



Comforting Friends

Published monthly by the Sacramento Chapter of Friends for Survival, Inc.

A National Outreach & Support Organization for Those Affected by a Suicide Death
P.O. Box 214463 • Sacramento, CA 95821-4463 • 916-392-0664
www.friendsforsurvival.org

October 2018

National Edition

Volume XXI, Issue 9

Generosity Month

By Kelly Holmstrom, Cameron Park CA

Thankfully, there will always be special days in my heart to remember my husband. Sadly, those significant days come back to me in memories that are both full of fun and celebration as well as loss.

Birthdays, holidays, sometimes even a summer barbeque, will remind me of times we shared celebrating these same things. At first I didn't know what to do with significant days. Finally, I found a few ideas to help me through.

My husband's birthday is in March. It's often the most difficult day of the year for me, because I don't know how to feel on that particular day. We make a big deal out of everyone's birthday in my house. It feels like something is lacking to no longer throw a big birthday party in March. I want to continue to celebrate Travis, but not create a sad day for me, or put any additional sadness on our kids. I've settled on a plan of action that both celebrates him, and makes me feel good.

During the month of March, I find an opportunity to personally help an individual or an organization, with no expectation of anything in return. It's my generosity month, in celebration of Travis. I take the money and the energy I used to invest in giving him a happy birthday and invest it in someone who needs it. It can be lots of small gestures, or one consolidated day of giving on his birthday.

What matters is that I consciously look for opportunities to help people. Taking a positive action helps me feel good about a day that a few years ago was passed crying in my car, without a strategy to make the day ok.

There are many ways to honor the day your loved one was born:

- Buy an outfit they would have liked, wrap it, and donate it to a shelter in your area.
- If you know someone who could use a bit of help with their yard, or another physical chore, offer to do it for them.
- Go to a bakery and pay for one of the birthday cakes that's on order.
- Start the "pay it forward" line at your Starbucks drive thru- pay for the coffee order of the person behind you.
- Ask your local school principal if you can pay off the lunch accounts that are overdue.
- Sponsor a printing of the Friends for Survival newsletter in memory of your loved one, during their birth month.
- Go to an animal shelter and volunteer to pet the cats or walk the dogs for a day. Give these animals the hugs you wish you could give to your loved one.
- Make a donation to Friends for Survival, or another non-profit organization, in celebration of your loved one.

After a few years of treating March as my generosity month, I am proud of how many people we've helped. There is no better way to honor the memory of those we've lost, than to spread kindness.

Please share with us...what are you doing on your special day or month of remembrance?"



Kelly Holmstrom is a mom, a board member at Friends for Survival, and works with marketing and technology teams to adopt new technology at big companies.

Louise Tina Freeman

11/08/57 – 10/18/16

by Lisa Freeman-Wood

Last fall, as the one year anniversary of my sister Tina's suicide was rapidly approaching, I felt compelled to do something in her memory.

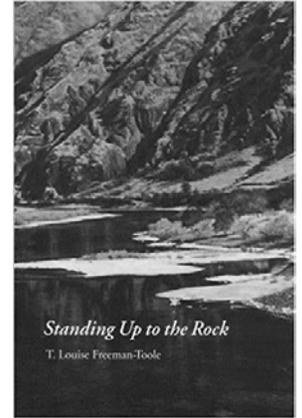
In November the local art center I belong to, Chico Art Center, had a month long exhibition for *Día de los Muertos*, or Day of the Dead. All art pieces from the community were accepted and there was an altar or *ofrenda* for honoring loved ones who had passed. My husband and I decided to sponsor the show in Tina's name. I researched the Day of the Dead which I knew nothing about and found that most cultures around the world have a day to honor the dead. I wrote an essay about these traditions that was posted as part of the exhibition. Below is the piece I wrote that was hung alongside her picture:



My sister Tina took her own life. To say that was a shock is an understatement. The story of her life and background is long and complex, as is anyone's who lives more than 50 years.

Almost everyone who knew her knew that she was in crisis and we were all doing what we could to help her. She had recently moved to be closer to family, but unfortunately there were no psychiatrists or mental facilities as it was a small town. She had battled depression and mental instability throughout her adult life, having had two mental breakdowns, and was experiencing a third. She tended to focus on the past and what she perceived as imperfections of what happened in her life, her marriage, and her family, constantly trying to mentally rewrite her history into a better story.

She had a large family, six siblings, and two sons that she loved with the ferocity of a mama bear. She had friends scattered far and wide across the country that she kept in touch with. She was a talented writer and could remember word for word what the people she interviewed said years later.



She had one published book *Standing Up to the Rock* and was working on another. *For She Is The Tree Of Life: Grandmothers Through The Eyes Of Women Writers*, a collection of stories and poems, including an essay she wrote titled *The Good Stuff: Learning About Life from Grandma Val*.

She wrote many magazine articles revolving around living in Alaska under her married name, T. Louise Freeman-Toole or Louise Freeman-Toole. Her essay in *For She Is The Tree Of Life*, about our Grandma Val, focuses on both the past through our Grandmother's life, living in the present, and the future which Tina did not live to experience. She talks about reading Grandma Val's journals, written during the years she lived with her husband in a small cabin on Square Island, Alaska: looking for the action and drama she thought was part of that life.

What Tina found was the acceptance of the slow pace of life, the appreciation of the little things, duck feathers found on shore, the sight of deer in the woods, the sound of whales in the bay.

The *real* good stuff, she said, was in the everyday, simple things, and learning how to live in the moment, not limiting yourself to what you already know, being thankful, and looking forward to old age.

I am mourning that she did not get to old age, to find out for herself the satisfactions it brings. I miss her immensely and will do my best to look for the "good stuff" in my life and celebrate it in my heart as often as I can.

LF

“If There Was a Way”

If there was a way I could come back and tell you,
I am sorry for all your grief and pain,
If there was a way I could change what I did,
to stop your tears from falling like rain,
If there was a way I could undo the hurt
I've caused you to suffer through,
I would do it in an instant...
because I really do love you.

But I can't...I took my life because,
at the time, I was unable to cope,
I felt empty...void of all emotions.
No anger...no fear...no hope.
Depression was the killer,
not you or what you did or didn't do,
it wasn't anyone's fault except my own.
You need to believe that part is true.

You were loving...you were stern,
you were just...at times...unjust as well.
You were right...you were wrong....
that's human nature...I was victimized
by a Depression sent from hell.
You couldn't see the signs, if you could,
the choice wouldn't have been mine.
So I had to keep my feelings from you.
That's how suicide is designed.
I had faith and trusted in you,
I only wish I would have trusted more in God.
Then maybe I wouldn't have felt so hopeless.
Maybe I would have beaten the odds.

Still...I want you to know our Father above,
is far more forgiving than I had hoped,
because He took me into His home,
where I finally learned to cope.
It's beautiful here with Him,
so much peace and tranquility,
it's a life I look forward to sharing with you
FOR ALL ETERNITY!

*written by Carolann V. Jerkovic
dedicated to Pam & Ken Schultz
in memory of Steven E. J. Schultz
who lived from 8-29-78 to 3-5-98
reprinted from SOS, "Mayday" newsletter,
Batavia, IL, Jan. 2008*

Would You Share?

Would you share your experience, strength, and hope with our *Comforting Friends* newsletter readers?

Just write from your heart. It can be a poem, a mantra, anything that you personally found or continue to find comforting.

It doesn't have to be perfect. The editor will cross the *t*'s and dot the *l*'s, if necessary.

It's heartwarming to see pieces in *Comforting Friends* submitted by our Friends for Survival family.

Submit your article through our website under "About/Contact Us", mail or email us.

friendsforsurvivalnews@gmail.com

P.O. Box 214463, Sacramento CA 95821
www.friendsforsurvival.org



Those we love don't
go away, they walk
beside us everyday.
Unseen, unheard but
always near, Still
loved, still missed, and
held so dear.

Experts Issue An Alert

In 2017, Netflix released “13 Reasons Why” to a global audience. A study published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* found a significant increase in internet searches on suicide following the release of Season 1. As a result, and in preparation for the release of Season 2, an international coalition of leading experts in education, mental health and suicide prevention have released concerns and recommendations to youth, parents, educators and clinicians/professionals.

“We want to make sure the public is aware and prepared for the release of Season 2 so that they can be informed and available to youth who want to talk about the issues in the series, as well as for those youth who struggle with the content.” Said Dr. David Reidenberg, Executive Director of SAVE (Suicide Awareness Voices of Education) who leads the coalition. “While we hope that the series will encourage important conversations and more positive, healthy behaviors, we also are concerned that the series could have negative outcomes for some youth.”

This coalition has developed a toolkit providing practical guidance and reliable resources for parents, educators, clinicians, youth and media related to the content of the series (suicide, school violence, sexual assault, bullying, substance abuse, etc.)

www.13reasonswhytoolkit.org

Research demonstrates that depictions of violence and self-harm can increase the likelihood of copycat behaviors. Adolescents are a vulnerable group and are highly impressionable, frequently copying others’ behaviors or reacting in response to things they have seen. Such copycat and harmful behaviors displayed on television and/or in film can lead to harmful outcomes.

“Season 1 included detailed portrayal of suicide, violence and it represented adults and professionals in a non-caring manner,” according to Dr. Murad Khan, President of the International Association for Suicide Prevention. “By creating a toolkit for young people, adults and professionals, we can demonstrate constructive and positive copying skills and encourage recovery and hope.”

Letting Go of Guilt

By Clara Hinton

Quite often, the first feelings that overtake a mother or father following the death of a child are feelings of extreme guilt. Thoughts of “if only” seem to relentlessly keep returning. “If only” I had taken her to the doctor sooner. “If only” I had not given him the car keys when I knew the roads were icy. “If only” I had not turned my back to answer the phone. “If only” I had not left him playing alone in the bathtub. Guilt is such a heavy burden of grief to carry around!

How does a parent move beyond the guilt of losing a child? How can a parent shed the painful feelings of inadequacy? How does a parent ever find a way to let go of the guilt?

The most difficult step in releasing the tight clutch that guilt holds on a parents’ heart is dealing with the reality of the loss. “My child died” are often the most difficult three words that will ever come from the mouth of a parent. Those words are hard words, yet they are words that are necessary to say and to understand before being able to rid oneself of guilt.

When we live in an “if only” emotional environment we have not yet come to the full realization that child loss has actually occurred. We are still working through the mental “if only” reasoning which continues to wreak havoc on a parent’s heart. When a parent lives in an “if only” state, the reality of the child’s death can never be completely accepted. As painful as it is, a parent must—at some point—make the hard choice to accept the reality that the child has died.

Because a parent’s primary role is to nurture and care for the child, a parent often has a feeling of deserving punishment when a child dies. That is simply another way of expressing the heaviness of guilt. A parent often wrestles with the thought that “because my child died, I do not deserve to ever smile again.” Guilt continues to prevent many parents from moving forward in this difficult journey we call grief.

It takes a lot of concentrated effort, hard work and support from others to be able to forgive oneself and finally let go of the gnawing feeling of guilt following the death of a child. Until a parent makes the decision to leave the heavy weight of guilt behind, joy can never return to a heart that has been so deeply wounded by the loss of a child.

Continued on next page...

....Guilt continued:

Letting go of guilt is a decision that must be made. There is no timetable for making that decision and others cannot force that decision on any parent. Eventually, a parent will come to the realization that the child's death is real, and there is a hard choice to be made—to continue to live in the guilt of the loss, or to let go of that heaviness of guilt and begin to experience a bit of peace and joy once again.

Letting go of guilt requires a real effort to put an end to the "if only" questions. Letting go of guilt means that a parent no longer blames himself for the death of the child. Letting go of guilt means forgiving oneself and accepting oneself. Letting go of guilt means being gentle with oneself and allowing time for healing to take place.

Letting go of guilt is one of the most difficult parts of grief work. It takes a lot of energy, understanding, and patience. But, when guilt is finally set free, a parent's heart can begin to walk the journey of healing through the child loss.

Reprinted from Orange Coast Chapter, TCF, May 2005



Control

by Margaret Gerner, BPUSA, St Louis, MO

The pain we feel is almost constant for many months. But there are times when it completely overwhelms us. At these times, we can do nothing but pace and wail. We wring our hands. Our bodies tremble with agony and despair. We feel regret – wishing to the depths of our souls that we could re-do the yesterday when our child died.

We feel intense longing for our child, so intense we don't believe we can stand it another minute. We feel completely alone. It is as though no one exists in this world but us. Between sobs, phrases like "My God, I can't go on," "What am I going to do?", or "it hurts so badly," come out of our mouths over and over again. We feel as though we are at the bottom of a deep pit, and there is no way out. We feel consumed with an indescribable anguish.

....Control continued:

It is at these times we might be advised by those around us to "calm down," or to "control ourselves." It is my opinion that this is exactly what we SHOULD NOT do.

Mistakenly, I tried to "control" my emotions after Arthur died. But when I could "control" no longer, my grief would pour out of me in a raging torrent. I noticed that for days after one of these sessions, I felt a great release of pressure, but I never did realize that these wailing sessions were helpful and healing.

Every emotion carries with it energy. Sadness, anger, guilt, regret: they are with us constantly in our grief, but the energy caused by them cannot be released as it builds. It is like a tea kettle. The water is constantly boiling, but it is in spurts that the steam pushes itself out of the lid. The uncontrolled crying session is the steam of our boiling emotions forcing itself out. As with the lid on the tea kettle, these sessions are our safety valves.

These sessions can last from a few minutes to over an hour. They are self-terminating, and they are exhausting. After such a session, we are worn out, just as we would be after hard physical exercise. Sometimes we can even sleep after them. Early in our grief they may be frequent, but as time goes on and you allow yourself to experience them and not try to inhibit them, they will become farther apart.

Don't take the advice of those around you to "get hold of yourself." On the contrary, surrender yourself to your pain. Cry. Wail. Rant. Wring your hands. Voice your anger, your guilt, your regrets. Expend your pent-up emotions. You will feel much better afterwards.

*Reprinted from The Compassionate Friends,
Los Angeles, newsletter, December 2005*



Dr. Wayne Dyer said,
"Peace is the result of retraining your mind
to process life as it is,
rather than as you think it should be."

Info Update, Donation Form, Purchase Tickets, Remembrances

Update My Info (to help us save costs):

- Send me this newsletter via email instead. Email address: _____
 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: _____ My name and relationship: _____

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

Please detach and mail to: Friends for Survival, P.O. Box 214463, Sacramento, CA 95821-4463



☞ A Few Last Words ☜

Did you know that you can donate through The United Way?



Please designate Friends For Survival agency #3043 as the recipient of your pledge.

4,697: This newsletter is one of 4,697 that we mailed and emailed out this month. We could not provide this valuable outreach without your support and generosity.

80: Number of hours it takes our amazing and wonderful volunteers to prepare our newsletter for mailing each time.

31: Number of new individuals and families that called us for the first time in August.

Message from Marilyn

Friends for Survival began in 1983. As a founding member, I have had the pleasure to serve you as the Executive Director from the very beginning. Losing my son Steven to suicide in 1977 forever altered my destiny. We have received calls and provide services to individuals and groups in all 50 states. So many folks we talk to on the phone do not know where to turn. Our staff provides a point to start, and continues with on-going support.

Thanks to our donors and volunteers, we are able to continue our important work, but the numbers of the people we serve are increasing. Would you consider taking the \$1 Challenge with me?

Our number one goal and passion is to continue to provide comfort and hope to you and others today, tomorrow and in the future.

Gratefully,
Marilyn Koenig
Executive Director

