

'No More Secrets'

By: Lisa Romero
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ROYERSFORD - John Gallagher looks for all the world like a typical American businessman, husband and dad.

As he dresses for work in his usual suit and tie, his wife Trisha bustles around their sun-dappled Royersford home for what promises to be another busy morning for both of them.

He's smiling; she's smiling. It's obvious love dwells here after more than 30 years spent building a life together and raising four children.

What isn't obvious, unless you know the story behind their new book, "No More Secrets: A Family Speaks About Depression, Anxiety and Attempted Suicide," is the truth they kept hidden for years from nearly everyone they knew and loved - even their children, parents and closest friends:

John, 57, is a suicide survivor who almost didn't live to tell his story - either as an author or speaker.

In April 1999, unable to cope with overwhelming feelings of hopelessness, loneliness and inadequacy stemming in part from a pending layoff, John did the unthinkable:

He jumped head-first from the third-story window of a local hospital where he was being observed for anxiety and suicidal thoughts.

"We only looked away for a moment," Trisha explained.

That was all John needed.

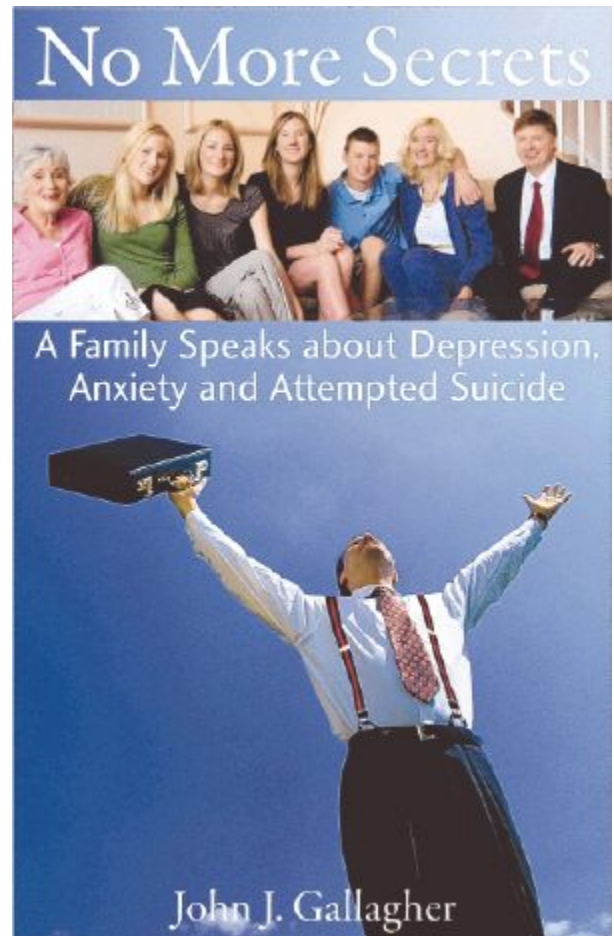
"I couldn't go through another minute," he said.

By his own admission, he shouldn't have survived the fall.

That he did - crushing his legs, but otherwise suffering only abrasions and no head trauma - was a "miracle," the couple agreed.

However, it's what happened after the suicide attempt that haunted the family for years - indeed, until this past January.

Instead of addressing John's depression, the family went into denial. Respecting his wishes to keep the situation private, Trisha and the older kids intentionally wove a web of stories designed to hide the truth.



So effective were they that John's dad and his two youngest children actually thought he'd been in an accident.

Indeed, John's father died never knowing the truth.

"We wanted to avoid the stigma associated with suicide," John said.

Trisha agreed. "For nine years, we couldn't say three words in this family: 'suicide,' 'anti-depressants' or 'therapy.'"

Over time, however, it was harder to keep people in the dark.

"They'd sort of figure it out," Trisha explained.

The younger children were eventually told.

The secret put enormous pressure on the entire family, adding even greater stress to John's considerable physical and mental rehabilitation.

At one point, he and his wife separated for several years, reuniting only after one of their children began showing signs of depression, a condition with genetic ties.

John, who'd been successfully managing his depression through a combination of therapy and medication, returned at just the right time to help strengthen the family again, the couple said.

But true healing for the Gallaghers began just seven short months ago.

After reading about a young man who, like him, had tried to commit suicide by falling from a building, John felt compelled to lift the veil of secrecy over his life and write a book about his experience.

The goal? To help people, especially families and men, become aware of the signs of depression and, if possible, to prevent others from experiencing what the Gallaghers had.

John encouraged each family member to write a chapter for the book, which goes on sale Sept. 1 on Amazon.com.

It wasn't easy to read what they wrote, he said - not by a long shot.

But it started a family dialogue that has led to a deeper understanding of depression's effects on everyone ... and to enormous healing.

"I feel like we have a new purpose," said John. "This book, and being able to speak out, is the reason God put me on this Earth."

Trisha agreed. "This is what he is called to do - articulately, passionately and honestly. We don't have to conceal the truth anymore.

"Now, we can help others."

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