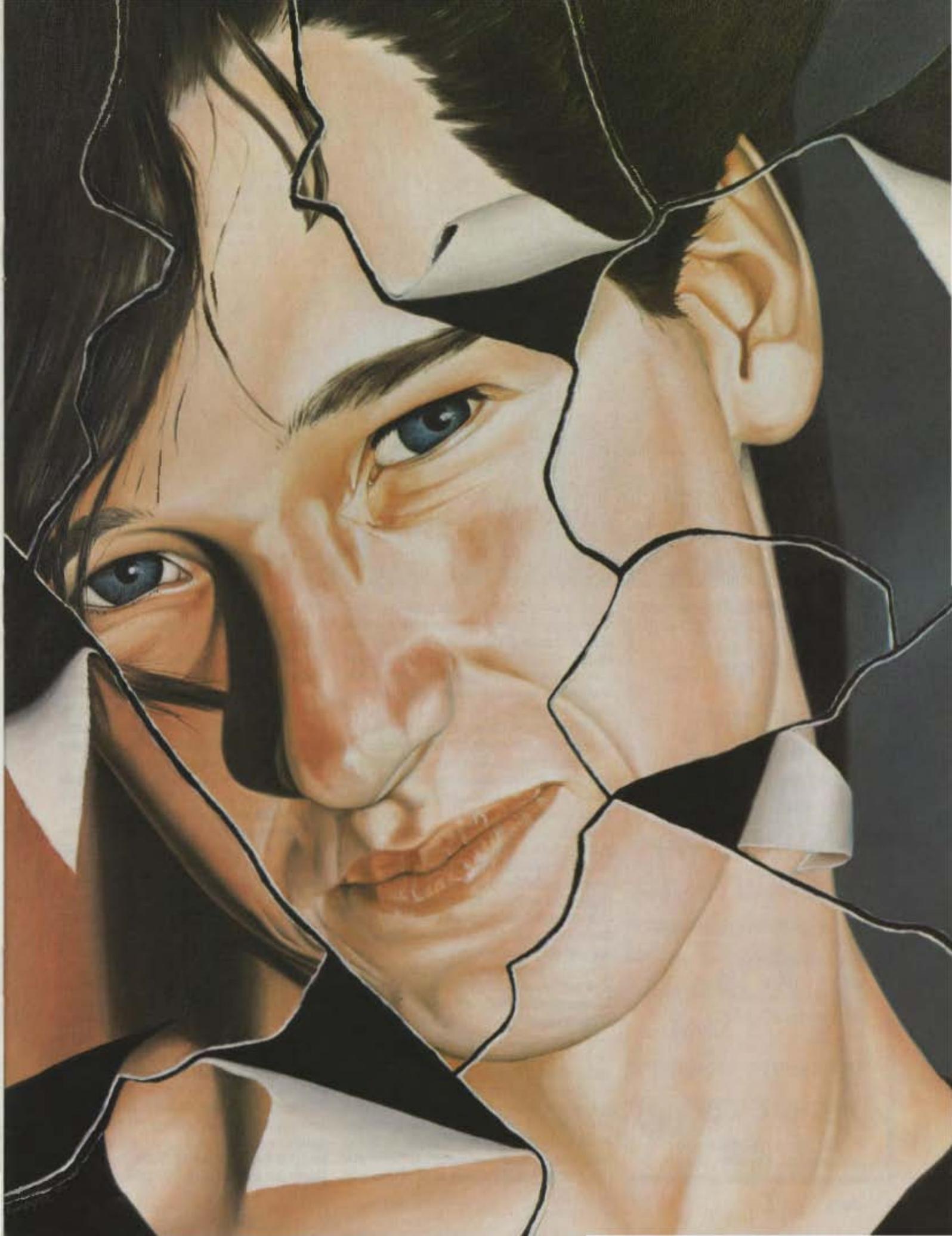
**'He got mad and  
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thinking.'**

**S**ometimes the imprudence and impulsiveness of youth can be fatal. That's the most damnable thing about many teen-age suicides.

As Nietzsche implies, the line between contemplating and committing suicide is sometimes thin and indistinct. And with their frail young psyches unable to cope with whatever is tormenting them, some teenagers topple over the edge — impulsively and tragically taking their own lives over a "crisis" that eventually would have passed.

And while it's true that some teen-agers commit suicide because of deep-seated and prolonged depression or other personal agonies, others kill themselves while in a state of acute and short-lived despondency called "reactive depression," a fairly common malaise among adolescents.

Such situations may be ephemeral, but they can also be deadly, warns Boise State psychologist Jim Nicholson. Because of their puerility and





*Sandra Forrey (with photos of Isaac): "It's like a part of me died; I'll never be the same."*

**'The crisis causing their problems may blow over in a relatively short time.'**

inexperience in dealing with life's cruelties, some teens are ill-equipped to cope with certain traumas, and their problems are blown out of proportion to their true measure. It is during this interval of time, says Nicholson, when some teen-agers may become suicidal.

"When you combine reactive depression with the impulsivity and lack of perception of reality common among some adolescents, you get a window of high risk when they are more likely to commit suicide," says Nicholson, chair of BSU's department of counseling. "Often the crisis that triggers this state of mind is real — a kid flunks out of school, or a friend is killed, or a boyfriend or girlfriend ends a relationship — and the pain they are feeling is in fact a normal reaction. But what happens to some adolescents under these conditions is that they become less logical and more depression-prone."

According to Nicholson, suicidal depression and thoughts of doom can manifest themselves during this window of susceptibility, "but the crisis causing their problems may blow over in a relatively short time," he says. "In many cases with adolescents, the high potential for suicide is short-lived, and the person is eventually reconnected with reality and thinking more rationally. What you need to do when dealing with someone in this situation is to make sure they know that there will be some sense of hope and relief, often in the next few days. With reac-

tive depression, that window of high risk can last for weeks or days, sometimes just hours or minutes."

Sadly, 15-year-old Isaac Forrey apparently slipped through that "window" three years ago and killed himself. Forrey committed suicide following what seemed to be a fairly harmless quarrel with his mother. But as his parents would later discover, there were other factors that led to the tragedy.

Sandra Forrey sits in the dining room of her quaint and comfortable Boise home. It's midday and the house is quiet. Isaac was the seventh of her and her husband's 10 children; their ages range from 34-13. In the spring of 1991 Isaac shot himself in the head with a small-caliber handgun alongside an irrigation canal near his home. "I can talk about it today without crying," she says, "but some days I can't." She doesn't cry, but once or twice she blinks back tears; occasionally her voice wavers.

Forrey is willing to share her story because it might help other parents avoid a tragedy like hers. Yes, she says, her son's suicide was an impetuous act that might not have happened had he cooled off. Yes, it came without warning. Yes, that makes it all that more difficult to accept.

"Kids at that age will do it on impulse, and Isaac was impulsive," she says. "That was his nature — a lot. He would get real mad and be un-mad five minutes later. We had absolutely no forewarning [of the suicide], so

that made it really hard."

In hindsight, Forrey believes her son was experiencing some problems in the weeks and months preceding his death—but nothing more than what most junior-high-aged boys grapple with.

"He loved football. He was real close to all his football buddies, and in the winter, I don't know, he began to become disgruntled with some of the friendships he had," Forrey says. "And one night in January he called us at almost midnight and said for us to come get him, and I said, 'What's going on?' and he said, 'Well, they're drinking, Mom, and I don't want to be here.' And he had us come get him. And we were just real proud of him, because it's hard to do that."

"But later after he died he had some journals at the school that they gave us, and [we discovered that] he was getting harassed because of some of this. And some of his friends after his death. ... Well, one of the boys sobbed and said, 'It's our fault. We were on his case all the time, calling him wimp and weanie and everything else because he wouldn't party.'

"And instead of realizing how hard it was on him we just thought he was strong," Forrey continues, "and now I'm thinking he was a lot more unhappy and frustrated with lots of things than we realized. ... He would act like it didn't bother him, but I think it was ripping him up inside. I think it was real hard for him to have his best friends calling him a chicken."

Other than a minor episode a few days before he died in which he got "kind of mouthy" while shopping with her, Forrey says there were no signs of her son's inner turmoil. "It wasn't even a big deal," Forrey says of the incident. "We didn't even argue about it. ... Other than that situation until the day he died, nothing out of the ordinary occurred."

Then it happened.

During a family outing a few miles from their home Forrey says Isaac became frustrated by a lack of recreational facilities. "He said to me, 'This is dumb, this is stupid, this is lame; I don't want to be here,'" she recalls. An argument between the two ensued and the younger Forrey said he was leaving and going to a friend's home. Sandra Forrey, who had her younger children to tend to, decided to let him go: "I said, phooey, he'll just cool down, he'll be all right, I won't worry about it."

Isaac went home and called a friend who he was supposed to meet the next day and told him not to bother. "All he said was, 'Don't come over tomorrow, I'm not going to be here,'" his mother recalls.

He pulled down a gun that was tucked away on a closet shelf and walked to the canal.

There are lots of teens like Isaac Forrey—teens with the same potential to rid them-

selves of some self-torment with the most drastic of measures. Fortunately, many of them receive professional help from people like Nicholson before they impulsively self-destruct.

"In a situation where you think someone is severely suicidal, you don't want to overplay the situation, but you also have to take it as far as necessary to make sure the person is safe," says Nicholson. "In some situations you have to take over for the individual and function for them. If the person is at high risk, you need to make it incumbent upon them to tell you why they shouldn't be put in a high-security hospital situation."

In retrospect, Sandra Forrey believes it was a matter of untimeliness. First, her son did not overtly exhibit the clinical symptoms that indicate suicidal tendencies.

"He was a little irritable that week, like that time in the mall, but nothing serious," she says. "That's why it's so bizarre. He got mad and did it without thinking. I also think there's an element at that age where they think they're indestructible, that they aren't going to die and nothing bad is going to happen to them."

Second, he was alone after the argument and no one was around to defuse his irrational behavior. Unfortunately, he may have just missed running into his grandmother by mere minutes before he went to the canal.

"My mother lives nearby and she walked over to our house because the phone line was busy; I think he took it off the hook," Forrey recalls. "I think if he had seen her, that might have broken his chain of thought."

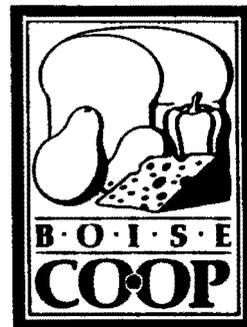
Despite the second-guessing, Forrey has been able to cope with the loss of her son through her professional and educational background and her strong religious beliefs. A 1992 graduate of BSU with a degree in psychology, she is serving an internship at a Boise counseling center as part of her work toward a master's degree in counseling from Idaho State University.

"I know I was mad at him that day, but I could be in the loony bin if I let myself think I drove him to that," she says. "I guess I knew that it was bigger than that, that little argument. ... The overwhelming sense I had is that God was in control of this and to let God have it. I said to my husband, 'Richard, this isn't my fault, or your fault or anybody's fault. We've got to just let God have this.'"

Her inner strength is impressive. "We don't go around pretending that he just died or that it was an accident," she says. "He shot himself."

But a minute later, her emotions take over—the emotions of a mother who has lost her son. "I still sleep with his Raiders T-shirt under my pillow," she says.

She stops, sighs and searches for the right words—but there aren't any. "It's like part of me died; I'll never be the same." □



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