

## **Sharing Pain Leads To Building New Family Connections**

As I reflect today (June 2020) on the six years since my near-suicide, my feelings are of gratitude and thankfulness for being able to survive. It wasn't easy to navigate the many highs and lows related to overcoming my severe depression. However, I'm fortunate to have learned invaluable lessons that rebuilt me and were shared with others to help them to do the same.

### **Vulnerability Opens Hearts**

During these turbulent years, there was one surprising person who supported me emotionally and with a mother's love. This remarkable woman is Mary Hanson.

Mrs. Hanson contacted me after reading my article "Letter to Myself the Day Before My Near-Suicide: Written a Year Later," which was published on The Huffington Post (now the HuffPost) in March 2014. This piece memorialized my journey from a broken man to one who was determined to move forward (during a period of considerable pain) and help others, too.

Mrs. Hanson's email (days after my article appeared) echoed through my soul. It was an unimaginable response to my heart-wrenching reflection on a year's arduous journey that wasn't considered by me (and perhaps many others) to be possible.

In her email, she wrote:

*"I don't know if my e-mail will find you. I don't belong to Facebook, Twitter, etc.*

*Your Huffington Post blog was absolutely beautiful and touched my soul deeply. Thank goodness you listened to that little voice to reach out bit by bit. It was so valuable to me, you sharing the timeline and what beautiful things came to you after the crisis.*

*I have struggled most of my life. My children were my saviors, motivating my inner voice to seek treatment and a healthier path... a work in progress.*

*My beautiful 26 year old son chose to end his life three years ago, a week before his birthday. We held a funeral instead of a birthday party on his special day. I had talked with him on the phone that evening and he would not give up any info other than he wasn't feeling right. He could not describe to me what was going on physically/mentally. Before we hung up I said I love you.*

*Local police stopped by at 5 am to say my son had committed suicide. This was a shock for the most part...but not...he was a giver, hard worker... survivor... his career had recently taken off... he had a ton of friends, participated in sports and kept fit... BUT also realized communication and his understanding of people skills was a challenge for him.... along with many events from his past...a perfect storm culminated if you will.*

*This is why I could never be angry with his decision, gapingly sad-yes. However miracles do happen and our family has recognized them each and every day. We did the family work via therapy, worked hard and came out on the other side intact and experiencing goodness no one ever could imagine. The power of loving and forgiving yourself, and others, keeping ego and its negativity at bay are lessons I wish I would have known forty years ago.*

*Thanks again.....sending love your way..."*

This email validated my gut-wrenching decision to be bold enough to share my journey to reclaim my life after being moments from ending it. This amazing God-sent confirmation taught me that the worst parts of my life and story could (and did) help others.

## **A Mother's Pain**

In an email years later, Mrs. Hanson provided additional insights about her son (Brian) who died-by-suicide on February 12, 2012.

*"It started with a phone call to my son. After several tries over the course of a week, Brian finally answered the phone at 7 p.m. He said, Mom, I'm not feeling well. I asked, what was wrong; why aren't you feeling well? He replied, I don't know.*

*Our conversation was brief... no more than 5 to 10 minutes. I ended our call by saying I love you.*

*After the call, I felt sad and wondered if my son still loved me. During our brief talk, he was so reserved. Afterward, I debated whether I should call back, but decided not to do it to give him space to deal with whatever was happening.*

*That night, I went to bed with a heavy heart. At midnight, Brian sent a final text message to his sister, which simply said: I love you - you've been a really good sister. Tell Mom I love her. A short time later, he sent another text to his roommate with the message You've been a good friend.*

*At 5 a.m., my husband and I were woke-up by our doorbell buzzing. At the door, there were two police officers with the unbearable news that that our son had ended his life at approximately 2 a.m. The officers then provided the*

*contact name and number for the detective assigned to the case (in the city that our son lived).*

*Our hearts and souls felt like they were violently ripped from our bodies. The room went dark for me. Suddenly, there was a shift in my thinking that everything I believed to be true and needed in my life were no longer so. Game over; we didn't imagine that our son's suicide would be our reality.*

*At 6 a.m., we started to make phone calls to let the family know about Brian's death. The first call was to our daughter. She couldn't believe that her brother was gone. Frantically, she checked her phone and sadly found Brian's text that was sent at midnight. Devastated by this reality, she gathered her belongings and came to our home.*

*As the day went on, additional calls were made to our closest family and friends. Each responded literally by screaming No; this can't be true! While making these calls, I could only bare to tell them that Brian died-by-suicide, as it wasn't possible to provide any further details at that time.*

*The only comfort – during this nightmare – was having our family and friends scrambled to our home to support our family during these life-changing moments in which our world stopped."*

Mrs. Hanson also wrote the following message for her son (Brian) to be included with this update.

*To Brian...*

*We brought you lovingly into this world almost 27 years to the day of your death.*

*We wanted to ensure that you were taken care of properly and lovingly sent back to the creator.*

*We prayed for you and your peace.*

*We took care of your estate and legal matters.*

*We cleaned your apartment and had the space blessed.*

*Your service was absolutely beautiful! It was filled with love from a large community that was devastated by your absence.*

*Your service was on your birthday.*

*We were never angry or ashamed.*

*It didn't matter why you chose this path, really; sometimes things are just as it is without explanation or justification.*

*The need to know melted away, as it wouldn't change the outcome or bring you back.*

*We experience signs that you are still with us, which is comforting.*

*Because of your choice, our family made a conscious decision to do the work to heal and move forward in a positive direction; both together and separately. You were the sole catalyst for the change that needed to happen.*

*We miss you desperately... but we're thankful for the gifts and miracles that were left in the wake, and that continue to come to us.*

*I will always love you my son.*

*Mom*

### **Support Goes Both Ways**

In one of my emails to Mrs. Hanson on February 12, 2019 (on the seventh year of her son's death), I wrote:

*"I hope you're doing okay!"*

*Over the last few days, you were constantly on my mind as today's date approached. I know that this might be a challenging day. Notwithstanding, I'm sure that Brian*

*wouldn't want you to focus on his passing, but instead to focus on the happiness surrounding his life and the blessing of his heart that he brought to yours.*

*This period is reflective for me too, as approximately a month from today I almost ended my life. Around the first year after my near-suicide, I wrote my article Letter to Myself the Day Before My Near-Suicide: Written a Year Later. This was one of the hardest things I've done or written, as I reflected on my journey into/out of darkness due to depression --- while dealing with the stigmas associated with discussing mental health. Nevertheless, I'm grateful that I pushed myself to write this piece --- for myself and the countless individuals like yourself who benefited from my painful disclosures.*

*In March 2015, you wrote me an email after reading this article. I never imagined in writing it or in responding to you that these experiences would change my life. It's interesting that (as I learned through our many conversations) that you didn't know a way to communicate with Brian during his suffering a few hours before his untimely death. Yet, you communicated clearly with me to let me know that I mattered, my contributions mattered, and that I was a positive force that could help many others. You blanketed me (this stranger) with a mother's love, compassion, and thoughtfulness. While addressing your pain, you extended your arms over distant miles to hug, hold, positively change, and love me.*

*Unfortunately, you couldn't save Brian... but, you saved me and my life. For this I will forever be grateful!*

*Also, it's interesting that you know the way that I look, I know the way Brian looked, but (by choice) I don't know the way you look. As we discussed years ago, I don't want to know the way you look until we meet in-person. With that said, next month will be the fifth year since I almost ended my life... and I want us to meet. This will give me an opportunity to hug my other mom (you) to tell her... I'm thankful for the years of love, support, and understanding... and that I love her, too.*

*Thank you for supporting me as I fought to hold on to and reclaim this valuable gift of life!"*

One of the most incredible things about our shared journey was my inability (by choice) to see Mrs. Hanson's face, even though I already knew and felt her loving spirit.

### **The Meeting**

After five years of phone calls and correspondence, I was finally ready to meet Mrs. Hanson. However, due to the coronavirus pandemic, our in-person meeting would be delayed to protect us from possible infection. Nevertheless, we were still committed to meeting virtually for the first time;

which occurred on 6/24/20. This meeting renewed my spirit and allowed our souls to further connect in ways I couldn't imagine to be possible.

### **Reflecting On The Shared Healing**

In the days following our meeting, I couldn't stop thinking about the incredible journey that we collectively had to help each other heal. I also reflected on my decision to not want to know the way Mrs. Hanson looked until we met. After our virtual connection, my reasons for our unusual relationship were solidified.

For both of us, we had each other to help process some of the devastating affects of depression and the impact of suicide/suicidal ideation. This allowed us to better understand and address the underlying issues associated with our own mental health challenges.

For Mrs. Hanson, she had an opportunity to process her pain and the emotions of losing a son while also helping this man to recover in a way that only a mother can do.

For me, I had someone special who focused on our common bond.

This beautiful and highly unexpected relationship strengthened my desire to be better despite being moments from almost ending my life not that many years ago.

By not seeing Mrs. Hanson's face, it freed me to focus solely on the messaging, love, and support. In the void of not having a physical being to see, I was alone with her words that navigated through my soul. This artificial distance allowed me to be consumed (in the dark) with this affirming voice that gently caressed my emotions and soul with motherly compassion.

During a critical period in my recovery, it was if I was a protected embryo in an amniotic sac. The voice was familiar and warming, but I didn't really know to whom it belonged. This was my safe place to just be surrounded by love. Then, upon emerging from this protected haven, I was finally able to see<sup>23</sup> the mother who nurtured me back to life.

It's an experience that I will never forget, as it was the moment that the radiating energy from our souls fully connected.

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*To Mrs. Hanson:*

*Sadly, you lost your son; yet, you selfishly and continuously helped to love me back to life.*

*For your unrelenting love for others and for this man (along with so many more intangibles), I thank you with everything I am. If it wasn't for your unwavering support, then I might not be alive today. Also, I wouldn't have had an opportunity to positively impact countless lives.*

*From my entire soul and with blessings from beyond, I'm incredibly blessed to have another friend, supporter, and mother.*

**THANK YOU MOM!!!**

*Love your other son!*

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<sup>23</sup> Watch the long-awaited meeting between S. L. Young and Mary Hanson after 5-years of supporting each other at [slyoung.com/hanson.html](http://slyoung.com/hanson.html)