GRIEF PIECES: THE SUICIDAL STATE OF MIND

Excerpted from Finding Peace Without All the Pieces by LaRita Archibald

Edwin Shneidman defines commonalities of suicide in his book *The Suicidal Mind*, which may provide the foundation for what survivors need: some understanding of their loved one’s state of mind before they ended their life.

Here are some commonalities which LaRita Archibald, as a survivor, found most useful.

“The common purpose of suicide is to seek a solution, a way out of the problem or pain. Survivors may never know what unbearable situation could have caused so much suffering, and even if they knew, still may not agree it was worth dying for.”

“The common goal of suicide is cessation of consciousness in order to stop the unbearable pain. When the person realizes the end of their life will be the end to their pain and suffering, suicide scenario begins.”

“The common stimulus of suicide is described as ‘psychache,’ being interminable, intolerable, inescapable psychological pain.”

“The common emotions in suicide are hopelessness and helplessness which trap the person into believing there is nothing that be done to change what they need to do in order to be free of the pain.”

Submitted by Nancy Pierce, Clinical Coordinator of Survivors of Suicide Services, Journey Mental Health Center

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LOCAL CONFERENCE TO BE HELD IN MADISON FOR INTERNATIONAL SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE LOSS DAY

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2017

This is the 19th year of a program promoted by American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP). Gatherings are held throughout the world on this day. Our local conference is independently sponsored by Journey Mental Health Center/ Survivors of Suicide Services.

It is a day of remembrance and healing for those who have lost someone to suicide and those who care about them. It is an opportunity for the survivor community to come together for support, information and empowerment. Family, friends, professional and non-professional caregivers are encouraged to attend.

Our local morning conference will include viewing of this year’s new film documentary, “The Journey: A Story of Healing & Hope,” produced by AFSP.

See the enclosed registration form for details.

More information including how to view the documentary online at www.afsp.org

Other information at www.journeymhc.org/sos

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There’s a powerful process for healing emotional pain and it doesn’t involve taking medication or paying a therapist to listen. Instead, put it on paper.

You needn’t be a “good” writer to tap the power of the written word. Just letting your thoughts and feelings out has an almost magical ability to lighten the load of the past, and improve your mood and relationships in the present.

Writing can even make you healthier by relieving stress. University of Texas psychologist James Pennebacker, PhD, found that people who regularly wrote about their troubles had higher levels of infection-fighting lymphocytes in their blood streams and were less vulnerable to anxiety and depression. If they suffered from arthritis, they had less pain.

You may discover inspiration on fine paper in a bound journal with an attractive cover, or find that a simple spiral notebook encourages spontaneity. Some people feel more comfortable at the computer. If so, you might want to turn the screen off until you’re finished, so you won’t be constantly tempted to reread and “correct” what you’ve written.

Suggestions: If you always write on a keyboard, try a few sessions longhand — just to see how it feels. When you write in longhand, the brain-hand connection can promote the mind’s “alpha state” of deeper relaxation. For some, writing at the same time and place every day — perhaps with morning coffee at the kitchen table — frees the flow of words.

However you choose to do it, write freely. Forget about grammar, punctuations, even logic. Jot down phrases, isolated words and images that come into your mind.

A good place to start is simply saying where you are, what you’re doing, how you’re feeling. “I’m sitting at a desk… sun sparkling outside but my heart is breaking…” Fill in the details of your surroundings, how your leg falls asleep, how the act of writing itself feels. This promotes the state of mindfulness, grounding you in the here and now. It’s a powerful support when you’re upset.

Because it allows you to feel and accept your emotional state, painful though it may be, writing in the here and now can be a potent antidote to anxiety and depression.

Traumatic experiences never quite go away. The way to heal is not to bury painful memories but to come to terms with what happened and integrate it into your sense of self.

Writing is an invaluable means to this end. We can often write about things we’ve never been able to talk about… look reality in the face and realize what we’ve come through… and understand the person we are today.

It’s never too late to heal old hurts with pen in hand.

“We do not write in order to be understood; we write in order to understand.”

C. Day-Lewis

INVITING YOUR WORDS AND COMMENTS

You are invited to submit thoughts or ideas concerning this Newsletter or the SOS program at any time.

Would you perhaps review a book that you have read that would be of interest to survivors?

Consider a brief writing about your initial reactions after your loss compared with your feelings as time has passed.

Write of your support group experience — what your first visit was like, or share a longer term involvement.

Contributed writings will be collected for possible publication with your permission. Writings could be credited to the author or anonymous. Please include contact information.

Submit to: sos@journeymhc.org or by mail to JMHC/ Survivor Services, 25 Kessel Ct. Suite 105, Madison, WI 53711.
BOOK REVIEW:  
THE GIFT OF SECOND: HEALING FROM THE IMPACT OF SUICIDE  
by Brandy Lidbeck

Brandy wrote this book for those who have been impacted by a loved one’s suicide. She herself is a suicide survivor and writes with empathy about the unique grief that a suicide death brings. The book touches on subjects that survivors may be dealing with such as the journey through grief and feelings of guilt, shame and trauma. At the end of each chapter, questions are posed that the reader can use to further explore their own feelings or experiences. The author provides good information on each topic that she addresses and includes practical suggestions that readers can utilize to heal from their loss. The author shares the part that her faith played in her personal loss of her mother and also in the losses of other survivors.

She explains the choice of her title. “There have been others before you who know and have experienced the same pain. They are able to come alongside you and say, ‘Me too.’” In other words, we aren’t the first ones to have experienced a suicide loss and we can learn from others who have had a loss.

I found this book to be very readable, validating most survivor experiences, and also like a handbook with suggestions for self reflection and self care. The book would be very helpful for someone who has had a recent suicide loss.

Reviewed by Amy Schulz, Volunteer SOS Facilitator

READING SUGGESTIONS FROM THE SOS TEAM

Some books speak to our need or situation at a specific point in time, some books are timeless. The following books have been helpful to the SOS Volunteers personally and/or have been reported by survivors to be useful resources.

- My Son, My Son: A Guide to Healing After Death, Loss or Suicide, by Iris Bolton
- Finding Peace Without all the Pieces: After a Loved One’s Suicide, by LaRita Archibald
- Before Their Time: Adult Children’s Experiences of Parental Suicide, by Mary & Maureen Stimming
- After Suicide Loss: Coping with Your Grief, by Bob Baugher & Jack Jordan
- No Time to Say Goodbye, by Carla Fine
- Night Falls Fast: Understanding Suicide, by Kay Redfield Jamison
- The Gift of Second: Healing from the Impact of Suicide, by Brandy Lidbeck
- But I Didn’t Say Goodbye: Helping Children & Families After a Suicide, by Barbara Rubel

Other reading recommendations can be found at:
• AAS (American Association of Suicidology) www.suicidology.org
• AFSP (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention) www.afsp.org
• The Dougy Center (Children & Family) www.dougy.org

HOW DOES RECOVERY RELATE TO SUICIDE LOSS?  

Recovery means “to regain,” “to get back” or “to restore.” It has a lot to do with loss and with you. Recovery is not “getting over it” or “closure.” Those terms do not apply to what you have experienced. Suicide loss does not go away and it cannot be left behind.

You have not only lost someone dear to you, you have lost a part of yourself. You have lost your normality. You can’t get back your loved one or your friend, but you can get back, recover, that sense of things being normal that you felt before your loss. That is what recovery is all about.

Recovery is a process of learning to deal with each day’s challenges. In regard to suicide loss, a significant lessening of most of the emotions that you are feeling right now marks recovery. The anxiety, the sadness, the depression, the stress and the pain gradually become manageable and eventually move into the background. Your personal, social and school or work-related activities become less of a strain and more routine.

Recovery from suicide loss is not passive. It will not happen by only letting things run their course. It is active, something that you have to work at and work toward. It is how you get back your well being and quality of life. Recovery is the goal of your journey though suicide grief. It is getting to the point of being able to live with grief rather than only grieving.

Adapted from Recovering from Suicide Loss, Survivors of Suicide, Inc. Folcroft PA, June, 2004
ANGER — WHY AM I SO ANGRY?

In memory of Paul A. Salvatore

As a relative or loved one coping with a suicide death, you may experience anger, often at the deceased — “How could they do this to me?” If the deceased was receiving psychiatric or medical care, you may ask, “Why didn’t THEY prevent it?” You may find yourself angry with God for “allowing this to happen.” The anger may be self-directed — “What could I have done?” or “Why wasn’t I there?”

Don’t try to deny or hide this anger. It is a natural consequence of the hurt and rejection you feel. If you deny your anger, it will eventually come out in other possibly more destructive ways and it will prolong the healing process. You need to find someone you can talk to about this feeling — perhaps a close friend, clergyman, counselor or a support group. You may need to release your anger physically: take long brisk walks or any exercise that is reasonable for your physical capabilities.

Your anger with the deceased is normal when the manner of death is suicide. The deceased has thrown your emotions into turmoil and caused pain for you and for others you care about.

Anger with the medical or mental health profession can occur if the suicide victim was receiving treatment or therapy. Though you may have had experience with someone unable to help, the professionals are dedicated and well trained, providing help for many people. These professionals will be the first to recognize that your anger is a valid emotion.

If you’re angry with God, share your feeling with a sympathetic clergyman even if you don’t have any close religious ties. John Hewett says, “If you’re ticked off at the Almighty, for His sake, tell Him. God is the only one prepared to handle all your anger.”

Don’t deny your anger. Talk about it, think about it, and constructively deal with it.

Reprinted from Suicide Bereavement Support, Metanoia Peace Community, Portland, OR, Volume No 19, Issue #8, August, 2007

FORGIVENESS AFTER A SUICIDE LOSS

During the mourning process after a suicide loss we often talk about finding forgiveness. Forgiving the person that we lost for leaving us. Forgiving them for not being able to see the world through our eyes. Forgiving them for not asking for help. What I have found is that this forgiveness often comes with relative ease. Sure, we still have anger but we have forgiven them for what they have done. The type of forgiveness that often takes the most time is the forgiveness we must find for ourselves. Forgiveness for not being able to save the person we lost. That is the tricky one. That is the piece that outsiders do not understand.

“It is not your fault,” I was told. My head understood that, but my heart could not accept that. It is in the aftermath that the signs become more clear. Seeing the signs more clearly can impact our ability to forgive ourselves. What we need to remember is that often those signs weren’t as clear prior to the suicide loss. They may have been more subtle. And truthfully, even if they weren’t, we just never believe that this type of loss would actually occur. So, give yourself a break. Acknowledge that maybe there wasn’t anything more you could have done. Acknowledge that there might have been many things you did to keep the person you lost alive. Forgive yourself for not being able to save them.


USING WHAT’S HELPFUL

We encourage survivors to seek out supportive people and resources. This can often be an arduous and frustrating process. Initially, feelings and reactions may change daily, by the hour or by the minute. It is difficult to think ahead and some words may seem empty.

The purpose of this newsletter is to present material that will be helpful to survivors at various points in their grief. We invite you to use what applies. You may set some things aside for future reference. You may want to share some thoughts with others. You may want to respond or comment.

Eventually, a healthy goal would be to integrate the experience of a suicide loss into the continuation of living a satisfying life. Our hope is that the words and experiences of others that we present will support you in your journey.
A SINCERE THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

Linda Bargo
Helen Kahl
Ping Sun & Kirk Parkin
in memory of their son, Zack Parkin

Please consider
*A donation in memory or in honor of someone.
*A donation towards the production and mailing of our quarterly newsletter to allow us to continue to bring it to you.

Tax deductible donations can be made:

By mail to Survivor Services, JMHC, 25 Kessel Court, Ste. 105, Madison WI 53711

Online at https://www.journeymhc.org/how-to-help/donate
Select SOS Services, then click “donate.” Use credit card or PayPal.

SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE SUPPORT GROUP SCHEDULE

A self-help group for adults who are grieving the death of a loved one by suicide.

2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month, 7:00 – 9:00 pm
Journey Mental Health Center, Kessel Ct., Building 49, Madison WI 53711
There is free parking in front of the building. To gain entry, press the call button and indicate that you are attending the SOS meeting. You will be greeted by one of the SOS team. Reception area closes at 8:00 p.m.
Information: (608) 280-2435 SOS confidential voicemail

MARK YOUR CALENDAR
Saturday, Nov. 18, 2017 — International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day Local Conference, Kessel Court, Madison

SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE SUPPORT GROUP PURPOSE
To share experiences for living and coping beyond suicide loss

WILL WEATHER CAUSE A SOS SUPPORT GROUP CANCELLATION?
In case of inclement or dangerous weather a determination of if the group will meet will be made by 3:00 pm the day of the meeting.
Call JMHC main reception (608) 280-2700 or check www.journeymch.org to find out if JMHC is closed for weather.

Email contact: SOS Confidential Email sos@journeymhc.org for correspondence & information requests
Phone contact: SOS Confidential Voicemail to leave message 608/280-2435
For an urgent or immediate need 24/7: Call Emergency Services 608/280-2600
Journey Mental Health Center Website: http://www.journeymhc.org
SOS Support Services: http://www.journeymhc.org/services/emergency/survivor-suicide-support

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