

## Randolph Mom Creates Scholarship to Bring Attention to Suicide Prevention

By Henry M. Holden

Each year, 44,000 Americans take their life and 500,000 more self-injure themselves. What does that tell us about how fragile we are, or how upset we are that we can't cope?

Marisa Victoria Rincon (30) struggled with anxiety and depression. On February 21, 2017 she took her own life.

"We knew that Marisa was suffering with depression and anxiety," said her mother Dee Rincon. "We got her the best medical help we could. But looking at her artwork now I can see that she was suffering."

Marisa Rincon was born in West Chester, PA., and moved to Randolph in 1991. She graduated from Randolph high

school, in 2004, and went on to graduate from County College of Morris (CCM) and Montclair State University with honors, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in Fine Arts.

"I could not survive the passing of our daughter without our church, our family and friends; Especially Resurrection Parish and our administrator Father John Tarantino," said Rincon. "When my husband and I were sitting down with him making the funeral arrangements he said, 'We're going to celebrate Marisa's life, and that really picked me up.'"

"So, I went home, and, in her closet, I found all these wonderful pieces of art that I had never seen before. They gave me comfort that Marissa



had had a wonderful life. She was a very talented as an artist and she worked with mixed media. She was also a model for her online vintage clothing business."

Marisa's talent was recognized early. As a high school senior, she had a painting featured on the wall of a Randolph High School classroom, and

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later in the offices of Denville Pediatrics.

"After seeing all her artwork, I went to CCM and ask them what can we do? I was very concerned about the rising suicide rate. Marisa was a 2007 CCM Fine Arts graduate, and I asked if we could we do a presentation of her artwork and combine it with a mental health message. I spoke with Tod Doney, and he was thrilled with the idea. CCM has a great mental health department."

In conjunction with the Counseling and Student Success Department at CCM, the college's Art and Design Gallery hosted Marisa's artwork to recognize National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month in September (2017).

The exhibition, titled "Marisa Rincon: An Impression of Life," featured more than 20 works by Rincon.

The free exhibit ran from Aug. 21 to Oct. 13, 2017. "We had seven weeks to show her artwork, and we had a reception. So many people came out. I felt that I was honoring her, and this was important to me."

Then Rincon took a break to reflect on expanding her efforts. The first thing she did was seek training at the Ameri-

can Foundation for Suicide Prevention so she could properly share her story with others. "We had five exhibits where I made presentations; the Morristown Medical Center, Morris County Stigma Free school district, Camp Jefferson, (Jefferson Township), Richie's Compass, in Montvale, and New Jersey Health and Fitness, in Ledge-wood.

"I thought it would be nice to do something in my church, so last November, we held a 'Dance for the lost loved one,' in Resurrection Parish. "We had a line dancing and a Zumba night, and I provided information on mental health in the form of flyers for everyone. Then we had a "Zumba-thon" at my gym, in October. Sixty people came out. They danced for four hours and they didn't want to stop dancing!"

Rincon feels the more you know, the more you are educated, the more comfortable you will feel in helping somebody in your family or your friends. "We tend to feel very awkward about it, but we've been silent for too long."

Rincon is on the exhibit waiting list for her daughter's art at the MPAC and the Morris Museum.

It is Rincon's hope that these

art exhibits will help those struggling with mental health issues to seek help from their physician, the County College of Morris, or the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. She believes that is Marisa's voice, too.

Rincon says her focus is on suicide prevention so that fewer families must experience what she is going through. She says that the best way to reach people is, through her art.

"I did everything I could, but I see these gaps," said Rincon. "These gaps bother me. I should've done this or should've done that, but then I looked back, I also see all the nice things that we did together, but I still feel bad.

"We need to get the best medical help we can. We need to be their advocate if they let you.

"I wish I had the right questions to ask her. 'Marisa how are you feeling? Talk to me about your mental health. Do you want to talk about it?' Those were the wrong questions. The question should be open-ended. For example, 'Can you tell me what it's like? We must find the right words'.

Rincon still feels the guilt. "There were times when I thought I really helped her, but I have so much guilt which is very normal in suicide situations. I looked back and I see all these years that I could've done more but I feel I didn't do enough, and I don't want anybody to feel that way. This is what I'm still trying to figure out the fragileness of them.

We must try and get in their head. Most people don't seek medical help because they're

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embarrassed. There's a stigma associated with that. Looking at her artwork you can see that she was suffering. When I saw the artwork for the first time it really bothered me because of what the message was. Oh my God! I denied it and I didn't know what to do with it."

Rincon wants to educate people about mental health through NAMI (National Association for Mental Health) and AFSP (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention) meetings. These organizations hold parent and group meetings and they're all about mental health mostly for teenagers and adults. They teach to recognize the signs for suicide. "Through these meetings become an advocate for your child or the person your concerned about.

"People must not be afraid of mental health or 'back away'. It's not always easy to do. Education will help in this arena, and understanding, acceptance, compassion are needed.

"How do I handle my grief? I attended SOS meetings (Survivors of Suicide) grief

meetings. I keep busy, being constructive, helping others to understand mental health.

I'm keeping Marisa's talented artwork alive, fundraising for the CCM scholarship we established, and I have shed lots of tears - gallons of tears.

"I got through the first year when I felt like a howling wounded animal in the woods. The second year, 2018, the art exhibits and dance-a-thons pulled me through.

"I was so busy it helped me not think about the pain. I realized there were a lot of good people out there helping me along the way - my church, and my friends.

So, I say, "There is hope." I'm still here."

Marisa's legacy said Rincon is that "We are born with innate talents, and those gifts must be expressed and shared in order to be happy."

To date Dee Rincon has raised \$4,000 from the exhibits toward the Marisa Rincon Memorial Scholarship for the Arts at CCM. If you would like to donate to the



*Credit: Marisa Rincon.*

scholarship, make your check to the "Marisa Rincon Memorial Scholarship for the Arts," in care of Katie Olsen, Foundation Director at CCM. Or contact Dee Rincon at [dee\\_rincon@yahoo.com](mailto:dee_rincon@yahoo.com).

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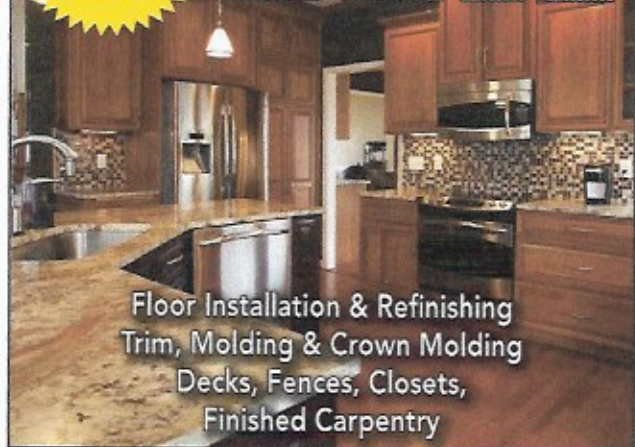
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