

## **Harrison speaks candidly about suicide**

I sat down by a stone fire place at the Michigan home of Harrison's. The fire was blazing and crackling. It was a subject that I had been reluctant to bring up, but felt that it should be represented as it was a part of his life, a desperate part. With trepidation, I asked the question...

Mason: "Harrison, how many times have you attempted suicide?"

Harrison slowly turned and looked at me with his ice blue eyes, a glaze came across them. I had touched upon a subject that was very troubling to Harrison and I knew it simply by looking into his eyes. It was as if his pupils opened and I could see the darkness in his soul.

Harrison: "Three times Mason, Three times I killed a part of myself in a single act. However, for 10 years I tried every day."

Mason: "You attempted suicide every day for 10 years?" I was perplexed by what he was saying.

Harrison: "Suicide is not always a single act. It is not always the gun in hand, the pills in throat and the slitting of the wrists. Suicide can be happening when you don't realize it is happening."

Mason: "I am afraid I don't understand Harrison."

Harrison: "And I thank you for being honest about not understanding. Mason, do you think people enjoy being in a bad place? Do you think all those that are addicted to drugs, find peace in that? Do you think that someone like me that goes at

150% when I only had 50% in me, enjoys that level of destruction? You may see a mentally ill drug addict and judge him as worthless and irresponsible. You may think he needs punished and ostracized from society. That isn't I what I see. I see him testing the fates. I see him dying. He doesn't need a beating he needs a hug! I didn't go the drug route. At 28, while lying in a hospital bed after a suicide attempt, I actually heard someone say, "If this were drugs, I could understand". Mind you, this is after I tried to kill myself – I had to hear someone say that had I been a drug addict, I would have been more acceptable. People amaze me with their lack of insight and compassion."

Mason: "I can understand how drugs can be killing you daily, but you didn't take drugs..."

Harrison: "When I left my apartment in Cleveland and flew to the Caribbean, I was on a mission. I had read that drowning was the most peaceful way to die. I swam as far out into the ocean as I could, with every intent of being so worn out, I could not swim back. That damn relentless energy of mine that has kept me alive for all these years swam me back. Then I didn't know what to do. I decided that if I spent every dime that I had, then I would be destitute and hungry and would end up dead, right? Well, I did that and ended up on the streets of a third world country. I walked and I walked. Somehow someday I would eventually drop, I said to myself. I walked by a mirror one day in town – my shirt off, as it was 90 degrees and I was in the sun all day every day and was dumbfounded when I saw myself – I looked great! All that walking had gotten me in shape of all things! I was beside myself with the challenge that I had before me. I hate physical pain, cutting myself was not an option – that came a few years later. Killing me was not going to be the easiest thing I had ever done!

Mason: “Why? Why was it so important to die?”

Harrison: “At different times it meant different things to me, to die. But the baseline of it all was I was tired of battling something that was invisible to everyone but me. This meant that I battled alone.”

Mason: “Your family knew of your mental illness though, your battle.”

Harrison: “Well, they knew the definition. And the other factor is, I had been battling mental illness for years before I ever knew what mental illness was. I was worn out! Some family were supportive in their own way, others were quite damaging to my self-perception and worth. When you do something as serious as try to take your own life and the response is either not there at all or it is a response of nonchalance and indifference you realize the value of your life to others. I was sadly made aware that too many that I loved very much, my life didn’t mean much.”

Mason: “People just didn’t care that you had tried to take your own life?”

Harrison: “The first thing that many do is make it simple and in accordance to making it simply they redefine a suicide “attempt” as a call for attention rather than a call for help. Whether they cared or not – I will never know and have long since stopped caring if they do care. People’s actions speak louder than any words and I made up my mind long ago that I am not taking part in any illusions brought on by someone else, I have enough of those battles within myself. – My psyche couldn’t handle an emotional

investment that might bottom out. I realized that with my personality and my illness, one had to be pretty strong to be my friend and those are the people that I aligned myself with; Those that cared more about me than the illness or the actions caused by it. I aligned myself with friends that cared enough to learn about my illness and listen to me. People who respected me rather than condemned me.”

Mason: “What takes you to a place so desperate that you would take your own life?”

Harrison: “I believe it to be a combination of life events and the illness. There is a misrepresentation that people commit suicide when depressed. That is not generally the way it happens. More times than not, people attempt suicide when they are feeling better, yet closely attached to the feelings of depression and hopelessness. It takes a lot of guts to end your own life, it is not nearly as cowardly as people say it is – nor is it heroic by any means. This subject is very troubling to me because I have lost friends to suicide and I myself have been there. You must realize that living with mental illness, an illness that few take seriously and an illness that so many judge – that every day of my life, to this day, I look forward to leaving this earth. Suicide is not the answer – if you are here, and then there is something you must do and that is the way that I have looked at my life, but never minimize the idea that I would rather be asleep forever than talking with you. Some people may sensationalize suicide, they may use it as a tool for their ego, but do you take that chance? I guess if you can live with it, you do – I however can’t. All it takes is my caring and I have a lot of that to give.”

Our conversation stopped there and Harrison had a pensive stare into the fire that gave me chills. A man that had done so much, experienced so much, longed for the end. I am not sure that I understand why, to this day, but I am not sure anyone can understand unless you live it.