



# Journey to Healing

*A Newsletter for Survivors of Suicide*

*Second Quarter 2015*

## *Sudden and Traumatic Grief*

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I couldn't believe it. The knock on the door...who would be coming to our house in the middle of the night? I opened the door and saw the police uniform. I knew something was very, very wrong. I didn't think I heard anything they said except: "I'm sorry. It was a horrible scene. He's dead." I can't tell you any of the details of the accident. I don't know if they didn't tell me, or I just couldn't bear it. I was so numb. I was so angry. I wanted to hit the policeman and the chaplain that came to break the news to me. They couldn't be talking about my loved one. It wasn't possible! I was certain he was in my car and in Anderson. I wanted to go check. They held me and they said, "I'm sorry, he's not there."

That was almost 17 years ago; I still feel the pain and the numbness of that night. It still feels impossible to believe. I'm back at work, but I'm going through the motions. My boss and fellow employees were wonderful to me.

I want someone to pay for this. It's not okay, it's not fair. How could this happen? Some days I just sit and cry. Will the clouds ever lift? Will the sun ever shine again?

When death – or loss of any kind – is sudden, you feel cheated. Life has given you no time to get used to the idea of having to say good-bye. An overwhelming sense of shock and disbelief settles in. It can't be! Then the horrible news of Bobby's suicide came 8 months later and I did lose it that time....there was not enough of me left to fight this loss.

It's hard to put the immediate horror to rest. I needed proof of why. We may need to see the body....the journey of coping begins with symbolically finding a way to say good-bye while coming to terms with the truth that a suicide has occurred. Even though this has happened, we are told by our loved ones who believe, that they are now in heaven. Ask someone you respect, be in a minister, counselor or friend, to please refer you to someone that you can speak and talk openly with about all of your feelings. This will help you begin a journey you didn't choose to take.

Additionally, seek the help of a support group of people who will listen to the story over and over again. Someone who might help with the beginning of understanding your new, imperfect life.

Just being able to put one foot in front of the other may be the hardest task you can manage in the early days following a suicide. It's important to have friends who will help deal with your children, if there are young ones, help prepare a meal or two, or even mow the lawn.

In a support group, you will hear people who have gone through this horrific loss, and can learn invaluable information on how they moved through the loss and regained a firm footing on "Ground Zero." Always make certain that if you attend a support group such as Survivors of Suicide, difficult as it may be to you, you need to try to commit to at least three times or more. Healing following this kind of death is difficult, painful and requires lots of time and support, so please be patient and treat yourself gently as you enter into this healing or amputation of your soul.

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## Death of a Child

The first time I went to a support group, someone said, the loss of a parent is a death of the past. The loss of a spouse is the death of the present. But the loss of a child is a death of the future." I stopped cold in my tracks, because I had experienced the loss of my parents, and yes, that was the death of the past and I felt like an orphan. However, the loss of a child is one that you never get over. You don't forget their birthdays, you don't forget the joy of their births, as difficult as that may have been, and you never want to forget the sound of their voice or the individual smell that each one had.

Loss of the future – children, regardless of their age, are not supposed to die before the parent, and the grief is overwhelming. I understood when someone mentioned their child, I wanted to talk about my boys, I wanted them to listen, but I could see the discomfort in their listening to my pain.....the pain of not replacing them with things, but wanting them for who they were. My prayer is that their names are never forgotten and as long as I live, they too shall live and their names will forever be imprinted on my heart and soul.....and whispered or talked about in conversation.

Next quarter, we will talk about loss of a sibling or parent so we can cover the whole realm of grief that takes us and changes our lives forever. Keep the faith, dear ones!

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. Additionally, CRISISline is available 24/7 at 864-271-8888. *Inclement Weather Policy: If the weather is severe, your well-being is our main concern. Please watch for e-mails, call CRISISline at 864-271-8888 or check the website of Mental Health America at MHAGC.org for cancellations. Please stay alert with these notices and take care of yourself.***



## *Inspirational*

### ***Fate of a Loved One***

Many survivors worry about the ultimate fate of their loved one. I can't tell how many people raise the issue and are distraught until they are provided with sound theological information. In the past many religious traditions have maintained that a person who completes suicide goes to hell. In virtually all of these traditions the attitude has changed. It is now based on sound theology that a person who completes suicide has found the peace that evaded him or her throughout their lives. They are with the Lord resting in peace for all eternity. I would find it hard to believe in a God who would punish and condemn to hell a person whose life was tortured, whose psyche was being devoured by the cancerous pain of depression and hopelessness and despair.

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### ***Life more than one final act***

Very often extended family members or friends ask the immediate survivors why their loved ones took their lives. I suggest an answer as simple as "they ran out of energy" or "they ran out of steam" or "they ran out of the desire to live." That, to me, is the truth. Survivors can be as explicit as they want in terms of giving a cause of a suicide, if the cause is apparent.

**The person's final act should not define their life.**

The person's final act should not define their life. Their life is much more descriptive than their final act of desperation. In the months and years after suicide after people have gone through the initial stages of grieving, they are able to take a better look at their loved one's life and see that their life was richer and fuller and more productive than their final act of desperation. It takes time and effort to arrive at that point but it will happen as long as survivors are patient and allow the grieving process to unfold.

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My life was suddenly divided into BEFORE and AFTER,  
and there was no going back to BEFORE.  
But then I realized I had a choice to live the AFTER. I had to decide.  
~ Brenda Neal ~



## *R*eflections by Becky

### ***Life Can Be Good Again...***

For nearly seventeen years, his voice has been silent. It is a span now nearly equal to the time it was heard. Never did I anticipate life without the sounds that marked his presence. Learning to survive that silence once seemed an impossible task, one so overwhelming I could find no hope or expectation of ever finding life once more.

He was my son, my eldest child. The tempo of his growing measured the cadence, the beat, for my own living. His passing left an existence without any value that I could immediately perceive. Ultimately, I came to recognize that I was wrong.

Life still had meaning, but it had fallen to me to find it, just as it had been in the years before his coming. Indeed, even as it had been throughout the time of his living, life still demanded my active participation, my own commitment to give it purpose and resolve.

Hindsight affords an ease in stating this realization that did not exist while struggling in the depths of bereavement. The steps taken to finally seize life again seem logical and in order while intellectualizing the process but I know that this is much easier to write than it was to experience.

I confess, with both sorrow and gladness, that I can no longer summon the full measure of those savage feelings and the unremitting pain that engulfed me in those early years. Working through them was the most demanding challenge of my life, exacting tolls in physical health perhaps even greater than the long-term effects on mind and emotion.

Today, however, I can reflect with gratitude upon a decade of mastery over the sadness. Control of my thoughts returned to me, and I know freedom from the utter devastation of those early years. Looking back reveals essential turning points on the road to healing. Some would seem to generalize easily for anyone. Others seem to respond to personal strengths and weaknesses more particular to an individual.

These points included: · Self forgiveness for the many deficiencies found within on the endless soul journey that is our lot in the wake of our child's death. · Forgiveness of others, relatives, friends and associates, who are less affected than are we, who seem unable to help us in our time of deep trouble and need. · The accepting, at last, of the finality of our loss, and that we must gradually unleash ourselves from our former lives and structure anew.

Learn to communicate value to spouses, friends, surviving siblings, our love for whom

seems shrouded behind the totality of our grief. Find ways to give expression to our need to somehow memorialize our child, be it through writing a book, planting trees, sustaining scholarships, or any number of ways. Our need to preserve and safeguard our child's memory is real and deserving of our attention.

A time comes for many to find new homes, jobs and purpose. These are often part and parcel of any significant change in our lives. Surrender to time, giving ourselves space within it to do our work. Use time to foster healing within, to enable us tomorrow with hope. No recovery will return us to life as we knew it while our child lived. That life is forever gone and, to a certain extent, we may well have to accept that, as we perceive life today. The finest days of our lives may well be a part of our past. Somehow, we must recognize that this is not unique to surviving our child's death, but is often a portion of the human condition. Bobby is dead. As much as I would wish it otherwise, it will never be. He is not forgotten. His voice, his laughter, his joy, and his shortcomings live on in me. No day passes without thinking about him. I am grateful for his touch upon my life.

Yet, joy is again mine. Pleasure is no longer a forbidden or guilt-producing element in daily living. I live, gladly and with purpose, with Bobby both behind me in time, but with me internally. Is this not our goal, to heal, to find the strength to love both yesterday and today? Our children have been the richest part of our lives and today should reflect the grace of that love in all that we are today. "Bobby is with me still, but now of the heart and memory. No matter what my span of days, each moment will yield its love for him. He will stand waiting on the other shore. When the day is over, and life gives up the mortal for the eternal, there will I find him, with laughter in the air, joy in the moment, and with love in the heart."

*Blessings on your journey,*

*Becky*



### *You're Here ~ Now You're Gone*

You're here. Now you're gone. It went just that fast. Where'd it begin? Where'd it end? Like a flash of lightning in the sky. So bright and full of life. Now gone and full of emptiness. How'd it start? Why didn't it stop? No one knows, but everyone cares. Your spirit is flowing in the air. You're not here, but you'll never be gone. You will always rise with the morning dawn. You hold my heart it will never be torn apart.

By Catherine Ludlow, in memory of her sister

### *As Long As I Can*

As long as I can, I will look at the world for both of us. As long as I can, I will laugh with the bird, I will sing with flowers, I will play to the stars, for both of us. As long as I can, I will remember how many things on this earth were your joy. And I will live as well as you would want me to live, as long as I can. .. By Sascha

The Journey to Healing newsletter contains articles about suicide grief, articles specific to the suicide death of a spouse, of a child, of a parent, of a sibling, of a loved one or of a partner as well as articles about coping after a suicide loss. Current and past issues of The Journey can be read online at mhagc.org

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

*Bringing wellness home.....*

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> 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 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.

