

Opinion: Expanding Memorial Day's definition

By Kathryn Reed

Someone is missing. That's what Memorial Day is all about; remembering those in the military who have died.

This year I'm broadening the definition of Memorial Day. I'm mourning the loss of my 32-year-old cousin who died last month, and whose services will be in June.

She was an alcoholic.



Christina Reed

No one knew this until it was too late. She was admitted to a Denver hospital on a Tuesday and died that Friday. It was in that brief time that the truth, or at least a small amount of it, spilled forth.

Answers to so many questions are buried with her. So many whys. Why did she start drinking? – Was it her mom's death nearly five years ago? Why didn't she tell anyone about her pain? – Did she feel embarrassed? Why didn't she ask for help? – Or did she and no one heard her? Why wasn't her life enough

to make her happy? Why? Why? Why?

From what I have learned in these few weeks, she had to have been drinking an incredible amount of liquor. It may have started a handful of years ago, maybe it was going on in college.

Christina was so bright and funny; she graduated from Wellesley College, was an attorney for the Bureau of Land Management, a beautiful skier who gracefully schussed down even the most difficult runs at Vail Mountain.

She was loved. Her dad, cousins, aunt and uncle all lived nearby. She had a cadre of friends at work and throughout the country.

No one, though, knew about what turned out to be a lethal secret.

She was a functioning alcoholic. But at the same Christina created a web of lies that only now are starting to unravel. It proves that even those who seem to have their lives together are fighting demons we don't know about.

I last saw Christina in January 2011. I had the opportunity to ski with her at Vail, to spend some time getting to know my youngest cousin just a tiny bit. We were never close; age and distance were the big obstacles. But she was family and we had a bond that even in death cannot be broken.

I ache mostly for my relatives in Denver who are left sorting through the fragments for answers that may never come. The "what ifs?" that linger; that eat away at you, making you believe you could have saved this troubled soul.

Life isn't easy – for anyone. Perhaps a death like Christina's is a reminder to really check in with people who mean something to you. Don't let canceled get-togethers become the norm without real probing; don't let questionable answers

about health issues be easily dismissed; check in on the person where they live; stop the judgment as much as possible; and start listening – sometimes all it takes is being in a safe place to open up. But also know you can't always solve someone else's problems – and that is what can be so painful.