



# The Lighthouse

Touched By Suicide  
Survivors Gather

Volume 10 Issue 2

Fall 2012

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Laura Peterson  
Layout

The Suicide Support group gatherings are open to all individuals who have been touched by suicide. The group meets year round on the first Wednesday of the month 7:00 – 8:30 p.m. at Hospice of the Rock River Valley, between Dixon and Sterling at 264 Illinois Route 2, Dixon.

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Newsletter of Touched by Suicide, Survivors Gather

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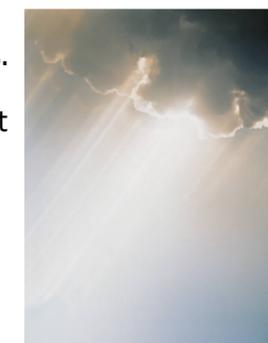
### Inside this issue:

From the Editor	1&2
Have You Seen?	2
Back in Time	3
I Will Sing You Home	4
Sing You Home	5
Courage Examined	6
Book Review: Looking for Alaska	7
Miki the Therapy Dog	7
Faces of Suicide Changing	8



### From the Editor AS WE SEE IT: Let the Sun Shine In

The dark clouds gather, the sky begins to churn and boil, and rain pours down like buckets of tears. Lightening and thunder are heard and seen throughout the dreary night. There is concern that something terrible will happen if the storm continues to intensify. Road and bridges that would provide a way out have become almost impassible. The sign on the post by the highway junction that is being tormented by the howling winds reads: "Danger, Proceed with Caution or Turn Back."



This parable all too frequently portrays the hidden trauma that faces the person whose stormy path has reached a point where life is too fragile, too fraught with pain and despair; and suicide seems like the only avenue that will allow the "storm" to pass.

My concerns are twofold: First, how to help keep persons from driving into the storm and helping them navigate out of harms way --- suicide prevention. Secondly, what can I do to bring rays of sunshine to those left behind ... the survivors?

In the years that I have been in our support group, I've learned to be a better listener, to be open and accepting while being non-judgmental. Also, editing this newsletter has been a powerful catalyst in letting the sun shine into my life. Coming out into the sunlight is never easy following a suicide death of a loved one or friend. It takes time and courage to reveal innermost hurt and misgivings, to take off the yoke of sadness.

### Here are some analogies that involve the warmth of the SUN:

- Sun Angles - Shining forth with a message of peace and harmony
- Sun Glow - That diffused, hazy light that urges us forward
- Sun Flowers - With their array of colors and pleasant smells that contribute to healing

Continued on page 2

### FACE OF SUICIDE CHANGING

In one northwest Illinois county professionals, a support group and a suicide task force are taking a close look at a changing trend. Although death by suicide traditionally occurs with middle age men there has been a disturbing increase in young adult suicide as well as with women in the county. Middle age men are still a prime concern partially due to the stresses of the economy.

Eight of thirty-seven persons were women who took their lives in 2010. So far in 2012 seven of the county's 19 suicides were women. It is estimated that men are nearly four times likely to die by suicide, but women attempt three times more often than men.

Practically all of this year's suicides involved mental illness. Diagnoses may have included bi-polar disorder, drug and alcohol, abuse, depression, PTSD and Asperger syndrome. One root cause identified in the article occurs when a person's coping skills can no longer keep up with the pain they are dealing with. "Suicide is certainly not painless; for those who survive, their pain has just started."

Excerpted from: *Northwest Herald* newspaper article, April 12, 2012.

Submitted by: Nanc Irwin, Woodstock, IL

The Lighthouse is published quarterly at no charge. We welcome submission of news items, poems, reviews, and personal stories. Comments and suggestions to the editor are appreciated.

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## FROM THE EDITOR - LET THE SUN SHINE IN

*Continued from page 1*

- Sun Cured - Preserved by the rays that keep us healthy
- Sun Dial - That casts a shadow announcing it is time to move forward
- Sun Birds - Singing to let us know there are happier days ahead
- Sun Rise - The orange sphere that ushers in the dawning of a day of hope
- Sun Bathe - Relaxing in the flow of energy transmitted through the atmosphere
- Sun Beam - A single particle of joy that when bundled with millions more provides radiance in life
- Sun Bow - Colors like a rainbow in the spray of a waterfall – an image of beauty

We can all be sensitive and supportive of survivors as they let the sun shine in. Our mission is to serve as beacons of sunlight assisting survivors who are reaching for a bright new day.

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## HAVE YOU SEEN?

The cover of the August, 2012 **National Geographic** has this banner: "In the Spirit of Crazy Horse, Rebirth of a Sioux Nation". This might give the casual reader a sense of hope that the Native American's world is moving in a positive direction. But the feature story "In the Shadow of Wounded Knee" focusing on the Oglala Lakota people in South Dakota may give you pause for reflection on not only the positive, but the harsh realities that confront these United States citizens. Yes, customs, language and beliefs are being nurtured, and the usual excellent photography of the Geographic provides vivid portrayals of "rez" life.

One of the realities is that the suicide rate of the Oglala is more than three times as high as the U.S. population as a whole. The suicide of Jumping Eagle is cited along with commentary of 38 year old Olowan Thunder Hawk Martinez reflecting on this young girl's circumstances. She states, "I know why a lot of young girls try to kill themselves on the rez. We're all in constant danger of losing ourselves, losing our identities. It's a daily struggle for each and every one of us to be fully Lakota."

Suicide in the context of the history of Wounded Knee, broken treaties and promises, identification of strong cultural values and present conditions at Pine Ridge makes this issue of National Geographic a worthwhile read for The Lighthouse audience.

## BOOK REVIEW

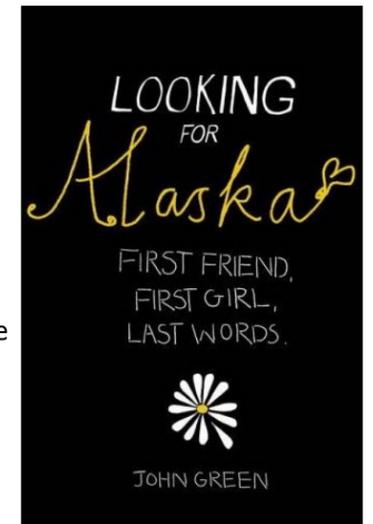
**Looking for Alaska**, John Green, Dutton Books, New York, NY, 2005, 221pp.

Miles Halter wants to go to high school at a boarding school. He greatly loves his parents, but needs to have some new experiences. He is seeking "The Great Perhaps." At Culver Creek he is taken under the wing of his unpredictable roommate and friends. One new friend is Alaska Young who is clever, funny, screwed-up and sexy.

The outcast group plays many pranks on their classmates (and on the school's administrators) as they come to trust and rely on each other. They stretch the rules to, and past, the breaking point. Then one of the students dies. Did she kill herself? Could they have stopped her? What will we do now? All the anguish, guilt and soul-searching are present. The students start to deal with their emotions, and even move to put their experiences into the context of "The Great Perhaps."

Written for young adults, this short and moving book is funny and serious in all the right places. The book was awarded the 2009 Abraham Lincoln Award, awarded annually to the author of the book voted as most outstanding by participating Illinois students in grades nine through twelve.

**Kathe Wilson**  
**Oregon, IL**



## MIKI THE THERAPY DOG

Kenny Baker was a nineteen year old New Jersey youth haunted by severe anxiety and depression. He attempted suicide in 2008, and stepped in front of a train in May, 2009. He was one of that year's 4,298 American suicides between age 15 and 24. His struggle was complicated by the stigma sometimes associated with mental illness.

Kenny's father, a professional dog trainer, mother and sister decided to help in educating teens about mental illness and also help other kids living with depression. They created the organization A.I.R. (Attitudes in Reverse).

Miki, their three year old Pomeranian became a certified therapy dog and "spokesdog" for A.I.R.. He attends awareness events where young people can openly talk about mental health and suicide prevention. Kids can pick Miki up, hug him, and find it easier to express themselves. Many teens struggle in silence and Miki is helping them find a voice.

*Excerpted from: NAMI Advocate, Spring, 2012. Original article appeared in Jan/Feb, 2012 issue of AKC Family Dog*

**Submitted by Jane Callaway**  
**Chesapeake, VA**

## COURAGE EXAMINED

We lost our son to suicide April 18, 2011, the day before his forty-second birthday. On the day we should have been celebrating his special day, we were instead making funeral arrangements. Because of the mental anguish he must have been enduring, perhaps he felt that he could not muster up the courage one more time to put on his "happy mask" for the family gathering. We were blindsided as we had recently returned from a family vacation in the Ozarks where Matt appeared to be doing well. Much of that time is an incredible blur, but I do remember Bud Wiener's early visit to the funeral home just prior to Matt's visitation. Because of his own daughter's suicide ten years earlier, he knew our pain. He later visited our home with a folder of many issues of the Lighthouse. I was especially taken with his editorial in the 2007 winter edition where he raised the question as to whether our loved ones drew upon courage to end their lives. His conclusion was that reluctantly he believed it was an act of courage.

In my search to understand how I could live with the incredible grief of the loss of our son, the concept of courage frequently presented itself to me and is what I'll explore in this writing. The ramifications are many. In a television interview, Florence Henderson shared her belief that during difficult times it takes courage to be happy. In my husband's 1957 edition of the Catholic Bible, I read the twenty third Psalm: "Even though I walk in the dark valley, I fear no evil; for you are at my side with your rod and your staff that give me courage." The word courage is not typically used in that familiar passage. A prayer that has significant meaning to me is the Serenity Prayer: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." Bernie Madoff, the American business man who was found guilty of investment fraud, revealed that he thought about suicide but did not have the courage to take his life. Matt presented his dad with a wooden plaque that had "Courage" on it at a retirement celebration. When his dad later questioned why that idea for a gift, I surmised that Matt admired his Dad for the courage he had demonstrated in taking on the task of both starting and managing the Village of Progress for so many years. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch said, "I wanted you to see what real courage is...It's when you know you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what."

When we lost Matt, fear became my middle name. I worried about everything—finances, future loss, life without Matt, health, old age, etc. I think I had been caught up in the naïve belief that there was a kind of certainty about the future. If we did the right things, everything would turn out okay. If we worked hard at parenting, our children would turn out to be healthy, happy, productive, successful human beings.

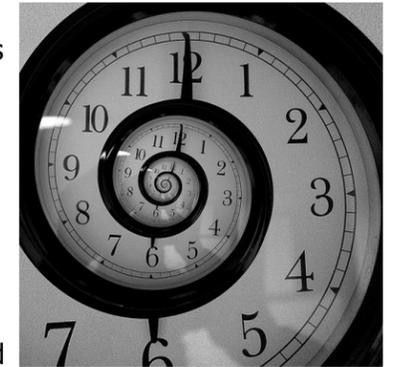
We truly did everything we knew how to do to help and support Matt, but we lost him anyway. When Matt's pain ended, ours began. To avoid being victims of this tragedy or others that may follow, we obviously had to give up on the idea of future certainty. The only place to find real courage is in day by day actions. Getting involved, doing kind things for others, reading, praying, seeking counseling, celebrating a loved one's life with all its special memories could be key. Many believe that courage only exists in heroes, but I've come to believe that it lies latent in us all. Fighting through adversity draws on hidden strength that we may not believe we even have. We have all heard the theory that if something doesn't kill us-- it will only make us stronger. It isn't the ordeal itself that can make us stronger, but our continual effort to work through it.

With us, it was terribly difficult to feel that Matt worried and disappointed those he loved. He shared that he felt he had made a series of terrible mistakes. Along with hospitalizations, medications, counseling, and exercise, he told us that he had prayed and prayed for God to help him find the way to end his mental pain. He felt that God had not chosen to answer his prayers despite our confidence that it would be in God's time that the answers would come. He spoke of envying the spirituality that others seemed to have attained. Considering his faltering belief in a God that cared about him, what courage did it take to leave this life without a feeling of assurance that there was something less painful for him in the afterlife? Reluctantly, I believe that it took courage for Matt to enter the unknown leaving all whom he loved and who loved him beyond measure. I know that Matt now rests in peace without pain. I also believe it takes courage to be happy, and I am committed to working towards that state one day at a time.

**Karole Glaser  
Oregon, IL**

## BACK IN TIME

This is a person who was an honorary citizen of the United States and three other countries. There are monuments dedicated to him and streets named after him throughout the world. There are awards given in his name and schools named after him in such countries as Argentina, Canada, Germany, Hungary, Sweden and United States.



The U.S. Postal Service issued a stamp in 1997 honoring him. He has received honors in a dozen or more countries.

In 1987, he was posthumously awarded the Train Foundation's Civic Courage Prize which recognizes "extraordinary heroes of conscience", and was cited for "steadfast resistance to evil at great personal risk".

He was a Swedish diplomat in Budapest, Hungary. His death was believed to have occurred in July, 1947 at the age of thirty four in a Moscow prison. He had been arrested by Soviet troops in January, 1945, and taken to Russia. Prior to that date in Budapest he had provided fake passports and safe houses by buying off Hungarian fascists and Nazis.

Raoul Wallenberg saved the lives of 20,000 Jews during World War II and averted the massacre of 70,000 more people in the Budapest ghetto.

Wallenberg was born in Sweden August 4, 1912, three months after his father died from cancer. His mother remarried Fredrik von Dardel and they had another child. Fredrik was the only father Raoul knew. He studied in the United States in the 1930s and was a respected Swedish architect and businessman before assuming the diplomatic assignment in Hungary.

His death has long been disputed. The Russians assumed he was an American spy and never produced a proper death certificate or his remains. His mother and stepfather tried desperately to locate him or find what happened to him, but to no avail. For some 30 years they sought answers but the Russians never revealed exactly the circumstances of his imprisonment or death.

In 2009, Wallenberg's sister, Nina, revealed that their parents both died by suicide two days apart at ages 87 and 93. Distraught over not finding their son, they each took an overdose of prescription drugs in 1979. She also revealed details of efforts by her parents and later other members of the Wallenberg family in their failed inquiries.

Even today, in 2012 the 100th anniversary year of Raoul's birth, Sweden has announced it will hold a new inquiry into his death. His half-sister, now 91, and great niece are still searching for answers and for the family to finally find peace.

## I WILL SING YOU HOME

When we attended a folk festival in Owen Sound, Ontario with family and friends there was a performance by two young sisters from Newfoundland known as "Ennis".

One of the sisters introduced a song they had written, "Sing You Home". She commented that it was a way that they came to terms with a loss by suicide of a very close cousin. Their uncle, the boy's father, suggested that it might help in their healing if they wrote a song for their cousin.

The song had been performed many times before, but for this audience of some five hundred people it provoked not only applause that one could expect, but went on and on and on without words. Tears came to a lot of people and also the sisters were in tears.

It was a very powerful and moving experience. Something magical had just taken place. Obviously, they had touched many in attendance. They expressed that never before had they received such a response.

We had no idea of how many in the audience had their own stories to tell ... who may have been touched by suicide. We suspect there were many, even most present that evening.

Bonnie: "It was the first time that I had acknowledged my grief at losing a cousin by suicide about five years ago, and reminded me of an aunt who took her life before I was born. Also, another cousin died by suicide some years ago."

**Bonnie Blundon & Doug Winter**  
South Box, Ontario,  
Canada

**Note:** Words to the song may be found on the following page. The piece is available to listen to on the following link, on the second album, "Lessons Learned".

<http://ennismusic.com/site/albums/>



## Sing You Home

*Too soon to leave this earth  
How could all your work be done  
Ash to ash and dust to dust  
Seemed to me you just begun*

*When grief invades my soul  
There's comfort in a prayer, I find  
Though these candles honor you  
They burn for those you left behind*

*Chorus:  
I'll sing for you because I need to  
Right now this is all I know  
You always said you wanted me to  
So I will sing you home  
I will sing you home*

*Know that you will live  
On the lips of those who knew  
What it was you had to give  
And what it was they learned from you*

*This is my prayer for you  
And maybe someday I will know  
If it helped your journey home  
Or if it helped me let you go*

*Chorus:  
We're born unto this earth  
Generations one by one  
Ash to ash and dust to dust  
There is nothing left undone*

*Chorus X 2*