



APPLE TREES AND MEMORIES

by Carol Clum, Medford, OR

I stand beneath a sky of blue, the August sun warming my back. Apple perfume is in the air, and my grandchildren cannot resist plucking the golden globes from my backyard tree. It is one of those “firsts” that children of 3 and 5 eagerly share with us older folks. We are learning anew that the best apples do not come from a supermarket.

Apple juice drips to the grass beneath bare feet. Giggles float skyward. I close my eyes, lost in the memory of my mother transporting me and 6 siblings down a country lane to the local orchard, where we eagerly fill baskets, then collect 5 cents for each bushel of hand-picked apples. At the end of the day, we are rewarded with ice cream cones all around.

Even at that young age, before I knew that life is not all apple pie and ice cream, I was learning about change. The orchard ritual meant summer was shutting down, autumn was just around the corner,

the school bell would ring, and life would change – whether I liked it or not.

I cannot say that growing up with this knowledge of change prepared me for that September when my son died. His death can never be anything less than an unacceptable tragedy. Rather, I learned that the unexpected can and does happen. And when something truly terrible happens, we shut down like the end of summer vacation. I fear there will be no more apples and ice cream for as long as I live. There is no fun in being present for anymore “firsts.”

Fall has always been my favorite season. Now the calendar is cluttered with remembrance dates. I resist the forward movement from the days when he lived to the days after death — as life goes on, but he does not. My life has forever changed. My feelings about life and death have changed. I have changed.

With each leaf that falls to the ground, I feel a loss so deep that, finally, I am empty like the barren trees. When he died, I expected the empty feeling to last for the rest of my life. I had forgotten my childhood lesson: seasons change. While I grieve, I watch six years’ worth of seasons come and go. For me, there is no closure. I am not prepared to say goodbye to the past. But slowly, I have begun to allow change to happen.

If there is anything I can suggest to those who are the “less seasoned” in grieving, it is to remain open to the present. Be awake and aware as grief changes the way you feel and who you are. Seasons change, and the seasons of the heart can change. As I peer into the future, I no longer see only emptiness. Sometimes, I smile at memories of seasons past. Sometimes, I see blue skies and apple trees.

*The Compassionate Friends newsletter, Los Angeles, CA,
September 2005*



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SURVIVING MISTAKES



How easy it becomes after a suicide to look back and list our mistakes. The focus can be one of self-blame. Careful reflection and inspection of each and every interaction that we had with the deceased may seem necessary in order to evaluate the part that we played in their decision. No matter how close or distant our relationship was, a suicide brings us to spending some time with these thoughts. For some of us the thoughts may be brief. We come to some comfortable conclusion which quickly places blame and responsibility on something or someone else. For others it may become a long process or possibly even a way of life. For most of us, hopefully, it is a review that can be looked at and used for our growing beyond our loss.

If keeping a detailed list of my mistakes, it could include minutes, hours, days, months even years before the moment I discovered my husband's body. It could continue on to minutes, hours, days, months and years after his death. What is it about a suicide death that leads us or even tempts us to go through such an exercise? Why must we review our mistakes? Why must we take such responsibility? Why can't we focus on the positive? It's puzzling. It's one of those things that make a suicide death "different."

As I look back, many years later, there are some mistakes that make me laugh. There are some

that horrify me. There are many that fall in between. What the mistakes have in common is that I have survived them.

I know if this death would have been from any other cause, I would not have been so hard on myself. I would have been able to rationalize many of the aspects of the death and the loss. It would have felt much more "normal." Those of us who have experienced other death losses are convinced that this is "different."

It takes energy to focus on mistakes, energy that we need for other tasks. It is self-defeating to think only of what we could have or should have done. We write our own endings to these thoughts and often cast ourselves as the villain or the victim.

The fact is that there would be mistakes in our lives with or without the suicide. It is also true that we all constantly do things that can be classified as successes. Loving, caring acts also need to be recalled and celebrated. Part of "living" life after a suicide loss involves stepping back from listing our mistakes. We don't get reverse gear, but we are allowed to go forward. We can survive our mistakes; we can survive the loss. I have seen it demonstrated again and again.

Jeanne Adams Moren 7/03

TO HONOR YOU



by Connie F. Kiefer Byrd

In Loving Memory of Jordan Alexander Kiefer, 8/24/88 – 12/13/05

To honor you, I get up every day and take a breath.

And start another day without you in it.

To honor you, I laugh and love with those who knew your smile and the way your eyes twinkled with mischief and secret knowledge.

To honor you, I take the time to appreciate everyone I love, I know now there is no guarantee of days or hours spent in their presence.

To honor you, I listen to music you would have liked, and sing at the top of my lungs with the windows rolled down.

To honor you, I take chances, say what I feel, hold nothing back, risk making a fool of myself, dance every dance. You were my light, my heart, my gift of love, from the very highest source.

So every day, I vow to make a difference, share a smile, live, laugh and love. Now I live for us both, so all I do, I do to honor you.

Source: www.bereavedparentsusa.org

"Suicide is an attempt to solve a problem of intense emotional pain with impaired problem-solving skills."

*By John Kalafat & Maureen Underwood,
National excerpts in implementing and evaluating school-based suicide prevention programs*



GRIEF TRIGGERS AND POSITIVE MEMORY: A CONTINUUM

Understanding Grief : Eleanor Haley (Blog)

Central New York, where I grew up, overachieves when it comes to cold weather seasons. I won't even get started on winter, but I will take a few moments to ruminate on fall.

As soon as the calendar hits September, the air grows cold, and the green trees of summer blossom into vibrant orange, red and yellow bouquets. Walk down the street, and you are surrounded by leaves in rich hues falling like snow and crunching underfoot. And the air has a certain feeling about it, like a mix of romance, nostalgia, and a touch of melancholy.

In my 33 years, I have amassed quite a few fall-related memories. First days of school, homecoming, pumpkin carving, leaf pile jumping – if these were the only things that had ever happened in fall, my memories from September thru November would be picturesque yet typical.

But my mother died in the fall, on a crisp October New York morning, and now it seems I will never experience the sights, smells, and feelings of fall in quite the same way. In the scrapbook of my mind, memories of hayrides, Halloween, and apple picking play second string to goodbyes, red-eyed family members, graveyards, sadness, and longing. With its sensory overload, fall is a landmine of grief triggers.

I couldn't find an actual definition for 'grief trigger' so I'm going to go ahead and define it for you. A grief trigger is anything that brings up memories related to a loss. Triggers may be obvious and easy to anticipate – like a birthday or a holiday – or they may be surprising – like spotting someone who looks like your loved one in a crowd. A grief trigger might tie to a specific memory or emotion, or it may be something that flashes into consciousness and merely leaves you with a sense of sadness and yearning.

Grief triggers are troubling because they open the floodgate for involuntary autobiographical memories. These are the memories that pop into your head without any effort on your part to recall them. They might hit you out of nowhere as you're driving down the street, sitting at your desk at work, or while you're microwaving popcorn. Many of these memories are innocuous, while others, especially those associated with deceased loved ones, can leave you with a veritable range of feelings.

To clarify, these memories aren't entirely random and don't actually come out of nowhere; usually, a sight, sound, song, smell, word, or another memory triggers them. These memories that are often associated with strong emotion interrupt your brain's regular programming, and the intrusion may be happy-happy-joy-joy, or it may make you feel like you've been hit in the gut.

For those who've recently lost a loved one, knowing these triggers are out there can cause a fair amount of anxiety. You might fear being blindsided by reminders of your loved one, their death, and their absence, especially right after a loss when your emotions are raw and labile. Some grievers will respond by eliminating and avoiding reminders such as objects, people and places; others will try and battle their way through, growing less and less embarrassed by each public outburst of emotion.

Under a dense fog of emotional malaise in the thick of fall, it is always tricky for me to maintain perspective. Still, I fight the urge to avoid reminders because, although they seem like the enemy during times of darkness, my involuntary memories are usually the exact opposite. You see, it happens often enough that a song, a place, or a face reminds me of something wonderful about my mother – enough so that I would endure any amount of pain to remember the good.

Memories are where our loved ones continue to live after they're gone; this is why we hold onto objects that remind us of them and go to places where they feel near. True, when someone we love dies, we are always at risk of their memory triggering aftershocks of the pain. But inversely, if we let them, such reminders may also fill us with warmth and comfort. In time you may even find that the very "grief triggers" that once caused you sadness now fill you with a sense of love and remembrance.

www.whatsyourgrief.com

"If we believe that tomorrow will be better, we can bear a hardship today."

Thich Nhat Hanh

CHRISTMAS AND THE WINTER HOLIDAY SEASON



For many people, December is the most difficult time of the year. Memories of past celebrations with family members or friends who are no longer here can magnify feelings of loss, and you may want to avoid reminders of celebration and togetherness. As the holidays approach, it can be helpful to share your concerns, feelings and apprehensions with someone. Let people know what is difficult for you, and accept offers of help.

TIPS FOR COPING WITH THE WINTER HOLIDAY SEASON

- Think about how you will respond to others when they offer holiday good wishes. You can simply say “Thank you” or “Best wishes to you.”
- Consider cutting back on your holiday traditions by not sending cards, or by enlisting the help of other

people with meals and decorating.

- If you find Christmas shopping upsetting, it may help to shop early, to shop by telephone, the Internet or catalogue, or to take along an understanding friend. Family may be willing to shop for you if they realize how difficult this is for you. You may also decide to go “shopless” this year and make a charitable donation in the name of the person who has died.
- Consider alternatives such as developing new traditions, going away, eating at restaurants or buying gift cards.
- Create a special decoration and give it a place of honour.
- Remember that you can always do things differently next year.

Victoriahospice.org, 8/21

Proactive grieving is living the loss and becoming an intentional survivor.

We learn to become intentional survivors...not collateral victims.

Accept the challenge to be alive.

— *Mitch Carmody, author, artist, and nationally known speaker on bereavement*

A SINCERE THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS



Tina Neupert, in memory of her brother Daryl Derer

Journey Mental Health
for sponsorship

To make a tax deductible donation online by credit card, visit 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

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.

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 was your first visit 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

ONLINE (ZOOM) SURVIVOR SUPPORT GROUP CONTINUES FOR NOW

With no definite date set as to when in-person meetings might resume, we continue to offer **online group support**. We offer this option to survivors who would have normally desired to attend our in-person groups.

The following criteria are needed for participation.

- Be a survivor of a suicide loss and wish to interact with other survivors.
- Be over 18 years of age.
- Have technology available to use ZOOM either through computer, phone or another device.
- Be willing to register and speak with a Journey Mental health provider to be assured that a group experience would be appropriate and then receive an online invitation (Group entry codes).
- Be able to provide your email and phone contact information.

- Be aware that this is a discussion, support group and is **not** a “therapy” group.
- Be able to provide a quiet space, without interruptions when participating, insuring confidentiality of the group.
- Be available at the group starting time.
- Do not invite or include others who have not been specifically invited to the session.

All group discussions are led by a trained volunteer fellow survivor and supported by a Journey Mental Health professional.

Meetings, for now will be held on our regular meeting nights, the second and fourth Tuesday of each month. The length of the meeting (usually 1½ hours) will be determined by the facilitator.

To request participation please email sos@journeymhc.org or call and leave a message for call back at SOS Confidential Voicemail (608) 280-2435.

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.

OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY 2022
	9		
12		14	11
	23		
26		28	25

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Saturday, Nov. 20, 2021 — International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day

No local event. Info at afsp.org for events in all areas.

Wisconsin virtual event contact: Gena Orlando, Wisconsin@afsp.org; 414-216-4180

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

“Find strength in sharing, comfort in connection, healing in hope.”

allianceofhope.org



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