



# Journey to Healing

*A newsletter for survivors of suicide*

**Second Quarter 2014**

Journey to Healing is a newsletter for survivors of suicide. Survivors are those of us whose lives have been changed by the completion of suicide by someone we knew. Journey to Healing is intended to let survivors know that you are not alone. If you would like to contribute an article or story for this newsletter, please send it to: Becky Kay, c/o Mental Health America of Greenville County 429 North Main Street, Suite 2, Greenville, SC 29601.

Survivors of Suicide Support Group – this group meets the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of each month from 7:00 – 8:30 pm at St. Michael Lutheran Church, 2619 Augusta Street, Greenville, SC 29605. There is also a closed program for eight weeks designed to help adults, teens and children.

As we grow and recover, it is important to remember that the most powerful aid that SOS can provide new survivors is the companionship of others who have endured the same type of pain. For SOS to work at its best, we must continue going to meetings to help others after we no longer need to go to be helped.

#### SOS Support Team

This team of survivors who volunteer their time to reach out to survivors in need is available to anyone who feels the need to share with another survivor by phone or personal visit in between meetings. Please call CRISISline at 864 271-8888 to arrange a call or visit from a team member.

## Does It Ever Stop Hurting?

*By Maureen Hunter*

When we are feeling overwhelmed and consumed by the inconsolable pain of our grief, we often wonder, is this going to be my life forever? Will the pain ever go away?

If grief has slammed into our life in a fury we are knocked down, broken and shattered, gasping for breath in a fog of shock, numbness and confusion. The pain becomes relentless and all consuming. The intensity and constancy of it staggers us and frightens us and we feel we will never be whole again.

I started measuring my struggle by my tears or lack of them and what was happening each day. I only cried twice today. I haven't cried for a day. When it got to two days, I celebrated. The tears lasted thirty minutes instead of two hours. Amidst my tears and the tatters of my heart I started looking for moments of comfort, and moments of hope. I searched for stories of survival and

gulped in the inspiration I found. I wanted anything that would bring a shard of light into the darkness of my life. Day by day ease came in the tiniest of increments and the pieces of my life once shattered forever started coming together again into moments of pleasure, joy and happiness.

Those tears, those moments, those tiniest of increments became my markers; the guideposts that helped me understand and notice my grief and my healing a little better. I saw where I was in my day and in my life. I noticed when my feelings came, how powerful they were and how long they lasted. I also learned that my grief would never be a straight line from A-B, over finished with, recovered and happy again. It became to me an ever evolving spiral which forms part of who I am now.

If I am around the outer part of the spiral the pleasurable moments in my life are merged and more than the painful moments.

I keep the memory and presence of my son uppermost in my day.

I take time to nurture myself.

I spend time with the people that matter most to me.

I purposefully find something each day to appreciate and enjoy.

If I am moving towards the centre of my spiral, the painful moments in my life are merged and more than the pleasurable moments: I miss my son so much I ache with a longing for which there is no ease.

I spend every single moment wishing for the past, wishing for the magic eraser to take it all away.

The flashbacks are on constant replay yet again.

I can't get out of bed and want to curl up and die myself.

Depending on where I am on my spiral these moments can be like waves gently lapping at the shoreline, or waves that pound me into the ground. Fleeting as in the wake of a passing boat or a storm that lasts for hours or days and I'm crushed again in that moment. Sometimes I can see the storm in the distance building slowly. Other times it slams into me like a bolt out of the blue. I've become used to those waves. Acceptance, always hard, gently comes and thankfully now this happens less and less.

As with my tears, my spiral and the ocean help me to know myself better. The spiral shows how my grief is rumbling through my life gently or forcibly and how powerful it is in my life at any given moment. It tells me where I am and it is a part of who I am. I don't have to get over my grief, put it away or pack it up. I recognize the duality that will always remain. The ache and the ease. The rage and the calm. The better, the worse. The sad, the happy. The pain and the pleasure.

The loss of my son will shape and mould me for the rest of my life, my grief will spin and I will move in the spiral of its unique rhythms forever.

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*I will not forget you. You are in my waking thought, my sweetest memories, and my dearest dreams. I will not forget you. You have touched my soul, opened my eyes, and changed my very experience of the Universe. I will not forget you. I see you in the flowers, the sunset, the sweep of the horizon, and all things that stretch to infinity. I will*

*not forget you. I have carved you on the palm of my hand. I carry you with me forever.*

***“You must live through the time when everything hurts.” Stephen Spender***

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## ***Support Groups***

It can be so powerful to connect with other survivors and such a relief to be able to talk openly about suicide with people who really understand.

For so many survivors, a crucial part of their healing process is the support and sense of connection they feel through sharing their grief with other survivors. The most common way this sharing occurs is through survivor support groups.

These groups provide a safe place where survivors can share their experiences and support each other.

It is natural to feel a bit unsure about going to your first support group meeting. In ***No Time to Say Goodbye***, one facilitator explains what you can expect: We sit in a circle, with each person giving a brief introduction: first name, who was lost, when it was, and how it happened. I then ask the people who are attending for the first time to begin, because they usually have an urgent need to talk. The rest of the group reaches out to them by describing their own experiences and how they are feeling. The new people realize they are not alone with their nightmare. By comparing their situations with others, they also begin to understand that they don't have a monopoly on pain.

Some survivors attend a support group almost immediately, some wait for years; others attend for a year or two and then go only occasionally — on anniversaries, holidays, or particularly difficult days. You may find that it takes a few meetings before you begin to feel comfortable. Or, you may find that the group setting isn't quite right for you, but can still be a useful way to meet one or two fellow survivors who become new, lifelong friends based on the common bond of understanding the pain and tragedy of suicide loss.



*Within Our Circle – A Broken Heart Still Beats*

## *Sometimes*

*Sometimes, I think I will not make it another day.  
Sometimes, I miss you so much I can hardly breathe.  
Sometimes, I try not to think or feel anything.  
Sometimes, I wish I understood where you were on that day.  
Sometimes, I wish I knew what I know now.  
But often, I wish you were here.*

*This poem was written by Barbara Pressley and sent to  
Jen Piver to place in or newsletter.*

*Thank you, Barbara, for your heart-felt poem of how we  
all grieve the passing of our loved one.  
You spoke truth from you heart to ours.*



## *Inspirational*

In May our country celebrated Mother's Day which is a day when we honor our Mothers who are still here and fondly remember those Mothers who are a part of the hereafter. For those Mothers who are grieving the death of a child from suicide or those children who are grieving the loss of a Mother from suicide this is an especially painful day. It is a day when families go out for brunch to honor Mothers and do something special for the Mothers in our lives. The day is fraught with a lot of pain for grief stricken people who are painfully reminded that a special person is absent from these festivities. There is a missing card or a card that can't be given to a missing Mother. This is a day that grieving people would like to have stricken from the calendar. Unfortunately that won't happen.

One of the most irritating aspects of the grief journey is the confusion that engulfs survivors. One of the most overwhelming feelings for those Mothers who are grieving the loss of a child or for those children grieving the loss of a Mother from suicide is the fact that this person was loved so very much and so deeply. The question is asked: Wasn't this love enough for this person? The answer to that question is that the suicide in no way reflects the level of love that survivors had for this person. The suicide is all about the excruciating pain that this person was in -- either the Mother or the Child. The tremendous love that was felt toward this person was incapable of penetrating to the soul and psyche of the hurting person. That is very confusing to the survivor because much has been written about the force of the love that exists between a Mother and her Child. Human love is incapable of solving or eliminating the pain of mental illness. It is vitally important for all survivors to realize that the love that we have for people is very limited and is incapable of making other people happy. Our love for people lacks the ability to create happiness in another person. Happiness and contentment emanates from within the soul of each of us. External forces are able to enhance or increase happiness. For example, possessions can enhance happiness in a person but these possessions cannot make people happy.

Another aspect of confusion for the grieving person is the attempt that people make in trying to alleviate the pain of grief. In the beginning of the journey there are no words or actions that can help those grieving people or spare them from this pain. Those people who reach out to the grief stricken survivor feel very helpless because there are no words or actions that can make the grieving person feel better. What can those people do or say that will comfort survivors and ease their pain? My suggestion is that people can be there for the survivors. There is no magical balm that can be applied and make the person feel better. In the immediate aftermath of a suicide, survivors need to first of all absorb the enormity

of what has happened. A person who was a vital part in the life of a family has died very suddenly and has ended their life deliberately. It takes some time to absorb just what happened and why. In the immediate aftermath of the suicide survivors seek answers to many questions. Sometimes there are answers and sometimes there are no answers. The big question is: WHY?

Confusion is a major part of the initial reaction to a suicide. How will the survivors continue to go on with their lives? What kind of a future will the survivors have without this person? Can survivors live without this person who was so loved and important in their lives? Will I ever be happy again or experience peace of mind? These are just some of the questions that survivors ask themselves. There are a myriad of questions that survivors ask themselves in the immediate aftermath of a suicide. These questions confuse survivors as they seek answers. These questions are all part of the initial reaction to a completed suicide of a loved one. Unfortunately, there are not always answers to these questions.

In the immediate aftermath of a completed suicide survivors are on automatic pilot and moving about and thinking in ways that don't always make sense. This is all part of the confusion that has become a part of the life of the survivor. It will not always be this way. As survivors traverse the journey of grief the fog will lift and the confusion will subside as survivors regain a semblance of normalcy in their lives. A suicide completely throws survivors into a world of topsy-turvy. Survivors literally don't know what is going on. All of this does subside after the initial aftermath but confusion and the uncertainty of life around them impacts the survivor to no end. But it does end as life continues and takes on a more normal aspect.

In many instances Mothers provide a balance in a home. This is not meant to denigrate the role of the Father in a home but the Mother seems to provide calmness and stability to the home. When the Mother is impaired by the grief of a suicide or the Mother has died from suicide the whole system of the family has been altered and there is a sense of confusion that descends on those remaining members of the family. Members of the family are called to rise to the occasion and make the necessary changes for the smooth running of the family system. All are asked to make the adjustment so that the family system can continue to function as normal as possible. The fog that engulfs a family after a suicide and the confusion that descends upon a family will eventually subside but in the immediate aftermath of the suicide fog and confusion will be a part of the life of survivors. This is very normal.

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## *Reflections by Becky*

My tears were already falling, before I even opened my eyes, lo those years ago. I had been crying nonstop for forty-seven days straight. As I walked down the stairs, I begged God to help me; I just couldn't process the fact that my son had died. I sat down to an unwanted bowl of cereal and stared out the patio door, when suddenly, a cardinal flew on to the deck banister. It made that beautiful chirp that sounds like "teacher" three times, fluffed its wings, and nestled itself down facing me.

The cardinal was only a few feet away from me and I didn't want to startle it, so I didn't move. We both sat staring at each other for a long time, when it suddenly started opening and closing its beak - as if it were singing or 'speaking' to me in a long, silent and private conversation. It then flew over to the rooftop behind us and sat on the tip of the roof - still facing me and stayed there for most of the rest of the morning. I was immediately filled with an overwhelming feeling of calm and peace...and I stopped crying!

Now, this experience was beautiful in itself, but the most amazing thing was that from that day on, I 'had breakfast with the cardinals,' and they would also be there on our deck or on the tip of the roof top across from the back of our house throughout the day. It was just soothing to sit there watching. There were so many that I named two of them after my sons, and looked forward to seeing them every day.

I would hear chirping early in the morning before I got out of bed. It sounded like they were on top of our roof, and then when I would go down to the kitchen to eat breakfast, there they would be sitting and chirping. Then one day, I saw that there were two where there had been a flock, but now there were two of them sitting together. They would perch themselves on our deck, sometimes on the

chairs or on the banister. I took many pictures of them as they calmed my every thought. And the calmer I got, the more peaceful I felt, and the more peaceful I felt, the more I looked forward to each day. I started really paying attention to all the beautiful birds that had now started landing on our deck and keeping me company. They seemed to remind me of all my loved ones that had gone on and were together now.

Then, as suddenly as they had come, one day they were gone. After not seeing them for a few days, I thought something had happened to them, and then I saw one on top of the chimney behind us. It turned towards me, chirped three times; as if to say goodbye, for now, and then flew away. I realized that it was probably getting ready to migrate south because fall was coming, and I would see it again. I also realized that I would see my sons again, someday!

I never would have thought that a bird could change my life, but I truly believe in my heart that I was sent a comforter just at the moment when I needed it the most. He sent me a cardinal, which I have since learned are called "messengers" when I was in mourning.

They are still my "Comforter with Wings!" May you be blessed with a comforter with wings....watch for them because sometimes we tend to overlook the most noticeable things of nature that speaks to us.

Blessings to you as you find the slightest thing that brings you comfort and a balm to your wounded heart.

Grace and peace,  
Becky

If you are interested in having a part in the *Journey to Healing* Newsletter we welcome your poems, articles, newspaper clippings or readings that have been helpful to you. This newsletter should be not only an instrument of healing, encouragement and education but also a reflection of who we, the survivors are and who we have become. We need your help and input to make this meaningful for everyone and invite your feedback to tell us what additional information you would like to see addressed. Thanks!

*"Grief is like a ball of string. You start at one end and wind.  
Then the ball slips through your fingers and rolls across the floor.  
Some of your work is undone but not all.  
You pick it up and start over again,  
but you never have to begin again at the end of the string.  
The ball never completely unwinds. You've made some progress."  
~ Author Unknown*

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*Bringing wellness home.....*