## Loneliness - Stories & Illustrations

**Loneliest time of your life probably is between ages 18 and 25, psychological researchers conclude. They say loneliness declines steadily after that and that said decline extends on into retirement, interrupted only at times when separation or death creates crisis. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**Sometimes I think we Americans are the loneliest people in the world. To be sure, we hunger for the power of affection, the self-acceptance that gives life. It is the oldest and strongest hunger in the world. But hungering is not enough. *(Sherwood Anderson, American author and poet)***

**One day last summer, hiking with m children through the hills of north Georgia, I came to a cabin clinging to a rocky ledge. Behind a picket fence a white-haired mountain woman was working in her garden. When we stopped to admire her flowers, she told us that she lived there all alone. My city-bred youngsters regarded her with wonder. “How,” asked one, “do you keep from being lonesome?” “Oh,” she said, “if that feeling comes on in the summertime, I take a bunch of flowers to some shut-in. And if it's winter, I go out and feed the birds!” An act of compassion -- that was her instinctive antidote for loneliness. (Arthur Gordon, in Reader's Digest)**

**My new cell phone has room for 15,000 songs, 25,000 photos, 150 hours of video. I can get e-mail, AIM, text and video messaging. I am so connected! I’m so lonely.” (Scott Stantis, in Prickly City comic strip)**

**Danger: Loneliness – Keep Out! (Ashleigh Brilliant, in Pot-Shots)**

**Why won’t that dog stop barking? If the neighbor’s dog is driving you crazy with its barking, have a heart: Odds are it’s just a little lonely, a new study suggests. Researchers in Australia surveyed 150 owners of “nuisance barkers” and found that dogs that bark the most when alone are the ones most accustomed to contact and stimulation. Herding breeds, like border collies and German shepherds, which tend to need more stimulation, were more likely to bark, as were dogs that had been raised with other dogs. Those adopted from shelters were less likely to bark, perhaps because they miss their owners less. “It may be that homebred dogs are greater barkers because of greater separation anxiety,” study author Clive Phillips tells Discovery News. But while a silent dog may please the neighbors, a lack of yelps doesn’t necessarily mean the dog is happy, cautions animal behavior specialist Paul McGreevy. “A dog that’s quietly melting in distress is rarely identified as a dog suffering separation anxiety.” (The Week magazine, November 6, 2009)**

**Grimm: “Your family went south for the winter?” Bird: “Yep, they all flew the coop.” Grimm: “Are you doing okay?” Bird: “Well actually … I’m suffering from empty nest syndrome.” (Mike Peters, in Mother Goose & Grimm comic strip)**

**Fingers like mittens better 'cause they don't get lonely in them. (Bil Keane, in The Family Circus comic strip)**

**The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quite alone with the heavens, nature and God. Because only then does one feel that all is as it should be and that God wishes to see people happy, amidst the simple beauty of nature. As long as this exists, and it certainly always will, I know that then there will always be comfort for every sorrow, whatever the circumstances may be. And I firmly believe that nature brings solace in al troubles. (Anne Frank, in The Diary of a Young Girl)**

**The Rev. David A. MacLennan, pastor of the First United Presbyterian Church of Pompano Beach, Fla., tells of a letter received some years ago by a network broadcasting company from a prospector in the Montana hills. “It gets lonely here,” the man wrote. “I have a violin I used to play, but it's badly out of tune. Would you be kind enough to strike me an ‘A’ Sunday night at seven, so I can put the fiddle back in tune?” (Rev. Billy Graham)**

**We've known intuitively that loneliness hastens death, but haven't been able to explain how. Psycho-biologists can now show that loneliness sends misleading hormonal signals, rejiggers the molecules on genes that govern behavior, and wrenches a slew of other systems out of whack. They have proved that long-lasting loneliness not only makes you sick; it can kill you. Emotional isolation is ranked as high a risk factor for mortality as smoking. A partial list of the physical diseases thought to be caused or exacerbated by loneliness would include Alzheimer's, obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, neurodegenerative diseases, and even cancer -- tumors can metastasize faster in lonely people." (Judith Shulevitz, in The New Republic)**

**Loneliness increases the risk of death by up to 14 percent, a University of Chicago study found. The stressful pangs of unwanted solitude trigger the "flight or fight" response, causing inflammation and cellular changes that disrupt the production of white blood cells that protect the body from illness. Social isolation does improve the body's ability to fight harmful bacteria, but it also makes people more susceptible to viral infections. "The lonelier one is and the longer one is lonely," author John Cacioppo says, "the greater the negative effects." (The Week magazine, December 25, 2015)**

**Girls alone are lonelier than boys alone, generally, and young women alone are lonelier than young men alone. But by the time women reach retirement age, they’ve evidently learned to cope with it. Such women are far less depressed by loneliness than lone men, according to research at the University of Nebraska. (L. M. Boyd)  
  
Friends with benefits: Being lonely can make you physically sick. A Carnegie Mellon University study found that college students with few friends and little social support had a 16 percent weaker immune response to a flu shot than did their classmates. Researchers theorize that loneliness may depress immune systems by increasing psychological stress and decreasing the amount of sleep people get. A second study of more than 3,000 men found that those who had the fewest social interactions every week had the highest levels of an inflammatory marker that plays a role in heart disease. Researcher Sarah Pressman of Carnegie Mellon University says that the key factor is a subjective experience of social support, not the actual number of friends. “Loneliness is the perception of being alone,” she tells New Scientist. “You can have many friends yet feel lonely.” (The Week magazine, May 20, 2005)**

**In one year the average American today probably meets as many people as the average person did in a lifetime 100 years ago. And yet he's far lonelier. There's a big difference between being lonely and being alone, and the presence of other people doesn't necessarily help at all. According to Los Angeles psychiatrist and author, Dr. Leonard Zunin, mankind's biggest problem is simply loneliness. (Paul Lee Tan, in Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations, p. 754)**

**Shakespeare, Leonardo da Vinci, Benjamin Franklin and Abraham Lincoln never saw a movie, heard a radio or looked at television. They had “loneliness” and knew what to do with it. They were not afraid of being lonely because they knew that was when the creative mood in them would work. (Carl Sandburg)**

**Traveling the long, lonely stretch of road between Alamogordo, N.M., and El Paso, Texas, a driver sees only flat land and sagebrush. Midway is a welcome break -- the tiny town of Orogrande, N.M. As I approached Orogrande for the first time, my mind, numbed by the monotony of the road, snapped awake. Standing by the highway was a single large tree, lush with vegetation and obviously lovingly nurtured. A sign beside it proclaimed: “Orogrande National Forest.” (Linda Hawthorne)**

**The toll of loneliness: Too much alone time can kill you. That's the conclusion of a study from Brigham Young University, which found that isolation and loneliness are as bad for a person's health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day or being an alcoholic. Researchers examined data from 35 years' worth of studies on loneliness, and after accounting for participants' socioeconomic status, age, gender, and pre-existing health conditions, they discovered that people who feel lonely have a 26 percent greater risk of premature death. Living alone or being socially isolated is even more damaging to a person's health, increasing the risk of early death by roughly 30 percent. The BYU team believes the U.S. will see soaring numbers of loneliness-related health problems in the near future, because more people than ever are living alone. "We are predicting a possible loneliness epidemic," the study's co-author Tim Smith tells ScienceDaily.com. (The Week magazine, April 3, 2015)**

**Lonely people wired differently: Pervasive feelings of loneliness can alter the brain, leading isolated people to perceive exaggerated threats and hostility in social situations, reports MedicalDaily.com. researchers from the University of Chicago monitored the brains of 38 very lonely people and 32 who weren't lonely when they were e3xposed to words such as "party," "sad," "belong," "alone," and "joy." The lonely people were much more acutely sensitive to any negativity, showing strong, immediate reactions to threatening words. The findings suggest that when lonely people walk into a crowded room, they focus on any negative facial expressions and words while ignoring smiles and words of welcome. Study authors Stephanie and John Cacioppo said that for evolutionary reasons, "being on the social perimeter is not only sad, it is dangerous." As a result, isolated people's brains become hyper-vigilant for threats. (The Week magazine, September 4, 2015)**

**Why wolves howl: When wolves let loose with their lonely-sounding howls, they are actually expressing loneliness rather than acting on pure instinct, as researchers long thought. That's the conclusion of animal behaviorists at the University of Veterinary Medicine in Vienna, who experimented with members of a captive wolf pack by taking each member of the pack out for a walk, one at a time, and observing the howls of the wolves left behind while testing their levels of the stress hormone cortisol. They found that all of the wolves howled -- and showed signs of stress -- when the pack leader left their sight. But the wolves also howled particularly long during the absence of the "preferred partners that they play with, groom, and lie close to when sleeping," study author Friederike Range tells ScienceMag.org. Those howls, it seems, were a way of asking for companionship, rather than pure expressions of stress. "Social relationships are very important to them," Range says, "and the howling patterns reflect that." (The Week magazine, September 13, 2013)**

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