

Author Raises Awareness About Bullying and Brother's Suicide

Award-winning author Arthur Mills recalls his relationship with his brother who committed suicide in his memoir "The Empty Lot Next Door." Recent headline suicides resulting from bullying resonate for this author who has experienced the situation firsthand.

Arthur Mills' novel has received attention for the ghost story told within it, but more haunting for the author is the story of his brother, Richard—a story that ended with his twelve year old brother's suicide as told in *The Empty Lot Next Door* (978-0-9860166-4-6, Second Edition, *Branching Plot Books*, 2012).

Arthur Mills knows firsthand what it is to be bullied and how bullying can lead to suicide. Arthur was the youngest of four brothers. His two older half-brothers as well as older neighborhood boys continually bullied and tortured his brother, Richard. While Richard did not fight back, he released his frustration by then beating and bullying Mills. Eventually, the bullying and feeling like an outcast resulted in Richard hanging himself from a tree at age twelve.

Current news stories of bullying and resulting suicides have made Mills want to speak out and raise awareness. In a recent interview with Reader Views, Mills stated about his book, "Even if my readers remain skeptical of the ghost story, I hope they learn one of the underlying themes of the story: prevention of suicide. My brother Richard gave so many signs that he was in serious trouble before he committed suicide. But no one did anything about it because we just didn't know what to look for. If my readers become more aware of the signs of suicide and learn to talk about them, then my book will be a success."

Richard exhibited several suicidal signs before his death. Not only was he bullied, but Richard was often self-destructive in his actions, not protecting himself by taking alternate paths to school to avoid the bullies. A talented performer who did magic tricks, acted in school plays, and enjoyed creative writing, over time, Richard exhibited more signs of being suicidal, including becoming introverted, talking to an imaginary friend, believing God would protect him from dangers he boldly faced, and writing poetry about death and destruction. Richard also mimed suicidal actions, pretending to shoot himself and choking himself with a belt in front of his friends. Sadly, his parents dismissed these cries for help as just "acting up."

Like many suicide victims, Mills' brother was different from others, and as a result, was bullied or ignored; while Mills was encouraged to participate in sports, Richard was not equally encouraged in his artistic pursuits. In *The Empty Lot Next Door* Mills tells his and his brother's story, a story that still raises questions about why Richard killed himself, and how bullying may have marred his brother's understanding of reality until he felt the need to end his life. Readers have found the novel, which Mills says is only 20 percent fictionalized, gripping and compelling, and Kirkus Reviews declares, "In a coming-of-age story that's well paced and layered with emotion, Mills creates moments of true suspense through guileless prose as he unearths a family tragedy." Mills hopes such family tragedy need not be repeated in other families.

About the Author

Arthur Mills has traveled the world, both literally and figuratively. In his military life as a Chief Warrant Officer, he was stationed in several countries the world over. In his life as a reader, he's been able to visit hundreds more. And as a writer? He's been able to create a world all his own.

Arthur is the creator of *Branching Plot Books*, a book series devoted to the art of double entendre and reader interaction. Aided by voice recognition software, Arthur has been able to pen novels to captivate people of all ages. Whether it's the horror of *The Empty Lot Next Door*, or the interactivity of *The Crawl Space*, Arthur's main goal in writing has always been to develop a deeper means of communication with the world—both real and imagined.

When not working on his latest novel, Arthur is a full-time husband and father. He and his wife, Yonsun, have two children, Arthur and Allen and live within the lush Washington landscape.