

No More Bad Days

Christian Anderson's fingers reached to sponge the sweat from his forehead, but his *Fall Out Boy* T-shirt was nearly soaked through.

Drops landed with a soft thud on the oriental carpet, bullets of sweat dodging his bare feet that dragged along the shorthair rug, inaudible over the roar of the passing cars and chatter coming from eleven floors beneath the open window.

The smells of Samgyeopsal and Kimchi hung in the air and the neon numbers on the digital clock rolled over to two a.m. The whole city was asleep it seemed, except for Anderson.

Anderson looked right, at a large map that covered the span of an entire wall in the study, his eyes drifting from South Korea back to the U.S.-back to Texas. 6,819 miles away and blurred by the tears that kept coming.

His feet, worn from days of proselyting, carried him to a small leather chair that sat in the corner of the room. He flopped forward, just enough so that his knees grazed the hardwood floor beneath the chair, the only area of the room the rug did not reach.

Anderson slumped further, read 2:10 on the desk clock, peeked over to the cracked door of the room where his companion slept soundly, and let out one long wail.

"I honestly thought I was going to kill myself that night," Anderson said, his tone unchanging. "I just felt like nothing was right. We weren't getting along. We weren't getting anywhere with the work. I'll always remember just being on the floor and having nowhere to turn. There's been a lot of those times."

Anderson isn't the only one. Over 30 percent of college-aged adults between the ages of 18 and 24 have reported seriously contemplated suicide, according to a study done by the American Psychological Association.

Suicide rates have tripled in the last fifty years, leaving one in 12 young adults having made a suicide plan, and 1.5 young adults out of every 100 having attempted to end their own life at least once.

With 1 in 4 college students grappling with a diagnosable mental illness, their struggle with stress, anxiety and depression isn't letting up; and the correlation between the two are affecting millions of college-aged young adults just like Anderson.

"It hits a lot more people than you would think," Anderson said. "The suicide rate for college campuses is really high; I've had people come up to me and say 'I struggle with this too,' and

they're people that you would have no idea that struggle with depression. You ask any random person on campus if they know someone with depression they'll say yes. A lot of students know they have depression, and they just won't go get help, and it's really sad."

While 1 young adult suicide happens every two hours, a nineteen-year-old Christian Anderson battled to suppress and overcome thoughts of suicide in the early morning hours of Seoul, South Korea in 2016.

Anderson does not credit his healing to counseling or therapy however, but to a group he created with his own will, determination and more importantly, with his anxiety and depression.

"I was in church, I was a returned missionary, and was struggling; and then something came up in my mind, 'the best way to help yourself is to serve others,'" Anderson said. "So I went ahead and texted my friend and said 'run with me here, I want to do an online group like AA, where it's just open dialogue, you can come and talk about things and talk it out. So, we put together a website and made flyers for a meeting, set up a page on Facebook, passed out flyers, and set up the meeting at Center Square. About 15 or 20 people showed up."

The group is called No More Bad Days, and it has blossomed into a fully-fledged nonprofit and support group that continually meets once a week, even two years later in Anderson's absence as he completes an internship in Washington D.C.

"We do this so that people can see they're not alone," Anderson said. "In essence we start to hold each other accountable. It's evolved so much, we've made a family out of it, and these people have become my best friends --it's a place where we can just be ourselves, it's just a place where we can be comfortable."

Michael Menendez, No More Bad Days co-founder and director in Anderson's absence, said the group has always remained entirely student run.

"I think our biggest goal is to let everyone know that no matter what, whatever it is you're going through, we love you and we're here," Menendez said, standing curbside and flashing a sign that reads "Free Hugs" outside the Burg restaurant.

While Anderson said the support group has helped him to gain control over his depression and anxiety, it's been a long time coming.

"I was in high school, around 15 or 16 years old when I realized that I wasn't happy," Anderson said. "I was doing everything- I was doing well in school, I had friends, but there were definitely times when I didn't want my friends anymore, so I'd kick them away. Looking back, I did a lot of good things, but at the time nothing could make me happy. I would do sports, music, and feel horrible about who I was. I just wasn't happy, and I never understood why."

His sophomore year of high school, what Anderson thought was a handle on his depression was shattered when his friend didn't show up for class one day.

"He had hung himself in his closet," Anderson said. "It didn't really sink in until I heard about a sixteen-year-old who commit suicide, and then realizing he wasn't in school that day. We said bye one day, and he just never came back. He left a note and said he didn't feel adequate, that he could never make anyone happy. No one really knew that he struggled with depression. He buried it deep, which is probably the worst thing you can do, and more than anything that showed me where it can get if you don't do something about it. This is something that you need to talk about, even if you aren't comfortable, even if people don't know a lot about mental illness."

Anderson was raised by a single mother, and while he had a normal upbringing, she had a limited understanding of exactly what had been plaguing her son's mind every single day.

"The first time I told my mom was when I got back from my mission," Anderson said, recalling his muggy battles with the Seoul humidity during his nights alone in the apartment study. "I was about twenty, and I was like, 'Hey, I struggle with depression and I've felt suicidal before, and she just said "Well, you've never been like that so that's not true."

So, Anderson turned to instrumental therapy.

"Music has been everything; really the music helps because you listen to the lyrics and it's poetic, it's beautiful they get what I'm going through and they give advice," Anderson said. "More than anything, music has given me ethics, and morals and a sense of belonging; it's just love."

Anderson picked up guitar in high school, and began translated his struggle into song lyrics. While Anderson often plays the guitar at local gigs, his commitment is as the lead vocalist of the Rexburg-based garage band, Carry On, Kid; which is doing better than any of the four band members had expected, and not just within the Rexburg music scene.

"It's amazing to me because I wrote a lot of these songs in high school, when I was having a depressing times and having a lot of anxiety," Anderson said. "Seeing these songs that were written in my bedroom come to life, expressing what i was feeling, and seeing people singing it back is incredible."

The Carry On, Kid posse has risen from the wooden-walled, one-couched basement of Mike's Music in downtown Rexburg to Hidden Home Records in Boise, as the band was just signed on February 18 with the record label after Anderson broadcasted a live video of one of their practice sessions.

Anderson said it was after the band released their first album, *Our World is Ugly and Filled with Beautiful People*, in July of 2016, that the reception of their music and overwhelming love for their band began flowing in.

“My big thing I like to tell people is that emotions and creativity and love are shown through art,” Anderson said. “God loves us so he painted the sky; in order to show love and emotions, writing music has been my outlet.”

The band has an eleven-song album that they hope to release in March of 2018, while Hidden Home Records will deal with the distribution and marketing of the up-and-coming album.

While Anderson has learned to cope, he once fit the statistic. He was once one out of the 12 young adults who seriously contemplates suicide in the U.S. Yet for him, while that thought may have disappeared, his struggles with anxiety and depression remain constant.

“The fact that over one-in-four college students struggle with this is a big deal; it was hard and it’s still hard,” Anderson said. “It manifests itself at different times. I kind of look at depression like alcoholism. You’re an alcoholic for life- it’s not like ‘Oh now i’m cured’; it’s something you constantly battle with. You think you’re on top of it, but it can become horrible at any second.”

Anderson turns on the T.V. for background noise in his current D.C. apartment after a 30 minute ride home on the metro.

“It wasn’t until my mission that God helped me understand what my depression was and what made me anxious about myself and fall into a depression,” Anderson is transported back to the night on his knees below the world map, eleven floors above the streets of Seoul, South Korea. “You could probably hear me crying over the cars. That was one of my first times praying out loud. As I kept praying, I just felt a voice say that everything was going to be ok, that this was only just for a moment.”