



NEWSLETTER

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YOU CAN'T DIRECT THE WIND

By Marge Frankenberg

It occurred to me that “grief work” is just that — adjusting your sails. When a child dies, our lives are changed forever — the wind changes direction. When the direction of our life is so tragically changed, we have two choices. We can deal with our grief and adjust our sails, or we can deny our grief and drift helplessly and hopelessly out to sea.

In the beginning stages of grief, we merely “reef our sails” and go with the tide. That is not a bad idea. At that time, we are in a state of shock and not capable of sound decisions. We need quite a bit of time to ride out the storm. But when the initial storm of intense pain begins to subside, we need to adjust our sails for our own survival.

You, and only you, can make the decisions regarding the rest of your life. You may find fulfillment in reaching out to help others or becoming more active in your church or temple. Maybe you will want to take as big a step as getting a job or returning to school. Perhaps you will make only subtle changes in your priorities. But, if you have made the decision to have a direction instead of drifting, get started now!

You may have several false starts before you are really on course again. That’s okay. Don’t give up! The healing is in the trying.

Eventually, you will once again have “smooth sailing.”

Source: TCF Arlington Heights, IL

*You can't change the direction of the wind,
But you can adjust your sails.*



IN THIS ISSUE You Can't Direct the Wind

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HEALING

by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

To heal in grief is to become whole again, to integrate your grief into yourself and to learn to continue your changed life with fullness and meaning. Experiencing a new and changed “wholeness” requires that you engage in the work of mourning. It doesn’t happen to you; you must stay open to that which has broken you. Healing is a holistic concept that embraces the physical, cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual realms. Note that healing is not the same as curing, which is a medical term that means “remedying” or “correcting.” You cannot correct your grief, but you can heal it.

GOING BACK TO WORK OR SCHOOL AFTER A SUICIDE LOSS



Following are some writings from survivors who were willing to share what happened to them.

GOING BACK TO WORK AFTER THE SUICIDE OF A SON

by Anonymous

The funeral rituals were over. Friends continued to stop by, but the great outpouring of support we had experienced in the days following Steven's suicide tapered off. What next? We were two working parents — a professor and a physician — and three surviving children — two in high school and one in grade school.

Friday morning, the day after the funeral, Steven's father returned to his classrooms. Supportive colleagues were kept at arm's length. He would grieve privately and stoically over many years.

Monday morning, Steven's mother returned to her clinic. Many helpful staff understood and were protective, but it would be 18 months before she began to address the real grief, the anger, the "if onlys" with a therapist and support group.

The children too, returned to school on Monday. The eldest, a senior in high school, often arrived home "ill" in the middle of the day. His brother, a sophomore in a boarding school, arrived back at his school with a bottle of vodka provided by an of-age friend. Not long after, we made a hurried trip to bring him home to deal with his distress. The youngest, the most open emotionally, was able to talk about her grief, but only slowly over the weeks that followed.

Now, 15 years later, it is apparent that each of us continues on a different path and the repercussions continue to echo in our lives. Getting on with work and school provided structure in the midst of chaos — something to hang on to while the emotional turmoil whirled about us.

This article first appeared in our April 2001 Newsletter

RETURNING TO WORK

by Darlene Woldt

When my son Derek died in 1990 from suicide, I could not imagine surviving this loss, let alone a decision about returning to work. Because Derek's death was right after Thanksgiving, I knew I could not return to work until after Christmas. I was off work for the next six weeks. Those weeks at home gave me a chance to do some difficult grieving, reflect on the past 18 years with Derek, and to think about my future. Did I want to return to work? What would my co-workers say, or wouldn't they say anything?

After being at the same company for 17 years, I was seriously thinking about resigning and finding new employment, with new co-workers, and in a new environment. It sounded so easy. But I made the decision to return to work at the same company on January 3rd. After being home for six weeks, I thought it would be good for me to get back to the "real world."

The first day I was so nervous. I was greeted at my office by a good friend who gave me the hug I needed. When my supervisor arrived (who also gave me a hug) her first words were, "Let me know if you need more time off." I know from talking to other bereaved

parents this reaction was unique. Too many parents have 3–5 days off after the death of a child and then they are expected to return 100%.

Being with people who cared was the answer for some of my anguish. But then I had to get in the car and hear a special song on the radio or go home to a house full of memories. That first year was very difficult. But with the support of a caring husband, three wonderful children, and very special co-workers, I survived.

It has now been 10 years. I still remember the feelings of despair and anxiety when I left the house to go back to work that cold January. But through it all, I have also learned the importance of helping others (friends, co-workers or strangers) with their own difficult situations. There is a saying, "Those who bring sunshine to the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves."

I hope those who helped me, feel the sunshine shining on them today.

This article first appeared in Dane Co. SOS Newsletter April 2001

RETURNING TO LIFE AFTER SUICIDE LOSS

By Linda Sielaff, Volunteer SOS Facilitator

I lost my mother to suicide May 9, 1978. I was 15 years old, two months to the day before my sweet 16th birthday. A trauma unprecedented and unexplainable with words. Much of the day was a blur except I poignantly remember my brother coming to my Algebra class to whisk me away. I saw him at the door, and I knew something bad had happened. My teacher didn't allow him in, but I ran out of the classroom and he told me.... Mom killed herself. I got angry and slammed my locker when I went to get my coat to leave. It was a cold and rainy spring day. I remember it like it was yesterday. My family lived in a small town for a few years and I attended a small-town school for a couple years. It was there that I experienced both wonderful and traumatic life events. When I returned to the school after my mother's death and funeral — I don't recall how long I was away, but not long — someone had ransacked my locker (at the time no locks were on lockers). I had a gift from a friend that someone had stolen. Everyone stared at me like I was a freak. It was painful beyond words. I felt shame, guilt, isolation, and abandonment. I didn't understand, why were people being so mean? I told my father I didn't want to return for my senior year. We moved back to Milwaukee where I was raised, and my father worked. I attended the high school I had my freshman year. Only people who I chose to tell knew of my experience. I could move forward, fit in and be a

high school kid like the others.

19 years later, August 24, 1997 my brother also took his life. I was then fully entrenched in my career, a corporate career, and very successful. My brother had struggled with drug addiction for most of his life, he was my big brother. I was the youngest, he the oldest. When my brother took his life, my workplace was very unkind, especially my boss. No one talked to me. It seemed they avoided me like the plague. I never took off any time from work except two days. My boss had threatened me with more when presented with an outdated policy around time off after a family loss. However, the president of our division was exceptionally compassionate and told me to take the time I needed. I knew he was genuine, yet I didn't feel the support down the food chain.

My return to 'real life' after such hurtful losses wasn't a positive one. What I realized is that I had to accept and move forward and find peace in other ways. I eventually found SOS and it made all the difference in the world. A group of people that understood me, supported me, and appreciated my experiences because of what they knew.

CHILDREN SPEAK OUT ANONYMOUSLY ABOUT GOING BACK TO SCHOOL

"It gets to me when the teachers treat us different from other kids. They won't talk about death and dying when we're around. They're afraid they'll hurt us, and they don't know that treating us so different hurts us more than anything else."

"The friendly teachers are O.K. They don't make any big fuss. They tell us they feel bad for us and they go ahead and treat us like everyone else. And that makes us feel like we belong there. Instead of wondering if we've got some kind of disease that other people think they'll catch."

continued on page 4

ADDITIONAL REMEMBRANCE

The following remembrance was not included in our last issue.

~~~~~  
**William John Bohne**

7/15/1975 – 1/28/2016

*One day I lit a remembrance candle and listed all the things I am grateful for having loved my son. The list was greater than 100 items. I tell him I love him every night.*

Mom

"If you had really loved something, wouldn't a little bit of it always linger?"

— Susan Orlean

# I REMEMBER THE DAY

*by anonymous*

I remember the night my younger brother, Scott, called to say my twin brother, Steven, had taken his own life. It was a Thursday. Much of the ensuing days were spent in bed – bewildered, in disbelief and crying. Six days later, on Wednesday, I returned to work.

I never questioned returning to work. I had a mortgage and other expenses to pay to support myself. Staying home I felt isolated and miserable, so, perhaps prematurely, I went back to work. Everyone was supportive and sympathetic, though I only discussed suicide with my closest co-workers. As it turned out, one co-worker had lost his sister to suicide.

At first, it was difficult to stay present and control my emotions. I remember showing rental properties to prospective tenants, eager for the presentation to end so I could sit on the floor and cry for a while. Gradually, the daily rituals – brushing my teeth, shaving, showering, going to the office – gave structure to my life that counter-balanced the chaos in my mind. Work gave me a reason to get out of bed every day, to venture into the world and to focus my attention on others.

Working wasn't easy. I was often distracted and my heart wasn't in it. Yet work gave me a framework and the discipline I needed to build a new normal.

## GRIEF

*By Joannetta Hendel, Bereavement Magazine*

Don't tell me that you understand  
Don't tell me that you know.  
Don't tell me that I will survive.  
How I will surely grow.

Don't tell me this is just a test,  
That I am truly blessed,  
That I am chosen for this task  
Apart from all the rest.

Don't come at me with answers  
That can only come from me,  
Don't tell me how my grief will pass  
That I will soon be free.

Don't stand in pious judgment  
Of the bounds I must untie,  
Don't tell me how to suffer,  
And don't tell me how to cry.

My life is filled with selfishness,  
My pain is all I see,  
But I need you. I need your love,  
Unconditionally.

Accept me in my ups and downs,  
I need someone to share,  
Just hold my hand and let me cry,  
And say....."My friend, I care."

## SETBACKS

*by Sascha*



Setbacks and detours in healing are caused by internal as well as external events. Anniversaries, things that people say, a touch of the flu, bad luck in traffic, a child at Halloween, his favorite food at the supermarket, a friend moving to another city – the list goes on.

As life goes on in its ordinary fashion, it cannot fail but to present us with reminders of our own loss and tragedy. Relatively minor things, such as changes, thoughtlessness or neglect can overwhelm us too completely for too long.

When the first onslaught of pain beings to fade, we should try to accept the fact that healing from grief rarely happens in a quick and unbroken line of progress.

Grievors and their friends do well to remember that grief will take us all on a journey of setbacks and detours. Healing work requires patience.

And when grief threatens the fiber of our life, we need to remind ourselves over and over again that patience IS the exercise of hope.

"For survivors it is not always true that things constantly 'get better.' Things do, however, constantly change. It may be in our changing that we grow and learn to wear the title of 'survivor' with pride."

*— Jeanne Moren (Adams)*



## A BEGINNING

by Susan Borrowman

One day you wake up and realize you must have survived it

because you are still here, alive and breathing.

But you don't remember the infinitely small steps

and decisions you took to get there.

Your only awareness is that you have shed miles of tears

on what seems to be an endless road of sorrow....

One day, one glorious day, you wake up and feel your skin tingle again

and you forget just for an instant that your heart is broken....

and it is a beginning.

## A SINCERE THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

**Mary Anne Bohne**

in memory of her son William John Bohne

**Journey Mental Health Center**

for Sponsorship

To make a tax deductible donation online by credit card, visit [www.journeymhc.org/donate](http://www.journeymhc.org/donate) and designate "Survivors of Suicide (SOS) Support Group" in the pull-down menu option.

To make a tax deductible donation by check, make it payable to Journey Mental Health Center with SOS in the memo line. Mail to:

Survivors of Suicide Support Group  
c/o Journey Mental Health Center  
25 Kessel Court, Suite 105, Madison, WI 53711

## SOS SUPPORT GROUP PURPOSE

*To share experiences for living and coping beyond suicide loss*

## SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE SUPPORT GROUP SCHEDULE

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

**Due to COVID 19 safety guidelines, at this time Journey Mental Health Center is holding NO IN PERSON SOS Support Groups. We are exploring other options. Future changes and information will be posted on their website at [journeymhc.org](http://journeymhc.org)**

For extra support please use Crisis Intervention 24/7 phone line at 608-280-2600 or leave a message at SOS voicemail 608-280-2435.

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**SOS Confidential Email:** [sos@journeymhc.org](mailto:sos@journeymhc.org)

**SOS Confidential Voicemail:** (608) 280-2435

**24/7 Year 'Round Mental Health Crisis Line:** (608) 280-2600

**Journey Mental Health Center Website:** [www.journeymhc.org](http://www.journeymhc.org)

Select Programs & Services, Community-Based Services, Survivors of Suicide

"Let warm memories be as close to you as the warmth of summer."

— Sascha



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