



Journey to Healing

A Newsletter for Survivors of Suicide

First Quarter 2017

My New Year's Resolutions in the Aftermath of my Son's Suicide

This time of year always makes me contemplative, in part because of the eternal question, "Have you made a New Year's resolution?" — but mostly because I'm on holiday. The long, lazy summer days stretch in front of me, and I don't have as much to occupy my mind with as I do when I'm at work.

So, my mind void chews away on the year that is about to close, and I consider what might be different in the year to come. I'm not big on making empty promises to myself. Sure, I'd love to lose some weight. Financial security is also rather alluring; imagine earning money and knowing there will be a considerable chunk of that left after all the bills have been paid. And love, the holy grail of New Year's wishes; just give me love and happiness and peace on Earth. Yes, all worthwhile goals, yet they don't really ring true for me. I'd much rather be happy in the body I live in (whatever shape it happens to be today), and be thankful for the money I do have and the security it offers me, and look for the little blessings in each day, appreciating the loved-up moments and the joyous happiness that does sometimes creep up on me unaware.

So, if it's not the big-ticket items, what is it I wish for in the year to come?

I'd love to be able to package up my baggage and deposit it in a long-term locker in the train station that is 2016, as I board the fast-moving 2017 locomotive. As I contemplate a new relationship as a 50-year-old (who was determined to remain single), I want to be able to enter that with an open heart and let loose the fear of past encounters, so I don't layer that on to what might be possible in the New Year.

I want to let go of all the uncertainty and angst that comes with waiting for the official coroner's report into my son's [suicide](#), and also the coroner's decision on suppression. My son Harry died on November 24, 2013; that is a very long time to be steeped in the tragic details surrounding his untimely death and the need to refresh those regularly, as the slow-moving legal system processes the very limited words and facts they must to sum up the life of my beautiful boy. I desperately want to be able to speak the words, write the words, release the pent-up feelings of love and loss. I will love my beautiful boy forever. And in my love for him, I also acknowledge that my heart cannot remain static and broken; I need to heal, I need to move forward into the "new normal" that is life without my miracle baby.

My daughter also occupies my thoughts a lot at this time of year (at any time of year). She has been through more than I feel any child should, losing her brother and her father within a three-month period. She has shown her character through her strength through those losses, and she astounds me daily with her backbone and her compassion and her overflowing empathy; she has the most beautiful heart. I would package up any lingering pain that assails my lovely daughter and shove that away in my 2016 locker as well — and wish to see her grow wings and soar into a beautiful, exciting, challenging 2017.

I suppose, then, that my New Year's resolution is to move forward, to keep moving forward, one small step at a time. To keep my eyes open, so I can recognize the wonderful little moments that money cannot buy. I wish for unencumbered happiness and health in 2017, for me and for all the people I care for.

In this lazy puddle of post-Christmas, summer bliss, I find anything is possible, even big-ticket items like finding happiness in every day, not just the stray happy bubbles that ambush me when I'm not focusing on my pain. Happiness then: pure, glittery, light and delicious. That is all I need. Package away the past pain, and try to find some happiness.....it is a huge step towards healing!

Printed with permission from
The Mighty...We face disability, disease and mental illness together.

A Gentle Reminder:

Losing a loved one through suicide is an especially devastating loss. The loved ones left behind (survivors) have a difficult array of emotions to overcome on their journey of grief. There are many reasons for this.

First of all, the death is usually unexpected and sudden, even if the person had been talking about suicide in the past. The method is often violent, and it is difficult for survivors to think about their loved one inflicting this violence on themselves. Unfortunately, suicide carries a stigma in our society; friends and family members are at a loss for knowing what to say.

For many people, losing a loved one to suicide causes a feeling of abandonment thinking: "My loved one chose to leave me!" All of these issues are difficult to deal with during the grieving process. Fortunately, the Greenville area has a self-help/support group called "Survivors of Suicide" for family members and friends of persons who have completed suicide. This free and confidential group is sponsored by Mental Health America of Greenville County.

Groups meet on the first and third Tuesday of each month at 7:00 - 8:30 PM at St. Michael Lutheran Church, 2619 Augusta Street, Greenville, SC 29605. If a family is too fragile to attend group, we will work with them to meet privately and gently guide them into the group. Additionally, CRISISline is available 24/7 at 864-271-8888 and a call-back can be returned by a survivor as close to the type of death you have experienced.



Inspirational

As we begin a New Year, many survivors begin or continue their grief journey. In the immediate aftermath of losing a loved person to suicide, survivors are in a state of shock. They can't believe that this loved one took their life. For some, this fact can be very difficult to admit, the unspeakable act of suicide has happened to their family now. Survivors oftentimes walk around in a daze for a long time trying to figure out why and what led this loved one to perform such an awful and destructive act. This family does not deserve this, no one and no family deserves such a tragedy. The first step in this process is to admit that this has happened in this wonderful and loving family. It takes some time for this admission to take place. If survivors are to have happy and satisfying futures, there is one very important admission and action that needs to happen. It is not going to happen automatically. It takes time and a lot of courage to come to this conclusion, along with a lot of tears.

Sister Dolores Hart has very poignantly and succinctly stated "that one's greatest wound 'integrated' becomes one's greatest power". The important word in that quote is "integrated". What does that mean? It means that a survivor has admitted that the unspeakable act has happened to their family. There is no hiding that fact. There is no covering up. There is no such thing as minimizing this act. It is very important to call it what it is, and that this loved one ended the intolerable pain that had engulfed their life. That is what has happened, and that is the reason for the suicide. That act of suicide needs to be integrated into the life of the survivor with all the aspects of the admission. If the survivor can integrate the act into their life, then the survivor can move forward with zest and vigor. Once the act is integrated into the life of the survivor, then the survivor has the tools to make a difference in the field of suicide. Educating people about the ravages of suicide and the impact it has on a family and friends is a powerful way to change the way people think about suicide. There are a lot of misconceptions out there about suicide, such as the act is cowardly or selfish. It is neither cowardly nor selfish but it is an act of desperation. The person who completes suicide can no longer handle the pain in their lives. They believe the only way out is to complete suicide and end the pain.

To better move on in life it is best to integrate this event into one's soul, and this is not any easy task. It means owning the fact that a loved one found life too painful and the only way out was to take their life. These suffering souls saw no other way to end the pain except to take their life. To survivors this does not make sense but to those suffering souls it made all the sense in the world. If one looks at the act through healthy eyes it appears senseless, but people who complete suicide are not looking at the world through healthy eyes. Their world has been engulfed with the pain caused by mental illness that distorts the reality of the world and leads these suffering souls to conclude that this is the only way to end their pain. If they saw another way out they would have taken it but to these hurting souls ending their life was the only solution.

The most important thing that survivors can do for themselves is to integrate the reality of their loved one's suicide into their own lives and then to move on in the journey of grief. This is a very difficult admission and exercise, but it can make one's future bright and enable survivors to experience the joy and happiness that all of us are entitled to experience. The integration of this painful experience into one's life is a major step on the grief journey. I am reminded that Shakespeare lost his only son three years before he wrote Hamlet. The words of the play take on different meaning when they are read or heard with the thought that the author lost his son three years previous. The artistic director of a theater in New York also lost his son to suicide. Subsequent to his son's suicide, the theater was putting on Hamlet. As the director watched the play there were tears when the ghost of the dead king cries out to his son, Hamlet. There were tears when Hamlet declares that "he has lost all my mirth". There were tears when Hamlet declares "To be or not to be" the speech in which Hamlet considers ending his life. For the artistic director, these were more than words. This part of the play stirred up many feelings related to the suicide of his son. The director has integrated his son's suicide into his life and his work. This does not mean that the experience has no effect on him, but it does mean that he is looking at the play through different lenses since the death of his son. That is going to happen to all survivors when there is a situation that brings them back to their loved one's suicide. The painful reminder does not mean that the experience of a loved one's suicide has not been integrated, but it does mean that survivors look at life differently since losing a loved one to suicide. It is also a reminder that the journey of grief is never over. The pain has become part of the DNA of the survivor. It has become part of the life of the survivor. It has been integrated into the soul of the survivor and will be there for the rest of one's life. That is as it should be.



Reflections by Becky

As we begin a new year, survivors for the most part are glad that the holidays are over, all the decorations can come down, and people can settle into a new year. The Christmas carols are over for another nine or ten months and no more Christmas cards and no more feasting on the rich foods of the holidays. The New Year's resolution can be observed for a few more weeks, and then people can settle into the year 2017. One of the thoughts that I have is: what is going to happen to me personally in this year and what is going to happen to our world as we venture forth into this new year? What exciting things will come my way, and what challenges will I struggle through? There are a myriad of questions that people confront as they move into a new year. That is what mystery is all about. As we venture forth in life, we are confronted with the future as it unfolds. Survivors of a suicide never dreamed that they would become part of the SOS family. As one survivor put it, "I have met some of the most wonderful people that I never wanted to meet." To me that is about the mystery of life and living.

The older we get, the more mysterious life becomes. Tragic events continue to take place all over the world, and yet we keep on living; this is but one of the mysteries of life. What behooves people to commit such heinous acts and cause such untold sorrow and mayhem? That is one of the great questions that plagues us as we move on in life. Over the years that I have been involved with SOS, I have learned to live with mystery and not having the answers. I think that survivors of a completed suicide are challenged to live with mystery as they try to figure out precisely why did their loved one die from suicide. In many instances survivors never know just why their loved one died. Notes never adequately answer that question. The question that survivors have is, "Why did my loved one die from suicide when there are other people in the world with the same challenges as my loved one and they are still living?" There is no answer to that question. That is part of the mystery.

I am generally turned off by people who seem to have all the answers to some of the profound questions that we have about life. I prefer to relegate these questions to the mysteries of life. I am more comfortable admitting that there are situations in life that defy any rational explanation. I don't need to know the answers. It is not that I am comfortable with some of the issues that confront the world, but that I have stopped trying to find answers. I am more comfortable to put these issues in the realm of the mystery of life. I don't have to know the rationale of some of the tragedies of life. I have learned to live with mystery. It is an important part of the grief journey to try to learn the exact reason why a loved one found life so intolerable that suicide was the only way out. That is an important part of the early stages of the journey. I maintain that survivors are challenged to live with the mystery, that they might never know precisely why their loved one decided that suicide was the only answer. That position is attained after a very long process in seeking why a loved one could not live any longer in this life. All suicides are tragic. Some suicides result after years of the torture of mental illness that was known to members of the family. Most suicides take people by surprise because while this loved one might have had some challenges and some disappointments in life, suicide was never seen as an option or a possibility. Suicide was not on the radar screen of survivors. Survivors are plagued with the question of trying to figure out why this loved one died from suicide. That is where the mystery comes in.

I have learned to conclude that people who complete suicide think differently than those of us who do not complete suicide. For those who complete suicide, their actions made all the sense in the world. For survivors, there is no rational explanation that will make sense. Suicide defies any rational explanation. That is one of the mysteries of life.

As we begin a new year, I want to assure each member of the SOS family of my thoughts and prayers during my quiet time each day, and I encourage all of you to do the same for each other – especially for those people who have recently joined our circle.

Grace and peace, Becky



Inclement Weather Policy

Even though right now it doesn't seem like winter, it is still around the corner... maybe. Your well-being is always the most important thing to us. Please make certain that we have all of your contact information so we can keep you up-to-date; in the event of inclement weather, you may look on MHA's website at www.mhagc.org or feel free to e-mail or call us if you are uncertain of our meetings.

The main priority is to care for you, and you to care for yourself.

Your Facilitators,

Becky

Alice

Deb

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!



*“When your fear touches someone’s pain, it becomes pity,
when your love touches someone’s pain, it become compassion.”*

— Stephen Levine

Mental Health America of Greenville County
429 North Main Street, Suite 2
Greenville, SC 29601

Bringing wellness home.....



In this Issue:

My New Year’s Resolutions
Inspirational
Reflections from Becky
Inclement Weather
Closing

Page 1
Page 3
Page 4
Page 5
Page 6

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 1st and 3rd Tuesdays 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 for our own healing.

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.