



The Final Leap: Suicide on the Golden Gate Bridge

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The Golden Gate Bridge is one of the most beautiful and most photographed structures in the world. It is also the most deadly.

Since it opened in 1937, more than 1,500 people have died jumping off the bridge, making it the top suicide site on earth. It's also the only international landmark without a suicide barrier. Weaving drama, tragedy, and politics against the backdrop of a world-famous city, *The Final Leap* is the first book ever written about Golden Gate Bridge suicides.

John Bateson leads us on a fascinating journey that uncovers the reasons for the design decision that led to so many deaths, provides insight into the phenomenon of suicide, and examines arguments for and against a suicide barrier. He tells the stories of those who have died, the few who have survived, and those who have been affected--from loving families to the Coast Guard, from the coroner to suicide prevention advocates.

The Final Leap: Suicide on the Golden Gate Bridge Details

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From Reader Review *The Final Leap: Suicide on the Golden Gate Bridge* for online ebook

Liralen says

If it takes you a week to read this book, and the Golden Gate Bridge still doesn't have a suicide deterrent, odds are that another tortured soul will have jumped before you finish. (22)

Bateson's book boils down to one point and one point only: *build a barrier*. For a tough topic, it's actually a pretty smooth read—lots of statistics (I love statistics) and personal stories and comparison points. But Bateson comes in with an agenda. I'm not arguing that he shouldn't, actually, and nor am I arguing against a barrier (actually, as of last month, nets are being installed to catch would-be jumpers). It speaks to the way suicide is treated in the U.S. that it took *eighty years* of suicides off this bridge for some kind of barrier to be put in place.

...the Bridge District approved \$5 million for a barrier separating bicycle traffic from vehicle traffic on the bridge. As odd as it sounds, the reason why this barrier was erected wasn't to protect bicyclists. After all, no bicyclist had ever been killed on the bridge.... No, the reason why the bike barrier was approved was because it protected the Bridge District. Bicyclists, you see, were using the bridge for the purpose it was designed, and if a bicyclist was hurt or killed because the bridge lacked a safety barrier, then the district would be liable. (70)

Today, prospective phone counselors at the agency receive forty to sixty hours of specialized training before they handle their first call. This is the standard for all crisis centers that operate nationally certified suicide hotlines. By comparison, psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists, and other mental health professionals aren't required to take any training in suicide prevention to attain or retain professional licenses. Zero. Training in child abuse and domestic violence is mandatory, but training in suicide is optional despite the fact that most practicing clinicians have at least one suicidal patient in their caseload. (131)

As fascinating as the numbers and explanations in this book are (no sarcasm), I would have loved to see it go beyond the 'build a barrier' message. Something broader, perhaps, about the response to suicidal individuals in the States? It seems to me that this book will lose relevance the second the net under the Golden Gate Bridge is completed, if it didn't do so the second the net was begun. With a broader focus, maybe that wouldn't be so.

Is there a case for *not* putting up a barrier? I don't know. If there is, it certainly isn't to be found here. That in itself is sort of a pity, because I'm sure there are people who *can* make more compelling arguments than *The Final Leap* suggests, and I'd be curious to hear what those arguments are.

I hope the net currently being built makes a difference, but I'll leave it at that.

Ali Lafferty says

This book is largely informative and goes about cost-benefit analysis of building a suicide barrier for the Golden Gate Bridge to prove that it can be done; the book also discusses specific Bridge suicides to create an

impassioned plea for that barrier. I knew next to nothing about the Golden Gate Bridge deaths and while this book discusses them in great detail, this is less of a sensationalized or exploitative portrait and more of an educational discourse on what makes people jump from the bridge and how a deterrent will drastically cut down on the loss of life. The only reason this isn't five stars is because the editing was a little choppy (and this is University of California press so like, I know they could have done better).

Jean says

Well researched, thoughtful, easy to understand and informative. I'll never look at the GG Bridge the same way again.

It's the site of the most suicides in the world.

It's time a barrier is added, people!!!

Cary Lackey says

As a former resident of the Bay Area, and someone who's always been captivated by the beauty, history and majesty of the Golden Gate Bridge, I've also found the "dark side" of the GGB, and it's conflict with the "light side," fascinating as well.

I was drawn to this book after watching the 2005 documentary film, *The Bridge*, which documented actual suicides off of the GGB, as well as interviews with jumpers' families, witnesses, and even a surviving jumper himself, Kevin Hines.

This book covers similar ground, but it is **OVERWHELMINGLY** (in each and every chapter) about building a suicide barrier. I have to admit, I was less interested in reading about a barrier than actual stories about the jumpers themselves, but the author made very persuasive arguments in support of the barriers, and has converted me from ignorant (believing, as many people mistakenly do, that suicidal people thwarted in one method of suicide will just pick another) to the enlightened.

The fact that this book is, essentially, the **ONLY** book out there about GGB suicides speaks volumes about the taboo that still surrounds suicide.

The book is a pretty fast read. Very sad, heavy, and poignant. I wish the author had devoted the Introduction and maybe 1-2 ending chapters in the book to make his barrier argument, rather than having a reference in every single chapter, even seemingly unrelated ones. Would recommend, but this book definitely does not make for breezy, light hearted reading.

Susan J Cold says

Not my favorite book but a good analysis of death by suicide from the Golden Gate Bridge and a comprehensive study of the controversy re installing suicide preventatives vs keeping the esthetic beauty of the bridge intact. In the end, it's almost impossible to understand how the Golden Gate Bridge Board can turn a blind eye to the effectiveness of either raising the height of the railings or installing a net to prevent the astronomical number of deaths by suicide that occur every year from our beautiful iconic bridge.

Andrea Mullarkey says

Call it morbid but I am fascinated by Golden Gate bridge suicides. As a local icon there is hardly a more recognizable spot in my area. It is undeniably a beautiful structure, a tourist magnet, a source of pride for locals. But many of the things that make it attractive to locals and travelers also make it attractive to people with suicidal thoughts: it is accessible, historic and a mythic. For someone contemplating suicide the bridge is easy to get to, presents no physical barriers and leaves little mess for loved ones to find. Given these things it is somewhat unsurprising that upwards of 30 people jump to their death every year. This book by the director of a local crisis intervention and suicide prevention center aims to tell the full story about Golden Gate Bridge suicides and advocate for a barrier. And he does a really good job of both. The book covers many aspects from history to design, mental health to policy in addition to telling the riveting personal stories of people who have jumped. The small pieces are amazing (like how more than one small child has been thrown over the railing by their parent who then jumped) and the insights shared by survivors, family members, and mental health professionals are both gut wrenching and illuminating. And while these stories of despair are really hard to read, the most difficult parts of the book in some ways were the parts that dealt with objections to a suicide barrier. I simply can not understand the total lack of political will to build a barrier that would save lives. Admittedly Bateson goes on maybe a bit too long about this, and his arguments about it are repeated so often that I started to get restless. But there is no denying that his arguments and the book itself are compelling.

Bill Larsen says

An interesting book – containing some surprising facts and thoughtful stories – and not badly written. However this is nothing more than the author’s platform for arguing to add suicide barriers to the Golden Gate Bridge. It’s very one sided and he’s relentless. He could have accomplished this in many less pages without continually restating his opinion or he could have balanced it with other perspectives.

Also there are numerous typos (‘meridian’ vs. ‘median’) including several glaring errors within quotes. (I suggest the author hires an editor before releasing his next effort.)

Although some parts were interesting and some of the facts disturbingly eye-opening, I cannot recommend this book.

Christi says

A good book--the topic is something that needs to be addressed. However, I felt the writing wasn't as polished as it should have been--there were several typos and I felt that a lot of the information was rehashed throughout the book; that is, the author was reusing the same information in different chapters. This book could have been at least fifty pages shorter if the repeated information was deleted. Still, it's an interesting book and the author is definitely pro-barrier--and there's nothing wrong with that. These are the facts as he sees them and that's fine. I learned about this book from a website I frequent; prior to that, I had no idea that

so many suicides occurred on the GGB, or that the railing was so short. Based on my lack of information, at the end of this book I agree with the author that yes, I feel a barrier or net is a good idea. I don't think any other works will change my mind. I am interested to see *The Bridge*, the film that is referenced (more than twice--see what I mean about repeating?) in the book, and have put it on request at my library. That filmmaker was also pro-barrier, so I don't suspect my opinion will change.

I appreciate that the author what the author was trying to do with this book--bring the fact that so many suicides occur on the GGB to public view AND try to reduce the stigma of suicide itself. However, I feel that reducing the stigma of suicide is a very involved goal and while I can appreciate what he was trying to do, I feel that that stigma requires far more attention than this book can rightfully give it.

Christiane says

Since the Golden Gate Bridge opened in 1937 there have been more than 1500 confirmed suicides, making it one of the top suicide sites in the world. As Bateson explains (at great length...and yes, I agree with him, but the book gets repetitive) what the bridge needs is a suicide barrier. It does not have one and as of this writing may never have one; despite the fact that the Bridge District board members voted in October 2008 in favor of a barrier net, they have raised no money and made no effort to build it.

(According to the <http://www.ggsuicidebarrier.org/> website: "Early 2013: Target to complete the \$5 million Final Design effort for the NET SYSTEM. This process will take about 18 months or from August 2011 to about February/March 2013.")

Many barrier supporters believe that public apathy and opposition comes from a lack of sympathy for people who commit suicide and a lack of understanding about mental health issues that drive people to attempt suicide. One of the people Bateson interviews, Eve Meyer (executive director of San Francisco Suicide Prevention) points out that people often are more sympathetic to the plight of animals than they are of people. "If one or two golden retrievers jumped off the bridge, people would get serious about a safety railing."

Part of the reason I found this topic so fascinating is that I live close to the Aurora Bridge, the number two suicide site after the Golden Gate Bridge. Since the bridge opened in 1932 there have been 250 suicides. After a great deal of public controversy, the Aurora Bridge installed a suicide barrier in February 2011. In a quick web search, I turned up no suicides from the bridge since then.

The most interesting, and of course saddest, parts of the book are where he talks to the families of the suicides. This book is well worth reading for throwing light on a subject most of us would rather not think about.

Meaghan says

The book is basically a 309-page argument for the erection of an anti-suicide barrier on the Golden Gate Bridge. I had known the bridge was a suicide hotspot and a few dozen people listed on my missing persons website are thought to have died there, but I didn't realize the toll was so high: more than 1,500 confirmed deaths and probably the true number is closer to 2,000. In the first book ever written on the subject of GGB suicides, Bateson interviewed the families of jumpers, the very few who have survived, the coroners, Coast

Guard officials and other professionals who have to pick up the bodies, and other people affected by this long and continuing string of deaths.

I am appalled that, to this day, the majority of San Franciscans oppose the idea of putting up a barrier, and the Board of Directors in charge of the bridge have done practically nothing to stop the suicides and indeed have tried to cover up the problem. (Recently the Board did vote in favor of a barrier, but didn't vote to allocate funds toward its construction, so what is the difference?) The arguments -- that it would be expensive, that it would ruin the view, that people would just go kill themselves elsewhere -- have been proven time and time again to be specious and false. People either don't know that a barrier would save lives, or more likely, they just don't care.

Books like this make me lose my faith in humanity. But someone has to know these things. I applaud the author for writing this and exposing the problem. Now I'm off to watch the documentary *The Bridge*.

Rita says

If you want to read a book about arguments on a barrier on the bridge, this book is it. After watching *The Bridge*, I was looking for a book that dealt with the human side of suicide on the Golden Gate Bridge, not all the "political" background on agencies against the barrier. It does have some human touch stories which were interesting. Still don't understand why there hasn't been a greater push and support for the barrier.

Shannon says

[4.5 stars.] Upon reading some of the reviews here, I do agree that there is some repetitiveness about the "agenda" of a barrier, but I think it's obvious, common sense, that this book wouldn't be written if there was one in place (or at least, have an entirely different tone). Yes its one-sided - it's about Suicide Prevention from, wait, where? The Golden Gate Bridge! Regardless of what you think of suicide or what the author's "agenda" is... Get it through your head, memorize and know this: Suicide is preventable. That's all that really matters when you read this book (while there were some discrepancies, the one that I cannot deal with is the location of the new span of the Bay Bridge: it's mixed up - the "Oakland to Yerba Buena" is the newest addition to the fucked up commute from the East Bay to San Francisco). Anyway, with that out of the way, I did rather enjoy this book - it was a quick read that was hard to put down.

I'll admit it. This book caught my eye because:

- 1.) Its simple cover design of a haunting image of the Golden Gate Bridge seemed oddly appealing
- 2.) I loved the feel of the matte book jacket upon picking it up
- 3.) The description on the inside cover was enough to pique my interest.

However, the first time I read this book, I honestly wasn't prepared for what was inside it. I got to the end of the prologue before I decided I couldn't handle it and shelved it - hid it for two years in the back of my bookshelf, avoiding it like the plague. It wasn't because the writing was terrible or that there was something abhorrently wrong about the style. It was because I came upon the realization that this shit was *heavy*. It absolutely struck me to my core about the ease of suicide off of the same bridge that I see everyday. I was in denial about it and the things going on in my life to be able to deal with it.

It wasn't until recently that I decided to try it again, mainly because my psych class reached the topic of suicide and, ironically, the professor decided to show a scene from *The Bridge*. I thought, "Well, if I can understand the motivation behind Kevin's story, the book shouldn't be so bad." And it wasn't. In fact, Kevin is featured in the book and I couldn't be more pleased to know that there is some sort of closure to witnessing secondhand an actual jump: a survivor turned advocate. I read the prologue again. The same hollow feeling in my gut crept up on me, as if I were just watching a clip of *The Bridge* again, as if some part of me felt like I, as a San Francisco native, should know that this was happening and yet I never, for once, thought about it before picking up this book. Yes, I'm guilty.

What I can say is that this book is incredible. It is well written, clear and to the point. The book is easily divided into parts that seem to segue nicely, each chapter more dramatic than the previous, with the exception of the prologue. It starts off with the usual acknowledgements, the heart-wrenching prologue, followed by the perception of the bridge in which Bateson describes the romanticism of the GGB, as well as chapter descriptions. I will not go into far great detail about the contents other than the fact that, yes, there is an repeated agenda for a suicide barrier throughout the entire book, but it didn't bother me as much as the picture he painted about the Bridge District did.

Bateson made a pretty good argument for the barrier and I am convinced that one needs to be put up as a precaution, although, like any other idea, it does have its flaws that are slightly addressed in the end of the book. The overall theme of suicide is that it is highly preventable and, while the barrier may be a deterrent for bridge jumpers, the time and effort applied towards having one on the GGB is absolutely ridiculous. The amount of crap that a system does to protect itself from liabilities and other political bullshit that is commonly found in America today - the ones that win over common sense - is disgusting. The argument about the barrier preventing people from completed suicide is debatable, however, in terms of "keeping the beauty" of the bridge, a barrier seems to be a non-negotiable item when it comes to saving a life. Honestly, aesthetics has nothing to do with it. You can stand anywhere across the Strait and get the same foggy ass view of my city or stuck up ass Marin. We live in a highly modern, advanced era where technology seems to be at its peak and gaining, so what the hell is wrong with erecting a barrier for practical means? If a barrier were to be erected, surely there would be a practical and aesthetically pleasing design that can be implemented *today*.

After reading some of the stories about the jumpers and their families you do begin to question the morality of the Bridge District and the excuses that are presented on the table. It reminded me of this messed up whale documentary my brother made me watch (THE WHALE) in which I found myself enraged at the decisions of politicians and locals that ultimately led to the death of a lonely orca. Mainly, the question here has to be asked: Is there any common sense left in the world? Seriously, is there?

There is such a thing as a natural order of things that we, humans, tend to fuck up. Death is a natural thing, yet we accept murder in our society far more than we can accept suicide which goes to show how far we have come as a society. As the years go by, things are going to get worse and prices are going to rise, such is the "natural" order of our economy, but it is not the natural way for us to behave. Many things, like our socioeconomic conditions, lead to people completing suicide, and the argument for the GGB is that it is so easy, so accessible, yet so preventable if people would simply get off their high-horses and do the right thing. That's all the author wants, that's all the people in this book want. It's simple.

Really, it is. Why protest it?

Shawna says

The author meant well, and he did shed light on a difficult subject, but a better name for this book would probably be: An Argument for a Suicide Barrier on the Golden Gate Bridge. This is what the book is about, and comes back to time and time again -- the need for that barrier and the reasons why it hasn't yet been enacted. While this book mentions the movie "The Bridge," the author has not done in depth research about the people who have ended their lives at this location.

Learning more about the people is why I got the book, and what I expected to read. Instead the thesis circles back to the barrier, the reasons why a barrier hasn't been built yet, and refutes all the arguments against it -- too expensive, structural integrity of the bridge, marring the natural beauty, people will just go commit suicide somewhere else. The author repeats himself with similar metaphors, if X number of people died because of Y we would do something about it. Yes, I do believe you are correct about that. But you are preaching to the choir. Who is picking up this book unless they are already aware of and interested in this particular issue?

This book may have been more effective published as a long form essay in a major magazine.

Ariel says

I found this book because of an article I read on CNN about the installation of suicide nets on the Golden Gate Bridge. Apparently over the years since the bridge's construction 1,600 people have killed themselves by jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge making it the number one suicide spot in the world and I had never heard about it. Interested to learn more I found this book which was very enlightening. Apparently all of the world's landmarks have suicide nets, Sydney Opera House, Eiffel Tower, Empire State Building, etc. and because of these nets people do not jump from these landmarks. The only landmark without the nets is The Golden Gate Bridge and the Bridge Authority has been quite stubborn about installing them despite three parents throwing their young children over the railing to their deaths. People who jump are generally locals to the area and they are all ages, all professions, and come from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Making jumping so enticing is the fact that the rails are only four feet high and anyone can get over. After that it is a neat four second drop to almost certain death. After reading this book you feel angry at the Bridge Authority for their uncaring and dismissive attitude toward the poor souls who kill themselves. A documentary film called The Bridge shot in 2006 caught on camera people jumping approximately every fifteen days. If someone dropped a puppy off the side of the bridge every fifteen days you can bet there would be a stop to that yet the bridge authority seems to extend no sympathy to people who they feel are using the bridge for unintended purposes. They refuse to keep track of the exact numbers of people jumping because they supposedly don't want to encourage anyone but it seems more like that they don't want to face the problem and actually have to do something. Anyway at long last the nets will be installed and it seems not a moment too soon. The surprising thing is when the author related what the few jumpers who survived the fall had to say about their leap. Despite their injuries they are now all doing wonderful and glad they survived. One man named Kevin said that soon as he jumped he knew it was a mistake and wanted to live. These people went on to get the right medication and lead productive lives. Studies have shown that for some people it is killing themselves by jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge or they don't take their lives. Some peoples don't jump for no other reason than simply not being able to find a parking place. People will not find any alternative means when the bridge option is cut off. Also when people jump they want to die not be maimed. Once the

nets are installed people will stop jumping. After reading the heart breaking stories of the people left behind after their loved ones killed themselves you will never wonder why the nets are necessary only what took them so damn long. To read more about the nets click here: http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slates...

Shireen says

I read the ebook version of this book as background research for the novel I wrote during National Novel Writing Month in November 2012. It's an eye-opener, replacing suicide mythology with facts and figures. For example, many assert that there's no point in putting up a barrier on a bridge because people will just find another way to kill themselves. But that's not true, according to the research. People with suicide on the mind fixate on one method and if that method is blocked won't use another. Another example: the people interviewed who had remarkably survived the jump from the Golden Gate Bridge didn't try again -- countering the idea that if thwarted, they will always try again.

I live in Toronto where the Prince Edward Viaduct (or as we commonly call it the Blood Viaduct) was the number two suicide bridge, after the Golden Gate Bridge. I have also seen the Golden Gate bridge up close and from afar. They are both beautiful bridges with incredible views that shouldn't be blocked. But unlike San Franciscans, Torontonians prevailed in having the luminous veil installed, deciding lives were important enough to protect while one did not have to completely kill the view and could have an architecturally excellent barrier. The fight to install the veil was considerably shorter than the ongoing one to install something similar on the Golden Gate Bridge, which fight Bateson details with stats and human stories. I thought a lot about the stories that surrounded the Viaduct and the luminous veil as I read Bateson's book. However, the numbers and his propensity for a little-too-much repetition of his theme that a suicide barrier must be installed became a bit overwhelming. Yet the reader is left wondering why on earth there isn't one installed yet.

Overall, this was a useful read for my background research, but not as comprehensive as *November of the Soul*, given its focus on the Golden Gate Bridge. Both authors though agreed on facts as far as I could see where their books overlapped.

Judith says

I had to write a paper for a class - research paper on a current movement in our culture. Being me, I chose the movement for a suicide barrier on the golden gate bridge. Living in the bay area with a lifetime of depression, the golden gate has always been a double-edged sword in the background. I was appalled to discover that between 1600-3200 have leapt to their deaths there and that 4 small children have been murdered by their fathers (thrown from the deck) there - and that this is easily 3-6x the number at any other "suicide magnet" on the planet before barriers have been constructed. I did a ton of research then happy came across John Bateson's newest book on the subject.

Batesman was the executive director of a crisis center in the bay area county I live in for 17 years. Unlike me, when he was hired into his position two decades ago, he had no idea about the death toll of the infamous bridge.

This book is totally readable, very accessible - its organization and presentation walk the reader through the

history, the personal, the political. It clarifies any questions you might have, and serves as a more than fair indictment of the small group of individuals who, as the bridge district, have ignored need for a suicide barrier for 75 years.

Whether you are pro-barrier or anti-barrier, the history is rich and incredible and Bateson offers it in an accessible tour of the many decades, the many, many unnecessary deaths.

Jan says

This book was so frustrating. There's a really good book in there. I think the editor just forgot to find it. It felt more like a series of essays that were cobbled together rather than a cohesive book, and that led to a lot of things being said repeatedly. Seriously, the book used the words "bridge jumpers" and "the Golden Gate Bridge" so many times, I wondered if the author had a word count to meet and wasn't sure how else to fulfill it. The book is titled "The Final Leap: Suicide on the Golden Gate Bridge"; I'm pretty sure you can just say "jumpers" or "the bridge" and I'll know what you're referring to. Also, it felt like a book-long rant about the need for a suicide barrier. It's not that I think the author is wrong; it just got tiresome, and since there's a whole chapter dedicated to the barrier, I felt like talking about it could have largely been confined to that chapter.

It's frustrating because beyond all of that, there was a lot of good information there to be found. In fact, that's the only reason I persevered. I learned a lot about the psychology of suicide, the history of suicides on the bridge, and the process of what happens after someone jumps from it. I just wish that information had come in a more refined package.

Kathy Disanto says

Not for the faint-hearted, and the subject matter won't appeal to many, but this is an important book nonetheless.

What price do you put on a single human life? How about more than 1,500 of them?

Bateson does a marvelous job of drawing you in ... to the psychic agony that inspires suicidal thoughts, to the grief and devastation suffered by families of suicides, to the mythical appeal of the Golden Gate Bridge as the suicide venue of choice.

He debunks the myth that the final leap offers a clean, painless death.

He shines a light on the political machinations that have blocked attempts to shut down the problem.

He offers resources and encouragement to those who are suffering now.

If you have ever looked into the abyss, this book will speak to directly to that wound in your soul. If you haven't ... here's your chance.

Lisa Vegan says

I found this book exceedingly hard to rate and even more difficult to review. I'm too opinionated and too close to the subject.

The book was definitely published now because this year is the 75th anniversary of the Golden Gate Bridge. Since 1937 when the bridge opened, there have been 3,500-4,000 people who've leaped from it to their deaths, and a paltry 32 or so who've survived a leap, the latter almost all in their teens and twenties and physically fit and healthy.

Very little in this book was new to me except for some of the details of the more in depth stories of survivors, and those were touching and powerful stories. Interviewing survivors of people who'd committed suicide not off the bridge would have been just as powerfully emotional stories.

In a way I feel as though I should have given this book only 2 stars, but it was so readable, very interesting, never dull. It's a well-written and engaging account. But, at its heart, this book is one long, single-minded, one-sided, unabashed argument for a suicide barrier on the Golden Gate Bridge. I think this would have been a stronger and more helpful book and even better if told through multiple points of view.

I did enjoy all the history and the various facts and factoids.

More about my point of view later, but just FYI, I came to this book opposed to a barrier and this book did not really change my mind. I expected to disagree but I did not expect to feel such rage at times. I argued with the author throughout the book. More on that later.

There was a lot of content with which I agreed or at least had positive feelings.

What came closest to changing my mind is a quote from George Howe Colt's (Anne Fadiman's husband!) book *November of the Soul: The Enigma of Suicide*: "...To put up or not put up a barrier says something about the way we feel about suicide and suicidal people." That opinion did resonate with me.

Also interesting was a study done, of NON-LETHAL (so not Golden Gate Bridge jumpers who've survived as there have been fewer than 35 of them) which found frequent incredibly short planning periods. I know some completed suicides and nearly successful suicides have been done impulsively too. In those cases a barrier could be effective.

Not new to me but one of the best things this book does is clearly describe that suicide via the GG Bridge is not necessarily painless or easy, but can be very unpleasant indeed.

I did find it disconcerting the long history of attempts to get a suicide barrier and some of the indifference and reasons for opposition. And that the railing on the pedestrian walkway was originally designed to be higher, but was probably lowered because one of the designers was short and didn't want his view obstructed. I hadn't known that.

I don't doubt at all the sincerity of the author and others in favor, and not in favor, of a suicide barrier.

The author does at least acknowledge others' objections: cost, aesthetics, and ineffectiveness, the latter being my analysis, but he has such a dogmatic point of view and he dismisses other points of view with such ease.

Yes, he provides data, but boy, does he carefully choose his sources, those that back up his treatise.

There are also so many errors, including some not completely pertinent, but pesky to me, such as which half of the San Francisco Oakland Bay Bridge is being rebuilt. And some are part of his argument; I noticed what I considered a lot of faulty logic.

Worst of all, and I know this was entirely inadvertent, in my opinion, this book manages to romanticize and may be triggering to many people contemplating suicide. Not to mention it provides a couple ways to make a leap from the GG Bridge more likely to be a physically painless affair. It also gives information on how more likely to survive, and those wanting to make a grand suicidal gesture but live may try and fail; they will still most likely die if attempted.

Re the argument about the three young children murdered by parents by being thrown off the GG Bridge (a friend was working at the hospital where one child and the father were brought so I heard all about that in more detail than was in the news) as an argument for a barrier, I say parents have almost an infinite number of ways to murder their young, helpless children and then end their own lives too.

At least from the mid 70s to the mid 80s my experience was that most people “pulled off the bridge” were not there to truly jump. Suicidal gestures and attention seeking/asking for help were common, so the numbers are not as informative as they appear. Very unfortunately, back then people were more likely to get needed help than they are now. The state of local mental health care is abysmal for anyone without significant financial means.

Which brings me to the fact that 30 or so people jump to their deaths from the Golden Gate Bridge each year, and that is tragic. I’ll bet though that there are nearly 1,000 suicides per year in the greater Bay Area. A net is not going to help any of the others. Even worse, once a net goes up, people will be less likely to be fixated on the bridge. There are plenty of other sites that will fairly easily take its place. Most intent on suicide will find another way, or some will consider a net a challenge and they will manage to take their lives; it’s not foolproof. Or, others will jump into the net in order to get help and they may die or be permanently disabled. The net is actually (horrifyingly to me) designed to break bones, so I’d think if people dive into it they could definitely die or at the least break their necks or cause massive head injuries. The net will probably save a few lives, at least for a few years, but I suspect far fewer the author claims. The bridge does have a huge allure and it would fade for most were there to be fewer suicides off of it.

Among the mental health professionals and depressed/bipolar/other mentally ill people I’ve known and worked with, it’s about a 50/50 vote for/against a barrier of any type.

I say get people before a jump, or attempt to jump. Put all resources possible into helping potentially suicidal people whether or not the GG Bridge is their means of choice, and gestures and deaths would be more likely to dramatically decrease. Now, whatever is done or not done, there will always be suicides. If someone is determined to die, they will find a way. The author claims most are fixated on one method and if it the GG Bridge a barrier will stop them. I say for sure a few for some years, and then likely nobody. And, I know many who’ve made gestures/attempts and sometimes completed suicides who’ve gone from one method to another depending on what resources were available to them.

Some personal notes: This book did pack a punch. I’ve known three people, luckily not close friends, but close to close friends, who’ve died by jumping off the GG Bridge. Their names appear in the list of known dead in this book. I also met a survivor, met for the first time hours before her attempt and again a couple years later. I know people who’ve worked with another survivor, a person mentioned in this book, and who

was also in The Bridge documentary. I've known many, many more people who've committed suicide using other means. I've lived in San Francisco all my life and the Bridge has always been a huge presence. Years ago I walked across it on a regular basis, mostly on the east side but occasionally on the west side too. And, unlike most people, the west side is what I'd choose if I ever were to jump. I won't. Virtually everybody chooses the east side, but that's partly because most years the east side is for pedestrians but the west side had often been limited to bicyclists.

I know I was especially sensitive to the author's argument because very recently a friend of a friend fatally shot herself in the head; she lived a ten-minute drive away from the GG Bridge. I live a five-minute drive away and a fairly easy walk away from the GG Bridge but doubt I'd ever consider jumping from it, even though if I get cancer or ALS or certain other events transpire, I've always held suicide out as an option. (I'd like to work for adequate pain and nausea relief as a way to keep ill patients from having to resort to suicide to escape unbearable physical distress.) It irked me that the GG Bridge suicides got ALL the attention in this book, as they also tend to get locally in general. I want resources to go to all mental (and physical) health issues. Most people who live near the bridge and who are suicidal, choose other methods. They use guns, pills, hanging, drowning, jumping from other high sites, including other bridges, buildings, and cliffs, they put themselves on train tracks or in front of other moving vehicles, use carbon monoxide poisoning, and resort to many other methods. A barrier will not help any of them. Not a single one.

And, just as I was finishing up this book, I heard on the news, that while other countries have earthquake warning systems that give notice a couple seconds to a full minute prior to an earthquake, there is no money to do that locally. Doing so could save as many as 10,000 lives if the "Big One" should strike, all in a minute or two. Yes, I wish there was money for every safety measure, but since there isn't, I want to see money used most effectively. I don't think a suicide barrier is as effective as other mental health measures. And one argument made in the book, that funding for mental health programs can be taken away (unfortunately true) but the net is there to stay is a faulty argument. There are two vehicles involved in retrieving people from the net (a process that will take at least an hour and a half, ack!) that I'm sure will have to be maintained, and that money could be taken away, easily, unfortunately.

Interestingly, I think the author does prefer a higher rail, or some sort of barrier (unlike a net) so that people can't jump in the first place. If there is to be a barrier, I'd also prefer that method. A net has been approved but so far there is not adequate funding; I'm skeptical whether that will happen.

In 1937, the date the bridge opened, first to walkers, my mother lived in the city and she was 21 years old. I've always wondered if she was one of the people who took advantage of the opportunity and walked on it on its first day.

Sorry for the long ramble. I'm probably too close to this one to write a sensible review. This is one of the few times I'd have written a better review if I'd just given a synopsis of the contents of the book.

ETA: There is a lot of interesting history, studies, stories of those whose loved ones have committed suicide and those who've died or lived after jumps. And there are helpful resources in the back of the book. But re the resources for those readers who might be suicidal or who know people who might be, given that the author doesn't think they'll often be helpful, I find it interesting that they're there. Of course, it would have been unforgivable for them not to be provided in a book with this subject matter.

Meghan Portillo says

I had personal reasons for wanting to read this book, but I wasn't prepared to be unable to put it down. It is impossible to read this book and not feel outraged, saddened, surprised, and even a little bereft. This book is an incredible read. Living so close to the GGB, it's difficult to resist the urge to visit the bridge after having read this.

I suppose I could be considered an amateur thanatologist, with a special interest in suicide. This book provides many fascinating (and shocking) facts about suicide in general. I am **really** looking forward to reading his new book, "The Education of A Coroner" because it is most likely a direct result of this book.

Thankfully, the majority of this book (dedicated to lack of a suicide barrier of some sort) can be put in the past tense soon(ish) because a net is under construction. At the cost of \$214 million, it will be completed in 2021. It is ridiculous how long it took for this to finally become a reality; I would love to hear what Mr. Bateson has to say about this and if he plans on releasing this book with additional information.

My only complaint about this book is that the Coronado Bridge (connecting the island to San Diego, CA) is only mentioned once - barely. He devotes a decent amount of space to the Aurora Bridge in Seattle, WA, even though the Coronado Bridge has a higher death toll. Also, I am really curious about why Kevin Briggs isn't mentioned at all, considering that he was the Guardian of the Golden Gate for decades (that just happens to be the title of his memoir - published three years after this book).
