



Survivors

after suicide A Program of Didi Hirsch CMHC: Suicide Prevention Center of Los Angeles

Fall 2001
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SAS exists to help people resolve their grief and pain in their own personal way, and to help them move forward in their lives, positively and productively.

Alive and Running 5-10K Run/Walk POSTPONED TILL SEPTEMBER 30

The **Alive and Running Run/Walk benefit has been postponed until Sunday, September 30th.** Please join the Suicide Prevention Center along with hundreds of Survivors, friends and others as we walk or run on behalf of suicide prevention services. All the proceeds from the Walk/Run (5K walk and 5K/10K run) will go to support the 24-hour emergency crisis line and the Survivors After Suicide bereavement support program at the Suicide Prevention Center. **The race starts at 8 a.m. in**

Westchester Parkway, just west of Sepulveda Blvd. & La Tijera, north of LAX. Come early to register.

A special banner remembering suicide victims will be displayed so race participants can see the real impact of suicide. Also, there will be a banner entitled "Friends of the Suicide Prevention Center". On this banner are the names of supporters of suicide prevention. Names can be placed on either banner for a donation of \$25 (tax-deductible).

Call Sarah at 310-751-5426 if you need a registration form for the Race or would like to place your name, or the name of a loved one, on a banner. See you on Sunday, September 30th. Remember the race starts at 8 a.m. but come early to register.

TRAGEDY: In light of the terrorist attack in New York City, Washington, DC and Pennsylvania, I want to share a prayer that inspired me. This Buddhist prayer of peace was used at a community church service I attended this past weekend:

"May I become at all times, both now and forever a protector for those without protection; a guide for those who have lost their way; a ship for those with oceans to cross; a bridge for those with rivers to cross; a sanctuary for those in danger; a lamp for those without light; a place of refuge for those who lack shelter, and a servant to all in need."

Music Helps Me Grieve

My wife and I once received a gift so full of love and grace that although it made us weep anew about the suicide of our son, it helped me discover how music can comfort and support us in our grief and mourning.

The day before we flew across the country for Breck's funeral, a close family friend who is a composer played us a song that had come to her as soon as she learned of our loss. Her song captured our desperate longing, our bargaining and our tearful begging to undo the new reality of life without our child. Being unable myself to write a song about the devastating pain of knowing Breck had died alone, and violently, her song became both a comfort and a release.

In the weeks and months that followed, music accompanied me daily, opening my spirit up to insightful messages from songwriters and performers who had lived through great losses of their own. I didn't care why music helped me so much - I was just grateful to have found a non-prescription stabilizer for my emotional rollercoaster. Seven years later, I still take an occasional sleeping pill "aurally," and music is both safe and effective.

Learning from SOS group discussions that what helps one often helps others, and from Iris Bolton's well-known advice to "find a gift" in my son's death, I thought that collecting some of the best memorial music I'd found might bring comfort to other survivors. Eventually my idea became an album titled **BEFORE THEIR TIME**, released in late 1999 as a benefit for our local hospice program, which hosts our SOS group, and a suicide-prevention program in our state.

Full information about **BEFORE THEIR TIME** is available at www.beforetheirtime.org, which includes audio samples of most of the songs, the 24-page liner notes, and the (800) 447-3803 number for credit card orders. The website's "Ordering" page includes an offer of a free CD or cassette to any bereavement support group.

I call this album a memorial to all those we've lost, and it is a music resource for comfort and, as one writer put it, moving "from mourning to morning." The songs are so beautiful, moving, and wise that it's clear the composers have walked in our shoes, and are all too familiar with

Please turn to "Music" on Page 2

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grief. Often written as a release for the musicians' own pain, each contains themes about the stages of grief.

Some of the titles themselves give insight: "Time To Learn" is about how accepting the fact and finality of a death does take time; we are reminded that "No Time To Say Goodbye" before a sudden death can cause long-lasting and sometimes unresolvable pain; and although the rest of the world may move on quickly after our loved ones' deaths, the "Language of the Heart" keeps our love for them alive.

Bereavement support group participants know that "group" can often be the place to deal with topics to which most of our friends or co-workers can't relate. Listening to songs is no substitute for the benefits of sharing our stories with others who understand and relate, but listening to music can be a bridge between meetings, at times when we feel emotionally fragile. And in group, the topic of a song can highlight an aspect of grief that may be particularly relevant for discussion.

If you want to experience a musical lift, or want a gift for someone close, there is a wide selection of music to choose from. My favorites include:

Before Their Time, Volume I – Various artists (Hospice VNH Records BTT001). A compilation of songs written in memory of people who died young, from many different causes: accidents, illness and disease, war, murder, suicide. Songs and instrumentals in a wide variety of styles, including folk, pop, bluegrass, country/jazz, and classical, with original performances by the singer-songwriters and composers. All sales revenue benefits Hospice and suicide prevention organizations. www.beforetheirtime.org

Somewhere Between Heaven and Earth – Cindy Bullens (Artemis 1012). A remarkable album that chronicles a mother's second year of grieving after her adolescent daughter's death from leukemia. These stunning, powerful songs — some are achingly beautiful — reflect the stages of grief, arriving at acceptance and understanding. Sharing her journey with others through her songs was part of Bullens' healing process, and this very successful album was not originally intended for commercial release. www.cindybullens.com

Sweet Old World – Lucinda Williams (Chameleon 61351-2). Lucinda Williams is on my short list of singer-songwriters whose work will connect directly with survivors of suicide, because she writes and performs songs

that wrap messages of pain and loss in gorgeous melodies and stirring performances. The title song rails against her brother giving up: "Look what you lost when you left this world, this sweet old world." Survivors will also relate to her songs about the roots of her brother's suicide. www.lucindawilliams.com

Sand & Water – Beth Neilsen Chapman (Reprise CD 46521). This contemporary Nashville singer wrote many of these songs following the death of her husband to cancer. Courageous and beautiful music for healing, full of understanding about love and loss. www.bethnielsenchapman.net/albums/index.html

Editor's Note: Our sincere thanks to Michael Whitman for writing this article especially for our newsletter. □

Wednesday Night Writer's Group

Screenwriter, Director, Professor, Jeff Eamer hosts a lively, Pay What You Can, 90 minute Writer's Workshop. All writers welcome. Any genre. Any level (even if you've never written before but would like to get started). Cost: pay what you can (suggested \$10 minimum). Proceeds go to support the Suicide Prevention Center at Didi Hirsch CMHC.

For information on time and location: www.jeffeamer@mediaone.net or call Idella Sartin at 310.751.5373. □

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Contributions

May 8 - August 22, 2001

A million thanks for
your generosity

In Loving Memory of :

Alfred H. Conrad from Jacob E. Conrad
Anthony "Tony" Gonzales from Lori A. Boone
Betty Lemke from Mr. & Mrs. Edward A. Williams
Carolinda Haverlin Mair from Terra Mair Abroms
Carolyn Kanno from Sue Kanno
Clayton "Sonny" Clark from Felicia K. Clark
David Cole Gordon from Alicia & Robert Walker
Diane Nemetz-Murray from Joe Murray
Dion Harkness from Steven L. Leighton
Douglas Roman Segura from Irma & Donald Segura
Edouard Botwick from Barbara Minkoff
Eric Steven Goldenberg from William Goldenberg
Gary Scott Goodman from Myrna & Richard Berger
Heidi E. Owen from Christine Nielsen
Holly & Judy Wyatt from Scott Wyatt
Iring Moyssev from Galina & Larry Rosenberg
James Fitzgerald from Patrick D. Fitzgerald
Jason Kramer from Guinevere Stever
Jay E. Hancock from Dorothy Hancock
Jeff & Chris Pikul from Deborah Pikul
Joe Loniero from Mary Virzi
John G. Price from Mr. & Mrs. Arthur Price
Joseph Shane Barnes from Beverly Barnes
Josephine Gradillas from Eleanor H. Jones
Joshua Tyler Reagan from Sara Reagan
Justin Charles Pierce from Gina Rizzo
Ken Stranger from Dorothy Stranger
Kurt Boettcher from Carolyn Boettcher
Larry "Sunny" Szpila from Francine & Guy Righter
Laura Roanne Cole from Barbara and Mel Cole
Marc Richard Mendelson from Carrol Mendelson
Mary Kay Bergman from Charles Martinez
Mary Kay Bergman from Brianne Siddall Chierighino
Michael Coppola from Cindy & Louis Coppola
Michael Kogan from Arlene Joye
Michael Powell from Jackie L. Stone
Morris M. Hamilton from La Tonya
Hamilton-Thompson
Patrick Laden from Marilyn Laden
Peter M. Bateman from Patricia Donahue
Rob Wesley Littlejohn from Donna & Robert Littlejohn
Robert Alan Perrine from Athena Marano-Perrine
Robert Curry from Dr. Kita S. & Mr. Peter Curry
Robert Bagby from Dr. Kita S. & Mr. Peter Curry
Robert L. Vogt, Jr. from Eileen J. Vogt

Rozela Ruiz from Gilda Robles
Scott McGowan from Monica Brautovich
Stephen Le Roy from Gloria Le Roy
Stephen Lelewer from Mr. & Mrs. Stanley D. Lelewer
Stephen Lelewer from Jan Lipschutz
Strit Stritmatter from Walt Walston
Tate Richard Crane from George K. Crane
Theodore R. Katzmann, Jr. from Rev. Gayle F. Katzmann
Thomas Keane from Kathy Keane

In Honor of:

Jay Nagdimon from Mr. & Mrs. Joel Swartz
Mitzi Worley, Baton Rouge SPC from William Spears
Stan Lelewer from Jan Lipschutz

If you have given a contribution recently and it is not acknowledged in this issue, please call Carole Chasin at 310.751.5370. We apologize for any oversights. ☐

SAS Holiday Potluck for for SAS Members and Friends

Save the date, Saturday, December 15th.

SAS will have a Holiday Potluck at 6:30 p.m. at Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center, 4760 South Sepulveda Blvd., Culver City, CA. All survivors, their families and friends are invited. Bring your favorite main course, salad or dessert (enough to serve six). The program will be announced in the next SAS newsletter. We are looking forward to seeing you. Come and make new friends and see some you have not seen for awhile. ☐

Each Day...

Look upon each day that comes as a challenge, as a test of courage. The pain will come in waves, some days worse than others, for no apparent reason. Accept the pain. Do not suppress it. Never attempt to hide grief from yourself. Little by little, just as the deaf, the blind, the handicapped develop with time an extra sense to balance disability, so the bereaved, the widowed, will find new strength, new vision, born of the very pain and loneliness which seem, at first, impossible to master.

By Daphne Du Maurier, taken from *Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief*. ☐

Letter to James

By Pat Peta, New England

Dear James,

Perhaps it is the way the light falls across the trees, or the splashes of color we see in the backyard here on Blueberry Lane — signals that our hard time is here again. The sixth anniversary of your suicide is upon us. I stare at those words: “The sixth anniversary ...” It feels like yesterday. It feels like a hundred years ago. You should be 24. You are forever a seventeen-year-old high school senior. “...of your suicide” You? Suicide? Never! How can that be? Skateboarder. Mountain Biker. Snowboarder. Pilot, Handsome — Full of Adventure. Full of Fun. I run my fingers across the letters on your tombstone. JAMES JOSEPH PETA III 1977–1994. How can that be?

The house buzzed like a beehive for a long time. Your suicide turned us into a family of bedeviled detectives. Was it here the clue was dropped? Was this the point that could have changed the outcome? We were relentless. We lay the pieces of this puzzle out and at some unknown point began to face the reality that the picture would simply never be complete. We learn to live without the answers. This just is.

I used to beg to be given just three minutes to ask you questions. Is three minutes too much for a mother to ask? Your silence deafens me.

It was Tuesday, September 13, 1994.

There is a picture on the shelf that was taken for the yearbook at noon that day. You betray nothing. You are smiling and surrounded by friends. Was your plan in place?

It was a half-day at school and I picked you up. You were sitting on the curb and you waved when I pulled in. Did you know what you would do? You called and made an appointment to get your hair cut on Thursday. Did you plan to keep it?

I left for work at the hospital at 3:30. Your last words were: “Yo, catch ya’ later, Mom” Did you mean it?

You called Dad at work at four o’clock to follow up on a college application. Were you planning on college?

Bev spoke to you at 4:45. You left me a note on the counter. “4:45 Bev called. Call her.” Bev said you “never missed a beat.”

The gun you used was mine. About five years before we were getting the Christmas decorations from the attic and you asked about it, hanging there in the case. I told you it was a rifle from my days living in California and I used it to target shoot in the desert. You asked if it “worked.” I told you I doubted it. It was probably rusted after twenty-five years in the attic without being shot or oiled. You never mentioned it again. We left it hanging

there. There were never bullets in the house, but after you died I found the box of bullets hidden in your electric pencil sharpener. Your note said, “Don’t look for who gave me the bullets. I bought them myself.” When was that James? I have heard so many admonitions about unsecured guns in the home. I never thought the admonitions had anything to do with us. Our kind friends assure me that you would have found another way. Maybe. But you shot your-self with my unsecured gun. I must claim responsibility. No one can comfort me away from that truth and I am so sorry.

The Lifestar helicopter brought you to me in the Emergency Department at the hospital at 5:30. As the supervisor that night I was all business — trauma and neurosurgical teams gowned, gloved and waiting when they wheeled you through the doors. I handpicked every person in the room. If there was a chance to save you, they would be the ones to do it. Your Dad was at the house when the helicopter flew you away. He told me later you were breathing and on the way to your mother and all her colleagues at the hospital. Their specialty was reversing crisis. It did not occur to him that we would not save you. When your Dad arrived at the hospital, we went into a room alone and I told him. My mind could not comprehend the words that my lips forced out. “We’ve lost him, Jim. James is brain-dead.” Did you hear his anguished sobs?

The Robinsons went to get your sister at Wesleyan. Dad and I told her together. Did you hear her? NoNoNoNoooooo.

We called in the Organ Procurement Team. There were people fighting to live. Your kidneys and liver and heart gave four of them a chance. Brenda, your heart recipient, wrote many letters to us. In one, she said, “You know something? Your son still lives and will continue to live inside my body. He has a lot of energy and his heart beats strong.”

Fast forward to today and at last I can say I am glad to be here. Each day that passes moves us further from that horrific event. Each day that passes soothes. Each day that passes allows us to mend, with tiny, fragile stitches, the gaping hole in our life fabric. It has not been a “fast forward” for any of us. Your death, as your life, touched so many. It has been a daunting journey for us. Imagine the biggest, tallest, fastest, scariest roller coaster in all of heaven and earth. Imagine the plunges between the peaks. Imagine the lurching stomach, cold hands, bile in the throat, screaming brain, pounding heart. Imagine someone strapping you in that seat against your will and starting the ride and not ever letting you get off. Imagine the fear and the angst and the tension and the fatigue

Please turn to “Letter” on Page 5

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and the chaos. Imagine the track always changing. Upside down? Right side up? Try to catch your breath. Hold on tight. We have ridden that roller coaster every day. James, did you not know we would have moved mountains to stop your wild ride? Could you not send a signal? Could you not scream your pain?

Your sister graduated from college. She lives and works out West. She rides the roller coaster.

Dad and I facilitate a support group for survivors of suicide called Safeplace. We are a family of the heavy hearted. We in the group talk about how hard it is living without all of you and how sorry we are for the choice you all felt you had to make. Most of us acknowledge that we just do not get it. Most of the time, it does not compute with what we know. You, Caitlin, Tommy, Phillip, Randy, Michelle, Sam, Matt, Eric, Deirdre, Will and all the rest - do you comfort each other there as we comfort each other here? There are so many of you. There are so many of us.

I am on the Board of Directors for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention–New England. This should not have happened to any of you. This should not have happened to any of us. AFSP works hard on research, prevention and education. They minister to survivors. We look to them to help us complete the puzzle. How does the brain work? What is the combination of forces that causes someone to self-destruct? There is no time to waste.

The roller coaster ride is slower, James. We know the topography of this wasteland — the peaks are not as scary, the plunges are not as deep. We cannot leave our seats, but it now makes frequent stops. It gives us time to sigh and catch our breath and assume a more comfortable position. We try to be good to ourselves and each other. We recognize our strength and renewed confidence. We stand tall. We laugh. We stretch. We will not be overcome; we will survive.

Dad and I saw Dr. Patrick Hynes for almost a year. I used to call it "my check up from the neck up" He asked me once if I could erase any memory of you would I do it? I told him, "Absolutely. This pain is too searing and I want it gone."

I've since changed my mind. I have wonderful memories and stories that are flip and funny and bring a smile to my face. You filled the house with joy. For us, seventeen years was not nearly enough.

In this universe we share, we trust that you are safe and know we miss you and that our love for you will never end. Never.

Yo, catch ya' later, James.

— Mom

Pat Peta is a board member of AFSP-New England. She appeared on the Healing through Support Groups panel at the National Survivors of Suicide Day Teleconference in November 2000. Reprinted with permission from LIFE-SAVERS, Vol. 12, No. 4, Fall, 2000. □

Newly Bereaved...A Time To Grieve...A Time to Heal

By Dana Gensler,

The Compassionate Friends, South Central KY

Editor's Note: While this article was written for bereaved parents, I believe it is equally applicable for all survivors regardless of who you have lost.

Have you ever noticed the many mixed-up (confusing) emotions involved in grieving? On one hand, you feel restless. On the other hand, you feel like you don't want to move at all. You feel desperately alone, and yet, you don't want anyone around. You feel scatter-brained, forgetful, and yet, frantically meticulous. You feel like crying at nothing and sometimes laugh at anything. (Or do I have that backwards?) Being in a crowd of people is fine as long as they don't talk to you. And yet if they don't talk to you, you feel as if nobody cares. You want desperately for someone to mention your child, to remember the life that once was. And yet it can make you furious if all they want to talk about is the dead one and never mention the living ones.

Grief settles over you like a hot blanket. You're as cold as winter snow. Grief passes over you like a steamroller. You're floating in a bubble above yourself. Grief boxes you in on four sides and introduces you to pain no one should have to know. But then, once again, you begin to feel compassion. You relate to other parents who have had an experience similar to your own. And eventually, with a light as sharp as a sunburst, you hear yourself saying your child's name with an unfamiliar smile on your face. You remember some of the funny times, and feel laughter building in your throat.

One morning you notice the sun is shining, the flowers are bursting with the colors of spring. Three seasons have passed unnoticed, and somehow, you are still here. Even though your child is still there. You feel your heart swell with a love you never knew could exist. And you find a place in your life for something called (dare I say) peace...?

And then, ever so gently, the memories enfold you in warmth as soothing as a cool shower on a hot summer day, so you find you want to remember. And tender memories of love lift you to unreachable heights, to the brightest of stars, to the loveliest touch of your child. □

SPAN-California Legislative Activities

By Sam Bloom, President, SPAN-California

In February of this year state Senator Deborah Ortiz asked SPAN-California to be the sponsor of her bill, SB620, The California Suicide Prevention Act of 2001. Most of our effort went to advising the Senator and the staff of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee of which she is the Chairperson and educating legislators, the press and the public.

Eventually the legislation split in two paths, Budget Item #4440-101-0890 and SB620. The Legislature passed the budget item and it was included in their final budget sent to the Governor in mid July. Before approving the budget for the year July 1, 2001 through June 30, 2002, Governor Davis **line item vetoed the budget item saying, suicide prevention is a local (county) responsibility.** We had hoped he might approved it. It would have cost Californians nothing as it merely reallocated unused federal funds from last fiscal year to next fiscal year. The funds (\$200,000) were to create a Council to develop a statewide suicide prevention strategy **which the Legislature had already approved.** We had hoped because the budget item would use federal funds for a statewide project, he might have approved it. We'll try to find out more about his reasoning.

SB620, The California Suicide Prevention Act of 2001, was passed by the full Senate and the Assembly Health

Committee. Anticipating the same response from Governor Davis as on the budget item, we have recommended to Senator Ortiz that this bill be left in the Assembly Appropriations Committee until 2002, when we'll develop a strategy for it for next year's legislative session.

While the budget item was vetoed, SPAN-California and the suicide prevention movement in California has gained much this Spring and Summer. We've increased awareness in the Legislature and elsewhere and we're building momentum for suicide prevention with every action we take. The veto is not a defeat, just a delay, while we continue to educate the public and the Governor and position our organization and its goals in the minds of state policy and lawmakers.

Here's a quote from an email received from Senator Ortiz's Staff Director Sara McCarthy, **"Think of all the people in the Legislature and Budget Committees who responded positively, and strongly, to your request for a state plan. And, now you have a relationship with them and a foundation on which to build the next steps."** Sara has been our day-to-day advisor and a dedicated friend to our movement. We greatly appreciate Sara and Senator Ortiz.

Our special thanks to all of you who participated in our many advocacy letter campaigns. Your letters made the difference with the Legislature. □

Sorrow Is Not Forever – Love Is!

by Michael A. Simpson
from The Facts of Death

So often one attempts to face the whole future at once. But we will not live that period all at once, only day by day. Don't try to face twenty years. Face today. When that has been achieved, face tomorrow. You will find more and more ways in which you can cope. The Chinese have a saying that a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step. There is no way you can take the fifteenth, or the two hundredth step, before you have taken the first.

It can be difficult to face going out again and resuming your regular activities. It can take more courage to face little things than the big things in life. Going out shopping for groceries for the first time can become an ordeal. Try a different store, a different day or time, and go with a friend. When it seems very hard what to decide to do first, maybe it's not very important where you start as long as you start. Choose a simple task and get started. Once you've begun, it will be far easier to set your priorities and you will have gained confidence for having achieved something.

—from The Compassionate Friends, Australia. □

Book Review

By Therese S. Schoeneck, Syracuse, NY

"Living with Loss, Healing with Hope: A Jewish Perspective" by Rabbi Earl Grollman, 103 pages

A powerful book that anyone who is bereaved would find helpful. Each of the pages contain brief but extremely helpful insights. Listed below are examples:

Give voice to the anguish in your heart. Talk. Weep. Rage. You grieve deeply because you loved deeply. Grief is love not wanting to let go. Shock. Denial. Panic. Anger. Guilt. Physical distress. Depression. These reactions aren't neat sequential steps or stages leading you through the maze of grief. Like a roller coaster, they are recurring themes of anguish in confronting a devastating loss.

Learning about the emotions of grief may help you understand your own barrage of feelings. Just remember: Grief takes time and courage and patience. Try your best to be loving with yourself. Since there is no set timetable for bereavement, each one must find his or her own path to acceptance and healing.

Take as long as you need.

Reprinted from The Hope Line, Hope for Bereaved, Inc., July 2001, 4500 Onondaga Blvd., Syracuse, NY 13219. □

Third Annual Survivors Conference and Workshop

(Sponsored by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Western Division, AFSP/WD)
By Paul Bressman, M.D., Chair, AFSP/WD

Save the date,
Saturday,
November 17th,
2001 for the
American Founda-
tion for Suicide
Prevention, West-

ern Division, (AFSP/WD) Third Annual Survivors Conference and Workshops at Cedars Sinai Medical Center and the adjacent Sofitel Hotel in Los Angeles. The program runs from 9 AM to 3:30 PM and starts at Cedars Sinai Hospital with a teleconference led Dr. Terry Maltzberger, professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. The teleconference will be broadcast by live satellite coverage to 17 major cities across the country, enabling participants at similar conferences to join together to promote personal healing and suicide prevention. Participants will learn about the latest in suicide prevention research from suicidologists and be able to call in their questions and have them addressed to our nationwide audience.

The program will then reconvene at the Sofitel Hotel (easy walking distance) where we will have a catered Survivors Luncheon and then a full afternoon of Survivors Workshops. The workshops will feature: Loss of a Child from the Perspective of Parents and Siblings with Toni Sargent, Carol Mendelson and David Davis; Bereavement Issues Following the Suicide of a Spouse or Lover with Susan Celentano, M.S., M.F.T.; Handling Adolescent Suicide Crises with Elaine Leader, Ph.D., Children and Suicide with Sharyn Nichols, MA, MFT; Loss and Grief from the Perspective of Faith with Rev. Janet Richardson, M.F.T. and Rev. Alice Parsons Zulli, MFT and The Process of Mourning in a Family After a Suicide with Evelyn Tabachnick, Ph.D.

As the Surgeon General, David Satcher, M.D. Ph.D., has stated, "Too often we blame the victim and stigmatize the surviving family members and friends, intensifying their burden of hurt and further shrouding suicide in secrecy." Please join us to address these issues.

This year parking at the Sofitel, the Conference and Workshops and catered luncheon at the Sofitel and parking at the Sofitel are all included for a \$25.00 contribution. Family discounts are available. To register call AFSP/WD at 909.948.5272, fax at 909.948.0748 or email: afspdwd@earthlink.net. Please register early. □

Come to SPAN-California's Fall Meeting and Help Prevent Future Suicides

By Sam Bloom

Survivors, other lay persons and professionals will be meeting on October 6th and 7th to participate in SPAN-California's Fall Meeting. SPAN-California is a nonprofit organization of concerned citizens and professionals dedicated to the prevention of suicide through statewide and community partnerships. The all day Saturday and Sunday morning meeting will be held at the Holiday Inn Orange County Airport. The program will include updates on SPAN activities and experts in their fields speaking on a broad range of topics related to suicide and its prevention.

Come join us and make new friends. Many survivors find "doing something to prevent future suicides" can be helpful in their own healing as they strive to include new meaning in their lives following their devastating loss of a loved one to suicide.

Call Jay Nagdimon at 310-751-5324 as soon as possible on how to register. □

Thoughts About Memories

By Adele Mize,

The Compassionate Friends, Athens, GA

When our grief is new, our memories may be too painful to recall. All for very good reasons; we have much unfinished loving and sharing to be expressed for and to our loved one. We must shed our tears and we must find someone to talk to who can listen with genuine feelings.

We must also use our memories as an extension of the past to help us continue spiritual dialog with our deceased loved one as an assist in resolving our painful feelings. Only with time, much patience, adequate support, and renewed faith that a loving spirit is for all eternity, can we get well. As we work at it, the memories will begin to be less painful and more comforting. In time, good memories will return and become priceless as they sustain us in our daily lives.

Sascha Wagner of The Compassionate Friends, Des Moines, Iowa, said it very well: "Good memories are the perennials that bloom again after the hard winter of grief begins to yield to hope." □

I look forward to the day when images of my loved one's life are no longer associated with the event of my loved one's death.

— Martha Whitmore Hickman

If someone listens, or stretches out a hand, or whispers a kind word of encouragement, or attempts to understand a grieving person, extraordinary things begin to happen. — Loretta Girzartis

Calendar of Upcoming Events

YEAR: 2001

September 22, Saturday, 9 - 11 a.m., GriefShare your journey from mourning to joy

13 weeks, but it's not necessary to attend all session, each is "self-contained," so you will find encouragement and help in each session. Held at Rolling Hills Covenant Church, 2221 Palos Verdes Drive North, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA. Please preregister, \$15 fee. Call Donna Chamberlain, 310.832.9109 for information.

September 30, Saturday – Alive and Running 5/10K Run/Walk

Westchester Parkway, just west of Sepulveda Blvd. & La Tijera, north of LAX. Starts at 8 a.m., but please arrive early to register.

October 6 & 7, Saturday & Sunday – SPAN-California (Suicide Prevention Advocacy Network - California) Fall Meeting.

All day Saturday and half day meeting Sunday morning. Holiday Inn, Orange County Airport. All survivors are invited and encouraged to attend this important meeting. Read more about details in article included in this newsletter or call Sam Bloom, 310.377.8857.

October 13, Saturday – Annual Conference for Survivors, Sacramento, one-day conference.

Call Marilyn, 916.392.0664 for information.

November 17, Saturday – National Survivors of Suicide Day.

One-day conference 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. held at Cedars Sinai Medical Center & Sofitel Hotel, **all survivors are invited**, sponsored by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Features 90-minute live teleconference, survivor's luncheon followed by survivor's workshops. \$25 contribution includes luncheon, parking and workshops. More details in

article in this issue. Call 909.948.5272 for info. Save the date.

December 9, Sunday – Fifth Annual Worldwide Candle Lighting for "National Children's Memorial Day"

7 p.m. Sunday **in your own time zone**, sponsored by The Compassionate Friends. Anyone who has had a child die is encouraged to light a candle at 7 p.m. to feel connected with the rest of the world.

December 15, Saturday – Holiday Potluck 6:30 to 9 p.m.

All SAS survivors, their families and friends are invited. Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center, 47860 South Sepulveda Boulevard, Culver City, CA. Program details in next SAS newsletter. Bring your favorite main course, salad or dessert (enough to serve six). Our "Faces of Suicide Quilts" will be displayed. For information call Carole Chasin, 310.751.5370.

YEAR: 2002

February – SPAN-California Winter Meeting.

To be held in Sacramento, CA. (dates and details in the next SAS newsletter) Saturday (all day) & Sunday (half-day). All survivors and interested persons are invited. For information call Sam Bloom, 310.377.8857.

April 10-13 (Wed.-Sun.) – 35th Annual American Association of Suicidology (AAS), Bethesda, MD.

"Suicide Prevention: Opportunities & Challenges Along the Continuum of Health & Illness." For information see: www.suicidology.org.

May SPAN-USA Annual Awareness Event, Washington, D.C.

Dates & details in the next SAS newsletter. Join other survivors from all over the US. for the annual letter delivery to Capitol Hill. All-States Quilt Display. For information see: www.spanusa.org. □

It's Okay for Survivors to Feel Relief

By Lois Bloom, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA

It's not uncommon for some survivors to feel relief after their loved one died. It's okay to have these feelings. These survivors may have been abused sexually or verbally, or spent years responding to suicide threats from the individual, so when the person dies, the survivor may have strong conflicting feelings. These feelings may include extreme anger, hostility, guilt, relief, self-blame and so forth. Because the person is dead, the survivor often holds back expressing

their feelings, especially those that might cast a black mark on the victim. Often they believe one should not speak badly about someone who is deceased, even though they have lived through years of difficulty, struggle, and abuse.

Clearly it is best for the survivor to express **all** feelings. If you have these feelings, find someone to talk to whom you trust, a family member, friend, another survivor, a support/bereavement group, or a therapist who will listen without judging you. Someone who will actively listen and help you work through this extremely difficult situation. This activity can be very helpful in working towards resolution. □

"Faces of Suicide" Quilt

Last year we planned to make a quilt but did not have enough survivors who wanted to contribute a quilt square to make one.

So, right now everyone who wants to do a square for a quilt this year please contact Leslie Hill at 310.670.1854 or Lois Bloom, 310.377.8857. This means even if you called either of us before, call again, we do not want to leave anyone out. It also means if you have already received the square of fabric and instructions please call so your name is on our list.

Survivors who have contributed a square for our other quilts have told us they felt making a square was a healing experience and it made them feel "as if they had done something that makes a difference."

Our three quilts have really made a big difference. We use the quilts throughout the year for awareness and education at a variety of places. People are often tearful and speechless when they see our quilts, they make quite an impact and are a good way of showing that our loved ones are normal human beings who felt "helpless and hopeless" when they took their lives.

Some of the places the quilts have been in 2001 are:

- 1) Sacramento several times, when we testified at hearings for funding for a State Suicide Prevention Strategy;
- 2) Portland, when we testified at a hearing for the National Suicide Prevention Strategy;
- 3) SPAN-California semi-annual meeting in Sacramento;
- 4) American Association of Suicidology's 34th Annual Conference, Atlanta, GA;
- 5) SPAN-USA Annual Event, Washington, DC;
- 6) Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center's Erasing The Stigma, Leadership Award Luncheon;
- 7) Annual Spring SAS Potluck at Didi Hirsch, Culver City, CA;
- 8) Suicide Prevention Awareness Day, Fresno, CA;
- 9) The SPAN-USA Tool Bag Conference, Atlanta, GA;
- 10) NAMI California Conference 2001, Torrance, CA.

Remember, we'd like everyone who would like to do a quilt square to call Leslie or Lois as soon as possible. If you feel making a square is too difficult for you, call anyway and we'll talk about it.

Thank you, we appreciate your interest in this very worthwhile project.

NOTE: Urgent, we are looking for another SAS Quilt Coordinator. Leslie Hill would like help from another survivor who would be willing to receive calls and mail out the packets with the fabric and instructions. If you would be willing to do this please call Lois Bloom, 310.377.8857. Many thanks. □

Suicide

By Annette James-Rogers, 5/4/01

Utter the word and hear a multitude crying
Moved to despair by illogical dying
Suns of tomorrow's dimmed by the loss
Memories cherished, yet akin to dross
Worthless and mute as to reasons why
Yet Survivors must question and defy.

Because those we love have passed on to glory
We who remain must now tell their story.

In voices and silence, noises and sound
Each sought for answers but none where found.
Succor from kinsmen failed to appease
Assistance from healers could not please
Through demon treachery frail reality did wane
And Psyche's illusion of contentment was slain.

Courage to endure no longer pretended
The terror of being no longer extended.
They chose to terminate, cease to be mortal
And so have traversed beyond Death's portal.
If value to their deed is to be endowed
Survivors must pursue the crusade unbowed.

Because those we love have passed on to glory
We who remain must now tell their story

Editor's Note: Our special thanks to Annette for sharing her original poem. Annette is associated with our SAS program in Los Angeles. □

The Open Door

By Grace Coolidge (wife of President Calvin Coolidge)

You my son, have shown me God.
Your kiss upon my cheek
Has made me feel the gentle touch
Of Him who leads us on.
The memory of your smile, when young
Reveals His face,
As mellowing years come on apace.
And when you went before,
You left the gates of Heaven ajar
That I might glimpse,
Approaching from afar,
The glories of His grace.
Hold, son, my hand,
Guide me along the path,
That coming,
I may stumble not,
Nor roam, nor fail to show the way
Which leads us — home.

This was written on the fifth anniversary of her son's death. He was 16 when he died in 1924. □

Reprint Policy

You are welcome to reprint material from our newsletter if you are a non-profit support organization that produces periodicals. We do require the item include the author's name and title and the following:

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and also include the issue date and year the article appeared. Kindly send us a copy of any reprints for our authors to the attention of Lois A. Bloom, Editor.
Thank you.

SAS Monthly Meetings

Everyone who has completed an eight-week Survivors After Suicide Support Group is invited to attend monthly meetings at the location listed below. There is no charge. We suggest you put this page on your refrigerator for easy reference.

San Fernando Valley

Kaiser Permanente Hospital, 13652 Cantara (at Woodman), Panorama City.

2nd Saturday 11:30 am – 1:00 pm. Meeting dates

Oct 13 Nov 10 Dec 8 Jan 12 Feb 9
Mar 9

South Bay (Torrance)

Little Company of Mary Hospital, Center for Health Education Building, Earl Street, Torrance. Please check the bulletin board inside door for meeting room. **3rd Monday 7:30 – 9:00 pm.** Meeting dates

Oct 15 Nov 19 Dec 17 Jan 21 Feb 18
Mar 18

West LA - NOTE CHANGE OF MEETING PLACE AND TIME!

Now held at Didi Hirsch Culver/Palms Center, 11133 Washington Blvd., Culver City, 1 block east of Sepulveda on the north side of the street. The parking lot is in the building. Drive up to the gate and it will open outward.

3rd Wednesday 7:00 – 8:30 pm. Meeting dates

Oct 17 Nov 21 Dec 19 Jan 16 Feb 20
Mar 20

Survivors After Suicide Newsletter

A quarterly publication of Survivors after Suicide (a support group for those who have lost a loved one to suicide), a Program of the Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health: Suicide Prevention Center, 4760 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Culver City, CA 90230, (310) 751-5324. Crisis Line Number (310) 391-1253.

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