



NEWSLETTER

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JOURNEY MENTAL HEALTH CENTER

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Remembrance Issue

HEAD VS. HEART



by *Therese Gump*

Heads and hearts are two essentials in a human being but sometimes they don't jibe, and the conflict is on. When my loved one died, I felt in my heart like it was something I did (or didn't do) that caused his/her suicide, something I missed, or ignored that would have saved him/her. On the other hand, my head tells me (logically) that I did everything I could have done. I was supportive and loving, and yet made human errors like any other imperfect creature.

My head tells me I am a good person when I can listen to it, but in my heart, I feel tainted, marked, even bad because of what happened. Is it logical that I could have turned into this pariah of evil with the one act over which I had no control? Certainly not in the rational world. As I try to make sense of this irrational act, my heart sets me up for unreasonable conclusions. I go back over every conversation I had with the deceased to find a clue I should have picked up. What was it that I said that have pushed the button to their action? Would one more or one less phone call have made the difference? Did I say too little or did I say too much? The emotions of the heart are unyielding and override my ability to think clearly.

When I have done all the "heart" stuff over and over, there is a clearing of the confusion surrounding my

dilemma. A small voice in my head is finally heard above these heartfelt issues and it speaks to me.

"I am not a bad person. I did not cause this. I did the best I could.

"He/she didn't ask my permission. He/she made a terribly wrong decision.

"I have a right to my own peace of mind."

Finally, my head and my heart resolve the conflict. I'm together again. I realize I deserve to and I WILL survive.

Source: Obelisk Newsletter, LOSS program, Loving Outreach to Survivors of Suicide, <http://www.catholiccharities.net/loss>



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"Start where you are, use what you have, do what you can."

— *Arthur Ashe*

REMEMBERING OUR LOVED ONES



Thank you to those who have shared your Remembrances for this issue. We respect the privacy and confidentiality of this information, so this section will not be included in the online version of the Newsletter. Requests can be made for a written copy of the Remembrance Issue by providing your name and complete mailing address by email to sos@journeymhc.org or by phone (608) 280-2435 (confidential SOS Voicemail).

“Hope is choosing to believe and act as though the future will be better than the present.”

— *Unknown*

“Let your hopes, not your hurts, shape your future.”

— *Robert Schuller*

“Memories are like soft cushions you can fall back on when you need support.”

— *From "Finding Meaning," by David Kessler*

PEOPLE SAY THE DARNDEST THINGS



by Jeanne Moren (Adams), Volunteer SOS Facilitator

For some reason, reacting to a suicide and making comments on it brings out the worst in some people. While only those who are either practiced or lucky seem to make comments that are helpful, the rest of us may blunder through with words spilling from our lips before our brain has thought them through. I know that I fell in to the second category before I had a suicide loss and still find myself there occasionally.

There can be a period of numbness immediately following the death when the mind remembers nothing. Perhaps that is a blessing. Later, survivors are often able to remember, with clarity, things that either helped them or hurt them. They may latch on to these words and keep them forever. That means they can be forever thankful or forever non-forgiving. When asked to recall helpful or non-helpful comments, most survivors can come up with a few that are stuck in their minds.

It is useful for a survivor to be aware that their loss brings vulnerability and to learn the skill of anticipation and practiced answers. This is an area where we help each other and there is true value in a support group.

From the first time someone asks, "Why?" or "What happened?" survivors are called upon to answer what may be unanswerable. Our answer may be one of defensiveness or despair. The question can come at us so often that we may become sarcastic or complacent. The need of others to know doesn't always match our ability to respond. We do get to choose how brief or detailed we are in our replies. With even the most intrusive questioning it may not occur to us that the most honest answer might be, "I don't know" or "I don't care to talk about it right now."

My first awareness of insensitivity came almost immediately after Bill's death. The coroner wisely advised me that I should get my children home from elementary school so I could take charge of telling them of their father's death. It was a difficult assignment but I agreed I should be the one to make the call. When I called the school, the principal answered. Calmly, I stated that I needed to have the children home from school, recited their room numbers, and said I was sending someone to pick them up. "May I ask why?" was the first question. "There has been a death in the family," I replied. "May I ask whom?" was the next question. The tough

answer crossed my lips for the first time, "It was their father." The next question left me stunned and unprepared. "May I ask how?" Without an answer, I hung up the phone. In looking back, I suppose the woman was not just curious but needed to fill out some kind of form to explain a student's partial absence. The part of the encounter that made it more difficult was not that I was caught off guard, it was the fact that for the remaining eight years that the children attended the school, the woman never spoke to me nor did I ever feel comfortable approaching her. My own sensitivity led me to believe that it would have gone differently if it had not been a suicide death.

Words of shock, dismay, despair and comfort were all intermingled in the first few hours, days, weeks. Some words reverberated as though they were shouted in an echo chamber. There were other times I felt that I saw people's mouths moving but had no idea what they were actually saying. There were those who had nothing to say. They simply stood there as their mere presence spoke volumes. Their hugs or tears were easily understood.

I chose to have no formal visitation before Bill's funeral. After all I thought that would be awkward and uncomfortable. Following the service friends and relatives lined up to speak to me. I remember looking down that row and seeing the people in our life waiting to comfort me. As folks passed by one by one I got stuck on the phrase that was used over and over again. With affirmation it was repeated, "Hang in There." I could not imagine people being so insensitive as to offer up those words when only two days before I had found my husband hanging. It was a common statement that had now taken on new meaning for me. My sensitivity was surfacing again.

As cards and letters arrived, I sorted through, looking for words of comfort. I dismissed words that didn't make sense or seemed inappropriate. I know that if I were to reread those messages today I would interpret them in a different way.

About six weeks after Bill's death, an evening seminar was advertised in the newspaper. The subject was Grief. Mustering the courage to check it out, I arrived to find that I was the only one in attendance. It made me think that I might be the only one grieving. The two gentlemen who were presenting were quite

cordial as they shared their material and then sat with me to listen to my story. It was healing to be able to find a new audience that would listen to my rambling version of what happened. When I finished, I heard some of the first words that made sense to me and seemed well thought out at the time. "I am so sorry you have lost your husband. There are many ways to die. Some people die when their kidneys fail, some when their hearts fail, some in tragic accidents. It is sad that Bill died when his emotional system failed." At that moment I found those words making sense. There was something about the statement that normalized Bill's death for me. I didn't feel vulnerable, I felt comforted. For me, those words became part of a process of putting the pieces together. Making sense of the senseless.

As time passed many statements and questions would make me shudder and revisit my vulnerability. "How do you feel about Bill committing murder on himself?" "I think that Bill just thought he had a good idea. He was always an idea man." "Are your kids OK or are they a little nuts?" "Bill's selection of Thanksgiving as a time to kill himself really ruined our holiday." "How do you live with the guilt?" Every survivor can recite his or her own list of comments from personal experience.

It may not seem right that a suicide has to bring with it a heightened sense of rawness and sensitivity. It may not seem fair that even our method of communication is shaken. It may make us angry that everyone cannot be aware of our plight and comfort us with the right words. The reality is that we are plunged into the task of being a survivor in an

imperfect world. Every phrase is not always composed with our loss in mind. People's lives go on without always waiting for us to catch up.

However, we do get to sort and sift things that are said. Taking what is helpful and dismissing what hurts. We do get to try to read, discuss and learn from other survivors. We do get to move away from the rawness and develop skills in talking about a suicide loss.

This loss requires of us an extra measure of patience. Patience with our own sensitivity: patience with the process of surviving. It is a comfort to look back and know that the process works.

This article first appeared in the July 2002 SOS Newsletter as part of a series, That Was Then and This is Now

THANK ME

We can be really hard on ourselves.

To balance feelings of self-criticism and unworthiness, it is really important to remember that fundamentally, **we are on our own side.**

A good way to do this is to develop gratitude for yourself, recognizing that so much of what you do is for your own good — even if it doesn't always work out in a way you expected.

Take a few minutes today to close your eyes and thank yourself, because you are doing the best you can.

Source: Mindfulness Cards – Simple Practices for Everyday Life by Mindfulness Everywhere (available at www.chroniclebooks.com)

TODAY

Author Unknown

There are two days in every week about which you should not worry: two days which should be kept free from fear and apprehension.

One of these days is Yesterday with its faults and blunders, its aches and pains. Yesterday has passed forever beyond our control. All the money in the world cannot bring back yesterday. We cannot undo a single act we performed; we cannot erase a single word said. Yesterday is gone!

The other day we should not worry about is Tomorrow, with its possible burden, its large promise and poor performance. Tomorrow is also beyond our

immediate control. Tomorrow's sun will rise, either in splendor or behind a mask of clouds, but it will rise. Until it does, we have no stake in tomorrow, for it is yet unborn.

This leaves only one day: Today! We must focus our energies on today, the present.

It is not the experience of today that drives one mad, it is the remorse or bitterness about something which happened yesterday and the dread of what tomorrow will bring. Let us therefore live but one day at a time.



A SINCERE THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS



Darlene Abrahamson

in memory of son
Casey Abrahamson

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in memory of brother
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in memory of daughter
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in memory of brother
Steven Schnipper

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in memory of brother,
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in memory of son Erik Thorson

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in memory of son Braden Vessey

Benita Walker

in memory of Jim Terrance

Vicki Westrich

in memory of Al Olson

Kathleen Witt

in memory of son Steve Larson

Darlene Woldt

in memory of son Derek Walsvick

Journey Mental Health Center

for Sponsorship

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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
Please Consider —

* A donation in memory or honor of someone.

* A donation towards our Quarterly Newsletter so that we might continue to bring it to you and others.

* A donation toward resources that are provided to new survivors.

We often share the poetry of Alexandra Sascha Wagner (1927 – 2003).

Sascha’s words of comfort and understanding reflect her personal experience of losing both of her children. One to drowning and the other to suicide. Her life, personally and professionally, was dedicated to helping others who had experienced loss.

Her writings, related to grief, are widely read and often quoted. Her many published books include *For you From Sascha*, *The Sorrow and the Light*, and *Wintersun*.

LEGACY

“Memories are a legacy of hope and courage, left to help us go on when the giver is gone.”

— Sascha

SOS SUPPORT GROUP IS VIRTUAL



With all in-person groups suspended at Journey Mental Health the Survivors of Suicide Support Group is being offered as a ZOOM format. The open-ended support group for adults who have had a suicide loss is led by trained peer survivors along with professional staff from Journey.

The meetings are held on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month from 7- 8:30.

For information or to request an invitation link to the SOS ZOOM call (608) 280-2435 (SOS Confidential Voice mail) or email sos@journeymhc.org

SOS SUPPORT GROUP PURPOSE

To share experiences for living and coping beyond suicide loss

SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE SUPPORT ZOOM MEETING 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 – 8:30 p.m.

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.

APRIL						
		13				
		27				

MAY						
		11				
		25				

JUNE						
		8				
		22				

JULY						
		13				
		27				

SUPPORT GROUP DATES FOR 2021

August 10 & 24 September 14 & 28 October 12 & 26 November 9 & 23 December 14 & 28

CONNECTING WITH JOURNEY MENTAL HEALTH



SOS Confidential Email: 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

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



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