



Comforting Friends

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Suicide is Not Selfish

By Stephanie Chandler

The recent news of several celebrity suicide deaths is a reminder that depression doesn't care about fame or fortune or status. Though I didn't know any of them personally, I can promise you that they didn't want to leave their young children behind. What parent *wants* to leave their child? In the depths of illness and what's known as "the suicide trance," they quite likely thought their loved ones would be better off without them.

I used to view suicide as selfish, before I lost my husband to depression in 2013 and then set out to better understand what had happened. Learning that the brain gets stuck in the loop of the suicidal trance helped me make sense of it all. My husband was the least selfish person I've ever known. He would have never wanted to inflict such pain on his family, especially on our then 7-year old son, whom he adored.

Depression is an illness that lies to its victims. When in the suicide trance, they feel worthless and hopeless. They experience a level of pain the rest of us cannot begin to fathom—pain that has been compared to feeling like surgery without anesthesia.

A suicide attempt survivor told me: "It was like my brain was on fire. All I wanted to do was stop the pain. I wasn't thinking about how it would devastate my family. At the time I thought I was a burden on them and that they would be better off without me."

Suicide by adults is typically not a sudden decision. It's most commonly brought on by persistent thoughts its victims have battled for years. Oftentimes those struggling with depression and suicidal ideation hide their pain from family and friends. When in social situations, you would never

have known how deeply my husband was struggling. But back at home, where he should have felt his best, he retreated into an unreachable cocoon of sadness.

My husband worked for the same company for over 20 years. He was a steady force in so many ways, except that he battled depression daily. The only logical explanation for him dying by suicide was that he thought we would be better off without him. It seems to me it was more of a *selfless* act than a selfish one.

We need to stop using the term "*committed* suicide." Our loved ones died *BY* suicide and *FROM* depression. They didn't understand the devastation they would leave behind. They didn't mean to inflict so much pain on us.

Now, almost five years since my husband lost his battle with depression, my mission is to live life with as much joy as possible—the kind of joy he wasn't able to experience himself. I want to show my son how to appreciate every day while we honor the memory of his dad. It's not always easy, but it's a choice I strive to make every day. I know he would want nothing more than for us to be happy.

Your loved ones would want that for you, too.

Stephanie Chandler is a writer and speaker and resides near Sacramento, California. For more information: StephanieChandler.com.



"Suicide is an attempt to solve a problem of intense emotional pain with impaired problem-solving skills."
By John Kalafat and Maureen Underwood, National excerpts in implementing and evaluating school-based suicide prevention programs.

Criteria for Reconciliation

In the past, recover, resolution, or reorganization were terms used to describe the final dimension of grief. Most grief therapists are now seeing that the term reconciliation may represent better what the bereaved are trying to reach. This is what reconciliation looks like in a bereaved person.

- ❖ A recognition of the reality and finality of the death of the person who has died.
- ❖ A return to stable eating and sleeping patterns that were present prior to the death.
- ❖ A renewed sense of energy and personal well-being.
- ❖ A subjective sense of release and relief from the person who has died (they have thoughts of the person, but are not preoccupied).
- ❖ The capacity to enjoy experiences in life that should normally be enjoyable.
- ❖ The establishment of new and healthy relationships.
- ❖ The capacity to live a full life without feelings of guilt or lack of self-respect.
- ❖ The capacity to become comfortable with the way things are, rather than attempting to make things as they were.
- ❖ The capacity to being open to more change in one's life.
- ❖ The awareness that one has allowed self to fully grieve.
- ❖ The awareness that one does not "get over grief," but instead is able to acknowledge "This is my new reality and I am ultimately the one who must work to create new meaning and purpose in my life."
- ❖ The capacity to acknowledge new parts of one's self that have been discovered in the growth through one's grief.
- ❖ The capacity to adjust to the new role changes that have resulted from the loss of the relationship.
- ❖ The capacity to be compassionate with oneself when normal resurgences of intense grief occur (holidays, anniversaries, etc.).
- ❖ The capacity to acknowledge that the pain of loss is an inherent part of life that results from the ability to give and receive love.

Reprinted from Suicide Bereavement Support, June 2003



"People are forever changed by the experience of grief in their lives. We, as humans, do not 'get over' our grief, but work to reconcile ourselves to living with it. Anyone who attempts to prescribe a specific time-frame for the experience only creates another barrier to the healing process." *Alan Wolfelt*

If we believe that tomorrow will be better,
we can bear a hardship today. *Thich Nhat Hanh*



The birds are singing just for you,
Look at this day so new,
The sun is shining always true,
That you have to smile this day,
To make a way,
With love in your heart throughout the day!

The Miraculous Healing Power of Writing

By Henriette Anne Klauser, Ph.D.

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 Pennebaker, 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, punctuation, 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.

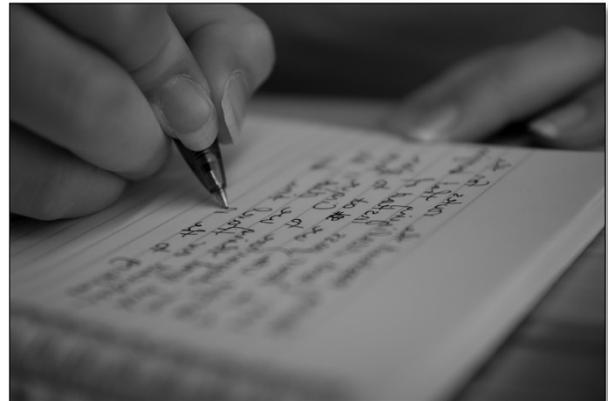
Because it allows you to feel and accept your emotional state, painful though it may be, writing in the here and now can be a potent antidote to anxiety and depression.

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.

Reprinted from Survivors of Suicide of Dane County Newsletter, Madison, WI October 2017, Vol. 23, Issue 4



"We do not write in order to be understood; we write in order to understand." *C.Day-Lewis*

"Writing letters is a way that we can express a part of ourselves that we can't seem to say out loud." - *from Companion through the Darkness – Inner Dialogues on Grief*

My Memory Library

By Sarah Blackstone

Imagine if I was given one moment,
Just a single slice of my past.
I could hold it close forever,
And that moment would always last.

I'd put the moment in a safe
within my heart's abode.
I could open it when I wanted,
And only I would have the code.

I could choose a time of laughing,
A time of happiness and fun.
I could choose a time that tried me
Through everything I've done.

I sat and thought what moment
Would always make me smile.
One that would always push me
To walk that extra mile.

If I'm feeling sad and low,
If I'm struggling with what to do,
I can go and open my little safe,
And watch my moment through.

There are moments I can think of
That would lift my spirits every time.
The moments when you picked me up
When the road was hard to climb.

For me to pick just one moment,
To cherish, save and keep,
Is proving really difficult
As I've gathered up a heap!

I've dug deep inside my heart,
Found the safe and looked inside.
There was room for lots of moments,
In fact, hundreds if I tried.

I'm building my own little library,
Embedded in my heart,
For all the moments spent with you,
Before you had to part.

I can open it up whenever I like,
Pick a moment and watch it through.
My little library acts as a promise,
I'll never ever forget you.

Reprinted from *Mayday, Survivors of Suicide*,
Batavia, IL, Volume 35, Issue 7 July 2018



"If I am to wear this mourning cloak, let it be made of the
fabric of love, woven by the fine thread of memory."
Safe Passage by Molly Fumia



Progress Check

By Pat Akery

It's usually around this time of year, when summer is
nearly over and fall is around the corner, that I like to
take a close look at the progress of my recovery.

Maybe it's the seemingly endless "back-to-school"
sales that suddenly end; or the return of the yellow
school buses with children carrying lunchboxes, that
causes me to feel a need to take a look.

This is a time of year some of us find difficult to deal
with, and checking where we stand during rough times
is always a good idea – especially if it helps us find
areas in which we can improve. We may even find
areas of real progress that may boost our awareness
of positive steps we have made.

It usually is difficult to notice the steps we make,
particularly early in recovery, unless we make a
concerted effort to notice them.



The work of healing is about being present to your pain
and honoring yourself through a regular practice of
self-care and compassion...Ask Yourself: "What is the
most empowering thing I can do for myself in building a
sanctuary for this journey?"

*Dianna Bonny (2015) Excerpt from I'll Write Your Name on
Every Beach by Susan Auerbach.*

Did Anyone Know?

by Laura Harlow, TCF Houston Bay Area

Did you know I don't like to be held when I cry? I also don't like to be touched; I just like for someone to listen when I want to talk, or to go away when I don't.

Did you know I'm tired of having these awful feelings? Feelings like guilt, denial, grief, sadness, depression and missing Brenda. They hurt, they hurt my heart, they make me feel afraid, lonely, and sad. I can't control me when I feel this way. They are painful, I don't like the pain, and I want them to go away!!

Did you know how much it hurts to realize your sister is dead? To really, in your heart, know and realize your sister is dead. I could say it a hundred times and never flinch; but to say it that one time when you know what it is you're saying hurts so much!

Did you know that sometimes I just want to be held? Because for that time span I'm being protected from all the outside problems.

Did you know that sometimes I want a hug? The kind of hugs that last forever, and don't lessen even when you let go. I just need support and friendship and someone who cares.

Did you know grief does not go away? You have to work through it, and no one can take it away, no matter how much they want to, and how much you want them to.

Did you know the only people who judge grief are those who have never experienced it themselves?

Did you know sometimes I have to talk about my sister? I have to talk and I just can't stop.

Did you know I like going to my sister's grave? Sometimes I can't get out of the car, but usually it makes me feel better.

Did you know I love my sister and I know she loved me, too? Did you know remembering her makes me feel good? Even when it makes me cry; crying isn't bad.

Did you know when you're grieving you want things to be the same around you and you want to go on with your life?

Did you know when you're grieving you want the world to stop and grieve with you?

Did I know any of these things before Brenda died? No, but I know them now!

Reprinted from The Compassionate Friends Newsletter, Sacramento Valley Chapter, August 2004



LIGHT

by Diane Atkins for Hospice
Bereavement Group

"He was the light of my life." We hear that statement often in reference to a loved one. What does it mean? Well in my case it was very real, almost literal. Don was the light of my life. That doesn't mean I walked in his shadow --because I'm sure I was the light of his life also and together we cast our own shadow—one shadow. So when he died, that light went out; and I was plunged into complete darkness.

At first that darkness was comforting. I could curl up in a ball and almost not exist. After a while, however, I had things to do, and I learned to manipulate in the dark, stumble around and take care of myself just as a person who suddenly goes blind learns to manage their world. And sometimes people would come into my dark space and bring their own source of light. They were always welcome. Some brought just an ordinary light that helped brighten things a little. Sometimes it was a bright light that brought laughter and a sense of fun, and sometimes it was just a candle that gave a sense of quiet that was very comforting. But the thing is, these people would eventually go, and I was left in darkness.

As time went on I got a little restless. I always heard that when one door closes, another door opens. So I began to stumble all around the edge of my dark space looking for a door or even a window to open that would throw a little light on the subject—the subject being me! Well one day in trying to find that door in the dark it dawned on me I was searching for light in the wrong place. It didn't have to come from without—it could come from within. Maybe I had the ability to make my own light when needed and light up my own space. Something to think about, some-thing to cultivate; and I find I can do it. I can make it just as bright or as dim as I need. And when I found that source of light from within, I looked around and there were all sorts of doors that I can open—windows too.

Just knowing I have this source of power has brought me a little peace; although some days it seems I take an awful long time just looking for the switch.

Info Update, Donation Form, Reaching Out

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 Please remove me from your mailing list.

Enclosed is my donation of \$_____ for: Most Needed Legacy Friends
Or easily donate online through our website: www.friendsforsurvival.org Click on "Ways to Give".

LOVE Gift in memory of: _____ From: _____

Reaching Out Column: Please include my loved one in your column. My loved one's name is:
_____, DOB: _____, DOD: _____.

My name and relationship: _____

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www.friendsforsurvival.org