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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.

An Affirmation for Those Who Have Lost

by James E. Miller

I believe there is no denying it; it hurts to lose.
It hurts to lose a cherished relationship with another,
Or a significant part of one's own self.
It can hurt to lose that, which has united one with the past,
Or that which has beckoned one into the future.
It is painful to feel diminished or abandoned, to be left behind or left alone.
Yet I believe there is more to losing than just the hurt or the pain.
For there are other experiences that loss can call forth.
I believe that courage often appears, however, quietly it is expressed,
However easily it goes unnoticed by others;
The courage to be strong enough to surrender,
The fortitude to be firm enough to be flexible,
The bravery to go where one has not gone before.
I believe a time of loss can be a time of learning unlike any other,
And that it can teach some of life's most valuable lessons;

In the act of losing there is something to be found.
In the act of letting go, there is something to be grasped.
In the act of saying "goodbye," there is a "hello" to be heard.
For I believe living with loss is about beginnings as well as endings.
And grieving is a matter of life more than of death.
And growing is a matter of mind and heart and soul more than of body.
And loving is a matter of eternity more than of time.
Finally, I believe in the promising paradoxes of loss;
In the midst of darkness, there can come a great Light.
At the bottom of despair, there can appear a great Hope.
And deep within loneliness, there can dwell a great Love.
I believe these things because others have shown the way —
Others who have lost and then have grown through their losing,
Others who have suffered and then found new meaning.
So I know I am not alone:
I am accompanied, day after night, night after day. □
Reprinted with permission from the SOS "Mayday" Newsletter, October, 2000, Vol. 18, No. 10.

Suicide: Some Unhealthy Misconceptions

By Father Richard Rolheiser, OMI
Rome, Italy

It's always painful when someone close to us dies, but the pain is compounded considerably when the cause of death is suicide. Suicide doesn't just leave us with a sense of loss; it also leaves us with a residue of anger, second-guessing and fearful anxiety. Partly that is because we still have some unhealthy notions about it.

The first is the idea that suicide is an act of ultimate despair. We are only just emerging from a mindset that understood suicide as a final act of despair — culpable, irrevocable and unforgivable. To commit suicide was to put oneself under the judgment that the early church pronounced on Judas Iscariot: "Better for that man if he had never been born." Until very recently, victims of suicide were not even buried in church cemeteries. As G.K. Chesterton, the great apologist, once put it: "A person who commits suicide defiles every flower by refusing to live for its sake."

What we didn't understand, of course, when we still thought those things were that the propensity for suicide, most times, is an illness, pure and simple. We are made up of body and soul. Either can snap. We can die of cancer, high blood pressure and heart attacks, or from malignancies of the heart, emotional strokes and mortal wounds to the soul.

In most suicides, just as in any terminal disease, death is not freely chosen. Suicide is a desperate attempt to end unendurable pain, much like when a man who throws himself through a window because his clothing has caught fire. That's a tragedy, not a sin; a succumbing to disease, not despair; a real death, not intended.

Given this truth, we must also give up the mistaken notion that in committing suicide, a person puts himself or herself outside of God's mercy. After the resurrection, we see Christ, time and again, going through locked doors to breathe forgiveness, love, and peace into hearts that are unable to open up because of fear and hurt. God's mercy and peace can reach through when we can't. This side of eternity, sometimes all the love, stretched-out hands, and professional

“Unhealthy,” continued from Page 1

help in the world can no longer reach through to a heart locked inside a prison of pain and illness. We try to reach through but our efforts are for naught and suicide claims our loved one anyway.

God’s compassion, however, can reach through where ours can’t. God’s love can descend into hell, where it can breathe peace and reconciliation right into the middle of a wound, anger and fear. God’s hands are gentler than our own; God’s understanding infinitely surpasses ours; and God is not, as Scripture assures us, stymied by locked doors in the same way as we are.

When our loved one dies of suicide and awoke on the other side, Christ is standing inside their huddled fear, gently saying: “Peace be with you.” Jesus told us that God does not promise to eliminate pain, death and suicide in this world. These remain. What God does promise is to redeem these, to write straight with their crooked lines, and to rescue us even beyond suicide.

Then, too, there is the myth about suicide that expresses itself this way: This could have been prevented if only I had done more, been more attentive, and been there at the right time. Rarely is this the issue. Most of the time, we weren’t there for the very reason that the person who fell victim to this disease did not want us to be there. He or she picked the moment, the spot and the means precisely so that we wouldn’t be there.

Perhaps, more accurately, it could be said that suicide is a disease that picks its victims precisely in such a way so as to exclude others and their attentiveness.

Of course, this may never be an excuse for insensitivity to the needs of others, especially those suffering from dangerous depression, but it is a healthy check against false guilt and neurotic second-guessing. I have stood at the bedside of a number of people who were dying and there wasn’t anything I could do to stop the process. They died, despite my attentiveness, presence and prayers.

So too, generally, with those who have died of suicide. We were present in their lives to the end, though not (as we found out after the fact) in a way that could stop them from dying.

The Christian response to suicide should not be horror, fear for the victim’s eternal salvation and guilty self-examination about what we didn’t do. Suicide is indeed a horrible way to die, but we must understand it for what it is — a sickness — and then stop second-guessing and worrying about the eternal salvation of its victims.

In the pain of losing a loved one to suicide, we must affirm the bottom line of our faith: God redeems everything and, in the end, all will be well and every manner of being will be well — even beyond suicide.

Reprinted with permission from OBELISK, Loving Outreach to Survivors of Suicide, October 2000, originally from the Catholic New World, Aug 2000. Father Richard Rolheiser, OMI, is a theologian, teacher and author, and currently serves in Rome as General Councilor for Canada for the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. □

Visual and Verbal Tools for Surviving Trauma Workshop

Saturday, February 2, from 2–4 P. M. Norris Film Gallery, Palos Verdes Art Center, 5504 W. Crestridge Rd., Rancho Palos Verdes, CA . Janice DeLoof, Artist/Curator of “Art Heals, Art Works” will demonstrate “Drawing the Feeling,” and encourage participation in this expressive drawing survival tool.

Rich and Kitty Edler, co-founders of The Compassionate Friends, South Bay–LA chapter in 1993, Board of Directors member since 1996 and co-facilitators of “Good Grief Support Group” at Neighborhood Church will share their survival story and give information about Compassionate Friends. Rich Edler is author of “Into the Valley and Out Again, the Story of a Father’s Journey.”

Sam Bloom, President of SPAN (Suicide Prevention Advocacy Network), and Lois Bloom, author of “Mourning After Suicide,” will also share survivor information, present warning signs and risk factors relating to potential suicide, strategies on how to respond, and where to seek help.

“Art Heals, Art Works” will be held at the Beckstrand Gallery of the Palos Verdes Art Center, 5504 W. Crestridge Rd, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA, January 25–March 24, 2002. The exhibit includes the work of sixteen professional Southern California artists with diverse experiences, concepts, styles, media, and approaches to art and healing. Essays about art and healing are included in the exhibit catalog. The workshop, exhibit, and reception are free to the public. □

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Debbie Pikul Appointed New Editor of the Survivors After Suicide Newsletter

The Survivors After Suicide (SAS) Program welcomes Debbie Pikul as the new Editor of the Survivors

After Suicide Newsletter. She will replace Lois Bloom who is resigning at the end of this year (see separate articles in this issue on Lois' resignation and recognition at the SAS Potluck event on Saturday, December 15th).

The SAS newsletter is extremely fortunate to obtain the volunteer services of Debbie Pikul as its new editor. Debbie is an experienced newsletter editor and desktop publisher. She currently edits several newsletters for other organizations as an occupation. Through the suicide deaths of her two brothers, Jeff at age 22 in November 1990 and Chris at age 23 in August 1998, Debbie partici-

pated in an SAS support group several years ago and has taken Support Group Facilitator Training.

Debbie is committed to maintaining the high quality of the newsletter and requests your contributions and suggestions as she proceeds with her work in producing the newsletter.

Debbie's brothers are represented on the SAS Survivors Quilt. She has a BFA from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and an MA in Psychology from Pepperdine.

The Suicide Prevention Center and the Survivors After Suicide are extremely pleased to have Debbie as an important contributor to this vital part of the SAS program.

Debbie can be contacted at 805.531.0138. Her email address is: dpikul3@aol.com

Check out Debbie's website at: www.twotoomany.com

She gives insight into each of her brother's suicides, has several other survivors tell their stories and provides suicide prevention information. □

Tips For Handling the Holidays

1. **Decide what you can handle comfortably and let family and friends know.**

Can I handle the responsibility of the family dinner, etc. or shall I ask someone else to do it? Do I want to talk about my loved one or not? Shall I stay here for the holidays or go to a completely different environment?

2. Make some changes if they feel comfortable for you. Open presents Christmas Eve instead of Christmas morning. Vary the timing of Chanukah gift giving. Have dinner at a different time or place. Let children take over decorating the house, the tree, baking and food preparation, etc.

3. Re-examine your priorities: Greeting cards, holiday baking, decorating, putting up a tree, family dinner, etc. Do I really enjoy doing this? Is this a task that can be shared?

4. Consider doing something special for someone else. Donate a gift in the memory of your loved one. Donate money you would have spent on your loved one as a gift to charity. Adopt a needy family for the holidays. Invite a guest (foreign student, senior citizen) to share festivities.

5. Recognize your loved one's presence in the family. Burn a special candle to quietly include your loved one. Hang a stocking for your loved one in which people can put notes with their thoughts or feelings. Listen to music especially liked by the

deceased. Look at photographs.

6. If you decide to do holiday shopping, make a list ahead of time and keep it handy for a good day, or shop through a catalog.

7. Observe the holidays in ways which are comfortable for you. There is no right or wrong way of handling holidays. Once you've decided how to observe the time, let others know.

8. Try to get enough rest — holidays can be emotionally and physically draining.

9. Allow yourself to express your feelings. Holidays often magnify feelings of loss.

It is natural to feel sadness. Share concerns, apprehensions, feelings with a friend. The need for support is often greater during holidays.

10. Keep in mind that the experience of many bereaved persons is that they do come to enjoy holidays again. There will be other holiday seasons to celebrate.

11. Don't be afraid to have fun. Laughter and joy are not disrespectful. Give yourself and your family members permission to celebrate and take pleasure in the holidays.

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Ways Survivors Remember Their Loved Ones, During Holidays and at Other Times

"My daughter's best friend told us after Beth's suicide that she would never want her

death to overshadow her life. The truth of those words has helped my family to embrace the holidays. Beth is remembered in many ways. There is now a star that bears her name.* The number at our Thanksgiving table has grown tremendously as we truly realize we have much to be thankful for. "When someone you love becomes a memory, the memory becomes a treasure." Lois, I want to share with you a gift that I received from Beth. Christmas cards were always an important tradition with me. Every year I looked forward to reaching out to all of the people who had touched my life. The first Christmas after Beth's suicide I just couldn't send out cards. I couldn't bear the thought of signing our cards Pam, Bob and Bobby when it had always been Pam, Bob, Bobby and Beth. Not sending Christmas cards hurt me; it was another reminder of how nothing would ever be the same again. The next year as it was getting close to the holidays I was going through Beth's closet and found a Christmas card that she had made. It was beautiful! I took it to a print shop and had it reproduced, Beth had signed her name under the artwork on the front so when I sent out the cards I didn't have to worry about not signing her name as she had done it herself. I can't tell you how many friends and family have framed her card and display it in their homes each Christmas. It's a gift from Beth to all of us that we will always treasure."

— Pam's daughter Beth died by suicide on June 11, 1997 at age 15. *Interested in naming a star for your loved one, call: 1.800.868.7800: or check web site: www.nameastar.net/

"After my mom's death in 1979, I made a decision that our family would celebrate her life and all of the contributions she made. To this day, we continue to bake her favorite cake on her birthday on March 4. The nice thing is that now that my 4 kids have grown, I don't always have to be the one baking her cake! Thanksgiving was Mom's favorite holiday so we make sure we attend Thanksgiving service and give special thanks for her life. Every year someone comments that the dressing "isn't as good as grandma's" and we keep a candle lit on our counter all day in her memory. We do the same at Christmas. I also buy myself a gift "from Mom," wrap it and put it under the tree. The kids and grandkids enjoy that a lot!"

— Stephanie's Mother, Ellen died by suicide on September 5, 1979 at age 61.

I have gone inward in my grief. Clearly, at the 2001 AAS conference in Atlanta it came flowing outwardly. In years past, I used to send my former mother-in-law a rose on Jim's birthday, thanking her for her son and honoring his memory. Our son was so young (3) when he died, that in many ways, Jason (my son) has gone on without Jim. Jason, was born on Christmas Day. In the years that followed Jim's death, Christmas morning was filled with mixed emotions. As a Christian, I celebrated Christ's birth. As a mother, I celebrated Jason's birth. As a widow, I mourned the loss of my husband. I tried to keep up a good front, but almost always shed many tears that morning. (Writing this brings forth more tears.) This Christmas will be particularly challenging. My son will be 21 on Christmas Day. My late husband should be here to celebrate our son's victories, but because of his choice 17 years ago, he will not. The work I do on a daily basis is probably my biggest tribute to life. I truly want to instill the message of hope to those in despair. I want to kindle a spark towards life, when life seems so dark. I want people to know that they do not have to face the challenges alone. I don't want another family to go through the pain that my family, and I have endured. I work as a Suicide Prevention Outreach Coordinator, Placer County and Placer County Law Enforcement Chaplaincy.

— With much love and appreciation, Kathleen's husband Jim died by suicide in 1984 at age 27.

"One of the most valuable lessons I've learned since Paul's suicide is that I must plan ahead for the revisited grief of holidays and anniversary dates. Early in my healing process, I began searching for holiday bereavement information and incorporated what I thought would be helpful in my recovery. I've included some useful information on my survivor support web site: (www.survivingsuicide.com). Another lesson I learned over the years is that the days leading up to the holiday/anniversary are often more difficult than the actual date. Take care all and be especially gentle with yourselves during the holidays."

— Linda's son Paul died by suicide on June 29, 1993 at age 25.

Once every year, since my son Brad's death on January 25, 1998, I have arranged for a meeting of my son Brad's friends with my husband and I. In 2000, we met at his grave and formed a circle, each speaking about some memory of my son Brad who took his own life at age 28. In 2001, we met in March at the reception for the exhibit, "Art Heal, Art Works" in Los Angeles; I curated and dedicated to my son's memory. This exhibit included the art work and poetry of two of Brad's friends, my art work, entitled "Every 17 Minutes," and the art of six other artists also dealing with trauma and loss in their lives. In 2002, "Art Heals, Art

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Works," will be held January 25–March 24, 2002 at the Beckstrand Gallery of the Palos Verdes Art Center, 5504 W. Crestridge Rd, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA. The opening reception on Friday, January 25, 2002, from 6–9 PM is the fourth anniversary of my son's death and his friends will again be there with my family and me.

— Janice's son Brad died by suicide on January 25, 1998 at age 28.

For the past three Christmas Eve's since Edward's suicide I buy two tickets to the play The Christmas Carol and use the second ticket as a Christmas gift to someone who's company I enjoy. I always go to see the play on Christmas Eve as this was a very special time for Edward and I when he was alive, a time we got dressed up, sat in front of the fire place with a Christmas drink and opened Christmas gifts. Clearly some of the happiest memories I am blessed with today. Then, we drove to Five Crowns Restaurant in Corona del Mar, for a wonderful Charles Dickens Christmas Dinner of prime rib, English pudding and Truffle. They have professional Christmas Carolers roaming from table to table in period costumes. At our request they sang "Oh Holy Night" for us. Since Edward's death I've continued this tradition going with a chosen friend. We go to the 4 p.m. play, the last showing, and

this seems to make it even more special and intense since it really is Christmas Eve just like it is in the play. You feel like you are really there in that vintage Christmas time. The audience is full of children, of all ages, and there just seems to be an extra excitement all around. Interesting, I am beginning to see the same faces of those who have made this a Christmas tradition in their family. During the play I feel especially close to Edward when the businessman Scrooge talks about his Christmas Past, Present and Future. Somehow it allows me to visit the past in a satisfying and productive way and I am always happy and surprised when Scourge opens his heart and makes his personal transformation to the present and future. Invariably, we leave the play refreshed and satisfied that we have participated fully in the season of love and hope. And as we walk to the cars we hear all the excited kids talking about the play. But, more importantly, they are talking about what Santa will bring the following morning. It's a warm and heart rendering moment that makes you glad to be alive. Last year my friend and I started including Christmas Eve Dinner at the Five Crowns, before then it was too difficult. I am so grateful to have had these memories and will cherish them always every Christmas Eve.

— Linda's husband Edward died by suicide on September 28, 1997 at age 52. □

Lifekeepers Memory Quilt

For too many families, suicide becomes a shameful secret. Each person thinks they are alone. Interestingly, if we have the courage to talk about our loss, we find we are not alone, many have shared the pain we feel. Too many.

We can offer a tangible message to educate our nation, our neighbors, and our legislators that we who survive want to help others find a way to live. You can share your pictures and sentiments by dedicating a square in the Lifekeeper Memory Quilt, offering the image of your loved one. Two quilts have been completed. We are presently putting together the third.

A \$20 fee covers the cost of material, labor and postage necessary to create the visual tribute to our sons, daughters, sisters, brothers, moms, dads, friends. You will receive a cotton quilt square and instructions on how to proceed. Catherine Montgomery is taking over the coordination of the quilt from Leslie Hill who did a beautiful job on the first two and is taking a well-deserved time out.

If you would like to honor a loved one with a square let us know. All 50 states have come together in this joint effort to educate the world for the need to reduce the incidence of suicide. The two existing quilts have been displayed at national meetings and will be available at the December 15th potluck in Culver City.

We want the world to know they lived and were loved and deserve to be remembered.

Yes, I want to create a quilt square to honor: _____

Send the material and instructions to me:

Name: _____

Address _____

Phone Number(s) _____

Enclosed is my \$20 check or money order made out to Catherine Montgomery to cover the cost of material, labor and postage.

Mail to C. J. Montgomery, P.O. Box 948, Redondo Beach, CA 90277 or call Catherine at 310.316.2527 for information.

This Should Not Happen To Others...

By Tom Arnette, Chattanooga, TN

I took Timmy to the counselor, a psychologist, for testing, and he started seeing the counselor. The counselor never mentioned sui-

cide. After Timmy died, the psychologist made reference to not being able to talk about what he and Timmy had discussed because Timmy was 18, an adult I guess. Maybe I could have told him some things if he had talked to me, maybe not. He did say Timmy was making progress. He said Timmy was the only person he ever had who tried everything he suggested to him.

On Sunday evening, August 20, 1995, Timmy went to a church "care group" meeting. He came home at 10 or 11 p.m. The next morning, Monday, August 21, 1995, I got up and got ready to go to work. At about 5:30 a.m., my wife walked with me out to the driveway around the side of the house. I heard a funny noise, and as we rounded the corner, I realized the noise was a car running—Timmy's car—and the exhaust was putting out a misty cloud. I ran to the car, opened the door, and pulled Timmy out into my arms and onto the ground.

It was like he was asleep, with his head laid back on the headrest. He had taken a box of sleeping pills he had gotten at Wal-Mart and then put a new garden hose he had bought up the exhaust pipe and into the window of his car, where he had placed a towel to plug the opening of the window. He had gone to sleep forever.

I did the best I could to do CPR, but got no response. My wife ran into the house to call 911. When the ambulance, police, and rescue people arrived, they could not revive him. I remember thinking that the rescue workers were standing around too much and not doing anything for Timmy. One policeman asked if Timmy was on drugs. (Timmy had never been a discipline problem, was never in trouble of any sort, never smoked, drank, or used drugs of any form.)

We followed the ambulance to the hospital and could see them working over Timmy. When they took him into the emergency room, we went to a small waiting room. At some point friends and preachers began to come in. A nurse came in and told us that they were working on Timmy, but that it did not look good. I think she came in later with the same message. Next the doctor came in, but I did not want him to say anything. I knew what he would say.

One of Timmy's friends, a young married woman (who worked with the youth group at our church and who had been at the care group meeting) heard on the radio that an ambulance had been called to the subdivision where we lived. She knew it was Timmy. He had told

her the night before that he knew he had good parents, a good home and material things, and did not know why he felt like killing himself.

She did not know what to do with the information. (There is no anger or blame there.) As it turned out, Timmy had talked to several preachers and church leaders, looking for help, looking for answers. No one knew what to do. No one seemed to understand suicide or knew that he might die.

His therapist (the psychologist) told us that he had asked Timmy about suicide, but it seems to have been more in the line of "you wouldn't really do that, would you?" The whole matter surprised him. He even seemed to be surprised or mystified that Timmy would know how to kill himself.

My wife, daughter, and I had our lives changed forever. We will never be the same. We would give anything not to be here, with the knowledge that Timmy's death forced upon us, but we have no choice. We are survivors, just like some of you here and many others that are not here.

We know that some people think that, we should be over it by now. If you are one of those who think that way, you are fortunate. It means you are not a survivor. I hope you never have to understand how we really feel.

What we would like you to understand, what we would like you to remember, is that so many people had a chance to help Timmy, to give him the help he wanted, but somehow he did not get that help. That should not happen to others.

Reprinted from "Living After Suicide" Newsletter, Chattanooga, TN, July 1999. Tom & Nina Arnette are co-facilitators of the support group associated with "Living After Suicide." □

SAS Holiday Potluck for SAS Survivors

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. The program will be to honor Lois Bloom, who will be retiring as Editor of our Survivors newsletter. Please RSVP to Cecilia Pool at 310.751.5373 by December 12, 2001. Bring your favorite main course, salad or desert (enough to serve six). We are looking forward to seeing you. Please come and get a positive start to your year end holidays. And, make new friends and see some you have not seen for awhile. □

Alive & Running Run/Walk Benefits Crisis Line and Survivors After Suicide

By Sarah Timperman, Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center staff member

support for the Suicide Prevention Center. Although the race had to be rescheduled until September 30 due to the

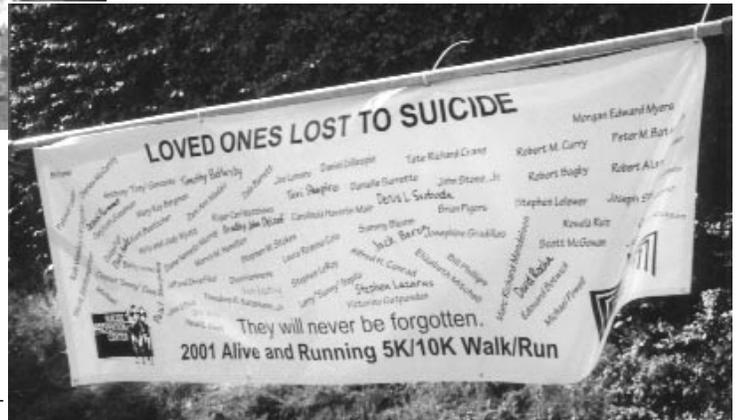
This year's "Alive & Running" 5/10K Run/Walk was a tremendous success, drawing more than 1,000 runners, and raising much needed financial

two of the many fun booths in the Expo area.

On display were the "Faces of Suicide" quilts that commemorate those who died by suicide and two banners, one that had names of "Friends of the Suicide Prevention Center," the other a "Memorial Banner" with names of loved ones who died by suicide.

A special prize drawing was held for those who raised money for the race. The prizes included a trip to Portugal (airfare, hotel and tours included), a five-night stay in an elegant New York apartment (airfare included), and a two-night stay for two at the Regent Beverly Wilshire hotel in Beverly Hills.

Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center would like to thank our race sponsors: Abreu Travel, Foothill Capital, Hawthorne Savings, Longs Drugs, Pellin Automotive Products Company, Sparkletts Water, Spectrum Club, and Union Bank. We would like to especially thank the runners, walkers and kiddies who participated in the



recent national tragedy, the spirit of the event was not dampened.

"This year's race was extraordinary," said Dr. Jay Nagdimon, Director of Emergency Services at Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center. "It was very moving to see everyone come out to support suicide prevention, the Survivors After Suicide Program and help raise suicide prevention awareness."

People from all walks of life participated in the day's events. Activities included a Kiddie K, in which children ran a one-kilometer course, and a prize-give away for runners and walkers such as T-shirts, gift certificates for See's Candies, tickets to Six Flags Magic Mountain, and gift boxes of Kiehl's Skin Care Products. Fresh juice, courtesy of Jamba Juice and gift bags from Trader Joe's were

event. And our special thanks to those who made financial contributions and all of the wonderful, hard-working wonderful volunteers. We could not have achieved suc-



cess without you.

We're very pleased to inform you we made a net profit of \$30,000 on gross revenue of \$35,000 this year. Many thanks to all of you for coming together to make this year's race our best ever! □

Calendar of Upcoming Events

YEAR: 2001

November 28, Wednesday — 8 p.m.
“COPENHAGEN,” starring Mariette Hartley,
Len Cariou and Hank Stratton, Wilshire Theater,
8440 Wilshire Blvd, Beverly Hills. The Western Division
of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention invites
you to attend the play and private reception with the cast
following the performance, reserved orchestra seating,
donation \$100. RSVP 800.344.0500.

December 9, Sunday — Fifth Annual World- wide Candle Lighting for “National Chil- dren’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 fami- lies and friends are invited. Held at Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center

4760 South Sepulveda Boulevard, Culver City, CA. The
program will honor Lois Bloom, who will be retiring as
Editor of this Newsletter. Please R.S.V.P. to Cecilia Pool at
310.751.5373 by December 12, 2001. Bring your favorite
main course, salad or desert (enough to serve six). Our
“Faces of Suicide Quilts” will be displayed. For informa-
tion call Carole Chasin, 310.751.5370.

YEAR: 2002

February 2 –Saturday 2–4 p.m. Norris Film Gallery

Palos Verdes Art Center, 5504 W. Crestridge Rd., Rancho
Palos Verdes, CA, “Visual and Verbal Tools for Surviving
Trauma” workshop. Workshop, Art Exhibit and Reception
are free to the public.

February 9, 2002 (Saturday: 8 a.m. –5 p.m., one day only). SPAN-California Semi-Annual meeting held in Sacramento, CA. All survivors and persons interested in sui- cide prevention are invited.

For information call Sam Bloom, 310.377.8857.

April 10-13 (Wednesday–Sunday) 35th Annual American Association of Suicidology (AAS) Conference

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

July SPAN-USA ANNUAL AWARENESS EVENT (dates & details in the next SAS newsletter)

Join other survivors from all over the United States for the
Annual Suicide Prevention Advocacy letter delivery to
Capitol Hill. All State’s Quilt Display. For information see:
www.spanusa.org. □

SAS Thanks Cecilia Urwin and Johnny Lowe

Two friends of Lois Bloom have treated the readers of
SAS to a professional looking newsletter over the past
seven years.

Cecilia Urwin has done the formatting and layout for
each issue of the Survivors After Suicide Newsletter as a
volunteer during this period. This adds up to hundreds of
hours of very exacting work. Cecilia has continually
enhanced the graphic design and layout that was origi-
nally created by Johnny Lowe, another friend of Lois’.
Johnny also volunteered his time to do the final editing of
each issue of the newsletter for several years.

Without these major volunteer efforts, the newsletter
would not have acquired the national respect it enjoys.
The Suicide Prevention Center and the SAS program

expresses its deepest appreciation to Cecilia and Johnny
for their significant contributions and a special thanks to
Cecilia for staying with our newsletter all these years.
Your service to hundreds of survivors is immeasurable.

Lois wants to express her personal thanks and appre-
ciation to Cecilia and Johnny for all of their efforts to
make the newsletter a success. She has enjoyed continu-
ing her personal relationship with Cecilia as they have
worked together on each issue. □

*Working with Lois Bloom has been one of the great gifts
of my life, certainly the best thing I’ve ever gotten from a job!
It has been both a pleasure and an honor to work with such
thoughtfully chosen material, knowing it will benefit so many.
It is gratifying to know this important work will continue.
Thank you so much for the opportunity to serve your community
in a meaningful way. — Cecilia*

From the Editor

Dear Friends:

After our son Sammy's suicide in 1982 my husband and I learned of the Survivors Program associated with the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center. The group was still in the developmental stage, but we were extremely fortunate to find and attend the 8-week program. The sorrow I felt at that time was almost more than I could bear. Going to the program and meeting other survivors was exactly what I needed. It's difficult to describe how much the program helped. What Dr. Edwin Sneedman said about the program helps to describe my feelings, "[it is like] a unique village of care that is like a signal fire on an uncharted prairie, a beacon and a light." Because we found our grief all consuming we resigned from all of our volunteer work and concentrate on our grief work. After nine months we took the crisis line training and became Group Facilitators with the Survivors Program.

I recall several years later at a Survivor Group Steering Committee meeting asking the committee to consider sending out a Holiday letter to survivors. The committee liked the idea. I wrote the letter. Survivor's responses were positive. A few years later I suggested a survivors quarterly newsletter be developed. The committee agreed. It was then that I became the Founder and Editor of what is now the Survivors After Suicide Newsletter.

Through the years, the newsletter has improved. I believe I have become a better editor and writer and have learned not to be shy about asking survivors, prominent suicidologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists, authors, etc. to write articles. It became important to me to try to get original articles because I could not find published articles about the topics that survivors requested. I believe these original articles have greatly enhanced the newsletter and helped to make it educational and unique.

After seeing the amateurish layout I was doing, my good friend Cecilia Urwin, who worked with me at the Saatchi and Saatchi Advertising Agency, volunteered her time and talent to format the newsletter. The newsletter attained an even more professional look when another agency friend Johnny Lowe volunteered to design a new look. These two wonderful people helped me out of the goodness of their hearts. Neither had a family member or friend die by suicide. Neither knew Sammy or me when Sammy died.

I don't know exactly when I knew that helping survivors and educating others about suicide prevention became so important to me. What does ring true is I gave up the life I had planned and found a very different one. I never dreamed my life would be so heavily involved with the suicide prevention movement. Because I was naïve about trauma that could change my life in an instance I wasn't aware of what Hope Edleman talks about, "Our lives are shaped as much by those

who leave us as they are by those who stay. Loss is our legacy. Insight is our gift. Memory is our guide."

What became important to me was finding some meaningful purpose from such a terrible loss. I had/have the great richness of all of the wonderful memories Sammy left us, but I was searching for a way to make his loss matter. In time I realized that by editing the newsletter and reaching out to help survivors I had already found something very worthwhile. And, of course, I feel it's important to encourage survivors not to abandon hope. I was fortunate to find hope in other survivors who had travelled a similar road, so it is vital for me to pass on the message of hope through the newsletter.

Now it is time for me to move on and to give someone else the opportunity to be editor. I want to spend more time with my two remarkable daughters and three irresistible grandsons; concentrate more on the suicide prevention problem in California and in the U.S. and finish the book I am co-authoring. Debbie Pikul, a survivor, has agreed to be the new editor (see separate article about Debbie). I am so pleased that such a talented, creative young woman has agreed to take on this job. I know Debbie will do a superb job. Debbie has asked me to continue to be involved by serving on the Editorial Staff. I have agreed and will help and support her to the best of my ability.

I want to express my sincere appreciation and thanks to the Committee Members, Editorial Board Members, Didi Hirsch staff and everyone who has helped me in any way. To the founders of the LASPC and the SAS Program, Norman; Ed, Mickey, Bob, David, Mike, Janet and Carla I thank you for your insightful vision for the survivors program. My sentimental feelings and sense of gratitude to each of you will be with me forever. To Jay, who took over the leadership of the program in 1994 and became a close friend, I am deeply grateful for your enthusiastic support. To David Davis my editor friend and cohort I thank you for your friendship and professional help. A big thanks to Ollie for all of the articles you sent through the years. Hugs to dear Rissa for the enormous amount of helpful material and the encouraging "fan letters" that were so heartwarming to receive. To Carole I'm very thankful for your assistance and helpful proofreading. To the Suicide Prevention staff a million thanks for years of mailing the newsletter in your all too little spare time. To Sam my incredible husband I thank you for your encouragement, for reading every article that has been in every issue several times and for all of your contributions. You are the best of the best, Assistant Editor, Producer, Proofreader and Helper. To those I've neglected to mention I apologize and thank you with all of my heart.

I cannot tell you how much I've enjoyed being editor. I have learned and grown significantly. I've met many wonderful people and have made many cherished friends. I contin-

Please turn to "Editor" on Page 10

Rx for Grief

by Stephanie Rapant McIlvaine
Cleveland, Ohio

Grieving people often say, "If only I knew what I could do to feel a little better in this grief..." The truth is, we do hold many remedies that can help with our grief process. While nothing will take away our grief completely, we can reduce anxiety and stress. The key to healing grief is having love for and patience with yourself.

No one knows us like we know ourselves, and we are our own worst critics. We tend to beat up on ourselves. How many times while grieving have we questioned our actions in comparison to others? How many times have we said, "I should have" in comparison to "He or she should have"? Chances are good that we question ourselves more than we do others. It is a natural tendency to criticize ourselves instead of giving ourselves credit. However, in our grief, we need lots of support and who better to give it to us than ourselves — the one we are with everyday, all day long?

On an airplane, the flight attendants provide direction in the case of an emergency. They inform passengers that if the airplane loses cabin pressure, oxygen masks will drop down from the overhead compartment. They continue to instruct passengers to first place the masks over their own mouths before assisting others. The message is, "You cannot be of assistance to others unless you take care of yourself first." This same idea applies to grief.

Your grief prescription is your own personal plan to heal. We may feel discouraged and believe that life will never be the same without our loved one. This is generally true in that our lives have changed in many ways. But we have to continue living, and it is important to allow ourselves to live in a healthy way.

Design your own plan for your grief. Be creative. You may want to get a massage, take a long bath, or spend a day at the zoo. Pamper yourself a little. Often, we spend the day filled with sorrow, and we need to balance this with some peaceful time as well. Try to include a few of the following simple principles in your grief Rx:

- Give yourself permission to grieve. Cry if you need to, and laugh if it feels good.
- Be realistic. Don't place unnecessary pressures on yourself to do everything you did before you were grieving.
- Release yourself from time constraints. Grief does not have a time limit. Frequently, people feel they should

act as if everything is back to normal when "normal" is no longer natural.

- Understand that grief is a physical, emotional, social and spiritual process. Grief affects every aspect of our lives.
- Utilize support systems. Don't feel guilty for accepting help from others. Other people find comfort in helping you.
- Talk with others experiencing similar losses. This helps to normalize your feelings. Also, sharing your thoughts will help others.
- Allow time for remembrance. We will always miss our loved ones. No one can ever take away our relationships or memories.
- Wait at least one year before making any major or unnecessary changes.

In addition, here are some helpful hints from the counseling staff of the Hospice of the Western Reserve.

- Journal
- Cook
- Golf
- Go on walks and listen to music that suits the mood at the moment.
- Try online support groups.
- Read books and watch movies — sad ones for a good cry and funny ones for a good laugh.
- Work extra hours.
- Temporarily reduce work hours.
- Focus on one task at a time.
- Learn to say NO!
- Take short road trips.
- Spend time with supportive family and friends.
- Find a quiet place during the day to meditate. Inhale and visualize forcing out all the negative stress feelings with each exhale.
- Create a memory box to keep significant items that are reminders of your loved one.
- Allow yourself to feel and explore your pain.
- Do something you are good at even if you don't feel like doing it.

You have the right to follow your own healthy, grief plan. Don't be afraid to change it around. If it no longer works for you, try something else. You are the one in control of your grief. Prescribe ways to help yourself heal.

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"Editor," continued from Page 9

ued to edit the newsletter all of these years because it has been such a gratifying experience. Being the editor has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

I will continue to be involved with the SAS program on the Advisory Committee, as a Group Facilitator, and

on the Editorial Board.

God bless each of you and heartfelt love always,
Lois

P.S. I wish for each of you the best possible holiday season. □

Contributions

August 23 –
November 6, 2001

A million thanks for your generosity.

In Loving Memory of:

Anthony "Tony" Gonzales from Lori A. Boone
Bill Pease from Beth Page
Bill Phillips from Carol Phillips
Brad Parsons from Joy Anderson
Bradley John DeLoof from Janice DeLoof
Brian Pigors from Peggy Pigors
Charles McCarthy from Kevin McCarthy
Chuck Anderson from Linda Anderson
Dale Barrett from Valerie Barrett
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Daniel Gillespie from Diane Gillespie-O'Neill
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Terri Shapiro from Gary Duboff
Timothy Battersby from Kathleen Battersby
Victorino Gatpandan from Vivien Gatpandan

In Honor of:

Beverly Bohn from Ruth and Robert Schreiber
Henry Bassman from Ruth and Robert Schreiber
Patrick and Amy Melghan from Beth Whitehead
Sam Bales from Elizabeth Bales ☐

A Request for Your Support

Your tax deductible donation, given in memory of your loved one (if you wish), enables the Survivors After Suicide (SAS) Program to help other survivors. Your contribution also helps defray the costs of publishing and mailing this newsletter. All contributions are appreciated. Thank you.

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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.

Survivors After Suicide Newsletter

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