

How Naomi Judd's Death Made this Minister Think, 'I Gotta Get Help!'

When the details surrounding Naomi Judd's death surfaced, it scared minister Janet Boynes. It was recently discovered that the singer was suffering from mental illness, and she recently took her own life with a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Boynes was deeply concerned that she herself might be headed down that path, and she knew she needed help. But she also knew that it would not be a comfortable situation.

"So, when Ashley and Wynonna Judd's mom committed suicide, I was like, 'Man, that can happen to me,'" Boynes says. "And when I found out that she used her gun, I was sick. I just thought, 'I gotta get help, because I don't want to be one of those people.'"

Like Naomi Judd, Boynes also owned a gun. And, when Boynes' counselor asked her to take the gun out of her house, Boynes says that she was offended.

"I was like, 'Wait a minute. Do you not trust me?'" she says.

Finding a good counselor to combat her mental illness issues had already stretched the boundaries of Boynes' comfort zone. She was afraid of the stigma that might come along with getting counseling, but when she talked with a few of her friends about her depression and negative thoughts, they recommended she see someone professionally.

Initially, she balked at the idea.

"And I was like, 'I'm not getting counseling,'" says Boynes. "I'm just not going to do it. I'm not ready for that."

Eventually she gave in and found a counselor she felt like she could trust.

Boynes says that she never told anyone about her depression until recently because she didn't want anyone to feel sorry for her or worry about her. "I'm the one that's supposed to be worried about other people. I'm the pastor," Boynes says.

Boynes is a prominent minister who speaks about how God called her out of homosexuality. As a child, Boynes' mother abused her physically, and her stepdad raped her. Because of the abuse she experienced at home, Boynes beat up other kids in school and gained the reputation as one of the worst kids on the block.

Boynes says it was hard for her to escape those experiences. Even after one conversion experience, two re-commitments and a lifetime of ministry, she says that in her worst moments, her past still haunts her.

"When you grow up, and everybody thinks you're the worst kid on the block, and that you're going to amount to nothing, and you'll be dead by the time you're 21 and your mom calls you all these names—at 64 they still stick with me," Boynes says. "I can still hear that. I can still hear the pain. I can still see that man raping me. I can still see my mom being abused."

Although Boynes still has those memories, she forgave her mom and formed a meaningful relationship that lasted many years until her mother died. She stayed in the hospital with her mother for the last seven days of her life.

"I watched her go through that pain, and the images—I can't get out of my brain," she says. "It's almost like a piece of me went with her. And sometimes I want to be with her."

Boynes speaks candidly about her experience of depression now, but she didn't always feel that freedom. She thought other people would call her crazy or try to boot her out of

ministry, but recently, she saw two stories and thought, “That could be me.”

Boynes says that she relates to the story of 2019 Miss USA Chelsie Kryst, who committed suicide by jumping from a window of the 29th floor of her New York City apartment building. Kryst’s mother said her daughter hid her “high-functioning depression,” and Boynes struggles with a similar form of depression.

“My counselor said, ‘You’re a very active depressed person,’” Boynes says. “You write books. You travel. You do podcasts. You’re on Christian television shows. And you’re still depressed.’” {eoa}

You can hear more of Boynes’ story here:

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