

Volunteers

Volunteer Profile Cilla DeHotman, Rindge

A guiding light for dark times

Rindge woman's deeply personal experience has led her to focus on suicide prevention

By ANNIE CARD

Cilla DeHotman, 54, is nine years older than her mother was when she killed herself at the age of 45. Cilla was only 16, the youngest of four children. Her father had left the family when she was only eight years old.

Ever since her mother's suicide, DeHotman worried she'd do the same thing. "When someone you love kills themselves, it becomes part of you. You now see suicide as an option." DeHotman remembers her 45th birthday like it was yesterday. "I was scared to death I wouldn't survive. My brother and sister got me through it." From different states her siblings kept her company via telephone.

Today DeHotman lives in Rindge and helps other suicide survivors by volunteering with The Samaritans. Every Thursday evening for the past five years, DeHotman has facilitated the Safe Place, a support group for individuals who have lost a friend or loved one to suicide.

"The people left behind feel abandoned. They come to the Safe Place to find others who understand. They cry. They get angry. And they work to find something positive. You *have* to find something positive or you won't keep going," DeHotman said.

Her mother's suicide left her feeling rejected and abandoned, too. As far back as she can remember, her mother told her she would kill herself one day, but not until she was 21 and out of college. Not until then, she promised.

"I'd come home from school and be afraid to open the door, not knowing what I'd find. I just never knew."

DeHotman found comfort with her pets. She crawled under the covers with her cat, closing out the bleakness.

"I'd just listen to my cat purr and hold her close. My cat wanted me and gave me solace. But a few times, I came home and all the pets were gone. She said she had them euthanized. That happened three times."

The girl decided cats and dogs were no longer safe, so she began collecting stuffed animals. "I figured, she can't kill these. But you know, I came home one day and they were all gone, too."

Instead of curling up with her pain and grief after her mother's suicide, the teenager made sure she wasn't alone. She went right back to school — St. Peter's Catholic School in Worcester, Mass.

"It's all I had. The nuns gave me a lot of love and attention," she said.

The school let her stay and graduate even though she couldn't pay the tuition. Neighbors and school staff dropped off groceries at DeHotman's apartment where she moved after the suicide. She haggled the rent down to \$27 per week.

"It's all I could afford. But the guy listened to my story and rented it to me. Not many people would rent to a 16-year-old. People were kind. Once in a while someone gave me a check for \$10 or \$15. I never would have made it without their help."

It took some time, but DeHotman says she now chooses to remember all the positives instead of just the suicide.

"My mother made sure I had access to art classes and music. And she taught me to love books. I was always getting new books from the library. She taught me to speak up and not be afraid to ask questions. I am who I am because of her, and because of all those who helped me. I'm blessed. I really am," DeHotman said.

As a child, DeHotman spent summers with her mother's parents in New York. That's when she



PHOTO BY ANNIE CARD

Cilla DeHotman of Rindge, shown at Dublin Lake, is a volunteer with The Samaritans and facilitates a weekly support group for people who have lost a loved one to suicide.

WHO TO CALL

- Safe Place meetings are held weekly. For more information, meeting time and location, please call the office at 603-357-5510.
- The crisis hotlines in Keene and Peterborough are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to anyone who is feeling lonely, depressed or suicidal. Peterborough 924-7000 Keene: 357-5505. Toll free in NH 1-877-583-8336. www.samaritansnh.org.

started volunteering. Her grandmother, a nurse at St. Vincent's Hospital, brought home a candy striper uniform one night and the next day at the hospital 12-year-old Cilla "was acting like I knew what I was doing, and doing OK."

As a youngster in Worcester her mother made her volunteer at Camp Joy, a camp for children with developmental disabilities. "As crazy as my mother was, she taught me a lot of good things."

Every Sunday morning from 9 to 11 DeHotman passes on some of these good things to her radio listeners. She hosts the Swap Shop on Hot Country 104.9 in Keene. Between matching sellers and buyers, she reminds her listeners to "Give more than you take." When a mom calls in and says she needs a crib, but doesn't have any money, DeHotman challenges her listeners, "Anyone out there have a free crib for this woman?"

And she reminds people to volunteer. She cajoles her radio listeners and her friends and colleagues at work. "I tell them to take their passion and find a way to volunteer it. You can be selfish and volunteer what you like, what makes you happy. You could call me

selfish. Volunteering really helps me. I need to be needed."

When we meet, DeHotman's wearing a dark pinstripe suit and long glossy purple fingernails. She's dressed for her day job with the Cheshire County Attorney's Office in Keene. As a liaison for victims and witnesses of felony crimes, she keeps them informed of their rights and the status of their case. Mostly homicides and sexual assaults, these cases can drag on for years and DeHotman is there for the victim to help them understand the process.

Before coming to this job 18 months ago, DeHotman worked with inmates at the county jail and before that at the New Hampshire Women's prison. "I've worked with those who have committed crimes, and now I work with victims. When you're a suicide survivor, you learn compassion. I have compassion for everyone. Everyone needs to be heard. I help where I can."

DeHotman moved to New Hampshire so she could have horses. At one time she owned 20, and for seven years led trail rides at East Hill Farm. The horses are gone. Now she's content in Rindge walking her two dogs at 5 a.m. every day and snuggling with her cats. "My animals and my husband comfort me. Deane is my biggest fan. He flies under the radar, but he's right there with me on all of my projects. He's the best."

Annie Card, owner of Annie Card Creative Services, developed her love for stories during her 16 years at Yankee Magazine. As executive director of a nonprofit she founded in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina, she used her photography and storytelling skills to attract money and volunteers. She continues to help nonprofits tell their stories. Have a favorite volunteer in your town? Tell Annie at annie@anniecand.com.

Help Out

WHAT'S NEEDED

Samaritans Hotline

Samaritans of the Monadnock Region are seeking volunteers to help staff their 24-hour hotline in both the Keene and Peterborough areas, offering telephone support to individuals who are in need of someone to talk to about their feeling depressed, lonely, anxious or suicidal. Monadnock region. 357-5510.

Tutors/Students Needed

For Project LIFT. Adult Ed. program assisting with study for GED exam, math, English, etc. Monadnock region. 464-5285.

Jaffrey: Cat/Kitten Care

Volunteers needed to help care for cats/kittens; also clerical, transportation, fostering, fundraising, publicity help needed. No offer of help too small. Kitty Rescue & Adoption. 532-9444.

Peterborough: Assisted Living Assistance

Volunteers for gardening, reading, crafts, entertainment, play cards or board games, music. Scott-Farrar Home. 924-3691.

Sharon: Office Help

Four hours a week for reception and computer tasks. Two hours a week to write press releases. Sharon Arts School. 924-4256, ext. 310.

RSVP/ Monadnock

Contact Kathy Baird at 924-7350 if interested in volunteering in any of the following areas, or visit www.monadnockvolunteer-center.org for more opportunities.

Drivers Needed: Once a month for a full day to help residents get to appointments and other personal business.

Gardeners: Help with garden maintenance and planting.

Neighbors-In-Deed: Providing companionship and assistance to senior citizens. One to two hours weekly.

Office Support: Various agencies need help with answering phones, greeting clients, and other office operations.

People with disabilities: Assist clients of local agencies with crafts, learning basic computer skills, cooking meals, and other activities.

Same Day Surgery: Caring individuals to provide reception and updates to family members about the progress of patients.

Senior Citizens: Help with filling out intake paperwork for programs and services.

HOW TO SUBMIT

Send us an e-mail with your organization's needs and upcoming volunteer opportunities at volunteers@ledgertranscript.com

Volunteer Briefs

MEDICAL RESERVE CORPS

Training provided for public health emergencies

The Greater Monadnock Medical Reserve Corps is looking for health professionals as well as other non-health related professionals to provide assistance in the Monadnock region during public health emergencies such as natural disasters, disease epidemics, and bioterrorism events. Becoming a member of the Greater Monadnock MRC will enable you to assist your regional community in these emergencies and to provide ongoing support for community health initiatives.

MRC units are community-based and function as a way to locally organize and uti-

lize volunteers — medical professionals and others — who want to donate their time and expertise to promote healthy living throughout the year and to prepare for and respond to emergencies.

Training is provided to all members and includes a variety of public health emergency response training, individual preparedness, CPR/First Aid, etc. For more information and to receive a volunteer application, attend an informational sessions on Oct. 31 at 10 a.m. at The River Center in Peterborough or at 2:30 p.m. at the Cheshire Medical Center in Keene.

For more information, contact Eileen Fernandes, Greater Monadnock Public Health Network Coordinator, at efernandes@cheshire-med.com or 354-5454, ext. 2130.

COMMUNITY CLOSET

Donations sought for free distribution

Clothing and footwear for all ages is being collected for free distribution throughout the community.

The Community Closet is looking for fall and winter items for boys/men and women, size large/XL, and children 0-10. It is also in need of bulletin boards.

Anyone interested in donating plastic bins with lids, clothing/footwear (primarily fall and winter at this time), or in helping sort and organize, call Kim Robbins at 562-7690 or at the Family Center 924-6306.

This is a free resource and open to everyone.

CVTC

Drivers needed to help with appointments, errands

Contoocook Valley Transportation Company is looking for volunteer drivers in Antrim, Bennington, Dublin, Frankestown, Greenfield, Greenville, Hancock, Jaffrey, New Ipswich, Peterborough, Rindge, Sharon, and Temple.

Volunteers help drive those in need to doctor appointments, the pharmacy, the grocery store or other necessary destinations. CVTC works with the N.H. West Chapter of the American Red Cross and the Disabled American Veterans. CVTC can answer your questions about mileage reimbursement, training, insurance, and scheduling. Call 1-877-428-2882.

Students want to help!

Giving back is more important than receiving, a lesson South Meadow School students learn through community service. Students must complete 20 hours of community service to attend the 8th Grade Farewell Ceremony.

Fall is a perfect chance for students to satisfy that requirement by helping with leaf raking, wood stacking and general yard clean up.

If you have a student with hours to fulfill, or if you're a person in need of assistance, contact [Nina Boyle](mailto:Nina.Boyle@smhschool.org) at 924-7105 for more information.



Peterborough Car Wash

Peterborough Plaza

A Soft-Touch Car Wash With Sparkling Results!

Open 7 Days • 9am-6pm (weather permitting)

*Businesses Building
Community*

wireless
ZONE
National strength, personal service™

Peterborough Plaza
603-924-3379

www.wirelesszone.com