



# The Lighthouse

Newsletter of Touched by Suicide, Survivors Gather

Volume 11 Issue 2

Fall 2013

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## From the Editor **AS WE SEE IT:**

*For this fall issue I invited Cliff Knapp to provide a guest editorial. He has been a frequent contributor to The Lighthouse, and I knew that he would have something meaningful to share with our readers.*

### **Try A Little Empathy**

***"The longer we dwell on our misfortunes, the greater is their power to harm us"***

***Voltaire***

***"When it is darkest, we can see the stars"***

***R. W. Emerson***

I have encountered suicide in my life several times, but never more powerfully than when my son took his life in 1998. I have dealt with feeling sad, angry, guilty, and confused. I have also felt relief, acceptance, inner peace, and hope. Do these feelings qualify me to write on this subject with more wisdom than anyone else? I don't think so. The stories, poems, news items, and comments from all the writers appearing in this issue and those of the past reflect wisdom beyond their words. When someone speaks and writes from the heart, as they have, their insights can heal the hurt and heighten the hope. I believe that the world needs more empathy to deal with the trauma surrounding suicide. Here are some of my heartfelt insights on the importance of empathizing:

Suicide prevention is a very risky and unpredictable business. There are no guarantees that what you think or do will prevent a death by suicide. Even though my son was "only" 26 years old, he had lived at least 10 years in mental pain. Maybe he was far older emotionally and could not endure his torture any longer. In his final years I was always there for him and I tried my hardest to help him solve the problems of living with schizophrenia. When the initial shock of his death eased and I could temporarily suspend my self-centered grief, I tried to empathize with him and look at the world he saw. Empathy is a great gift if we have the will and courage to try it on for size.

***Empathy continued on page 2***

***Empathy continued from Page 1***

How would the world be different if we could muster empathy for the mentally ill or depressed who want to give it all up? Or for the aged who feel they have lived a complete life? Or for those with a terminal illness that robs them of a quality life? Or for the people who take their lives slowly by excessive drinking of alcohol, smoking tobacco, ingesting harmful drugs, or taking unreasonable risks in life? Suicide prevention is worth a try, but sometimes we have to step beyond ourselves to look at the worlds of others who may decide to end their lives.

As you read this issue of The Lighthouse, you may want to empathize with the departed loved ones and friends who are written about and the survivors of suicide who share their stories with us. As Voltaire and Emerson advised us, we can harm ourselves by dwelling on our misfortunes and when darkness enters our life, we can gain hope and wisdom. A little empathy can go a long way.

**Cliff Knapp****Guest Editor**

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Oregon, IL 61061

[cknapp@niu.edu](mailto:cknapp@niu.edu)**SUICIDE WITH NO WARNING**

More than 60% of gun related deaths in the United States are suicides. They are often committed by people whose history doesn't suggest a serious problem.

Studies revealed that some were not in contact with a psychiatrist at the time of death, and the majority were not on psychiatric medicines. Many people are more momentarily desperate than classically depressed. Studies have found that up to 50% of people who attempt suicide make the decision within minutes to an hour before they act. They may be depressed or have contemplated suicide but the final decision comes very quickly and often there is ambivalence up to the moment.

Putting time between a suicidal impulse and getting a loaded gun in hand may be hard to legislate. But support for stricter gun laws is growing and there is a continual national debate on new policies at the federal level which would include a ban on certain weapons, restrictions on high capacity magazines and stricter background checks.

***Excerpted from: The New York Times, March 10, 2013***

## **COMMENTARY**

### **TO GRIEVE OR NOT TO GRIEVE: IS THAT THE QUESTION?**

A horrendous crime was committed in Cleveland, Ohio over a period of ten years. What Ariel Castro, age 53, did to three women was an affront to all that is considered decent, humane and lawful.. He was found guilty of kidnap and rape and sentenced to life in prison.

On September 3, 2013 Castro hung himself with bed sheets in the jail where he was being held. This high profile inmate died by suicide according to the coroner's office. The prison director has called for a review of the circumstances and the state police are also investigating.

This well publicized case presents a dilemma when considering reasonable responses to such an act. While there is generally empathy and concern for survivors, are there the same feelings for the parents and other relatives of Castro? Do we grieve for all suicides and their survivors, or just the ones who have not been involved and charged with crimes?

Do survivors, members of support groups and caring individuals harboring mixed feelings of outrage and disgust also have feelings for Castor's survivors? Are they deserving of our empathy? Do we grieve for their loss as we grieve for the loss by suicide of a family member or friend?

I try to reconcile my thoughts as I struggle to "do the right thing". And I call this to your attention because these are realities that life sometimes presents, and which we are confronted with. While weighing the circumstances and results, we examine our own conscience and face these realities with hope for a brighter future ... without crimes and suicides.

***Bud Wiener***  
***Oregon, IL***

## **SOME SUICIDE STATISTICS**

- Last year 38,364 people in the United States died by suicide. Up 28% in a decade.
- The rate for white men and women jumped 40%.
- Military suicides were at record levels in 2012 ... 346 as opposed to 176 in combat in mid-eastern wars.
- Men died by suicide at four times the rate of women.
- Approximately 19,000 suicides in the United States were committed with a gun.

The perplexing question is "why"? What is creating the stress that makes suicide a better alternative than living? What we do know is that community awareness and focus on the problem are necessary beginning points to finding a solution.

***Mark L. Hopkins***  
***Rockford Register Star, June 23, 2013***

## PRELUDE TO WEIGHTLESSNESS

'Weightlessness' speaks to the kind of despair that blinds one to life's pleasures and blessings. It is the crossing over the Rubicon\* where there is no turning back and, it illustrates the depth of regret entailed that the legacy of a parent who completed suicide leaves to his two sons. Fortunately, they are stuck with me for the duration.

I would describe myself as a survivor who was destined to die by my own hands. – and not of natural causes. I have been hospitalized only once for mania, but several times for a debilitating and utterly incapacitating depression. And I have been hospitalized because I could not see any way out of my pain and unremitting despair except through suicide.

I've come to believe that my depressions are transient states and eventually, nay always give way to periods of high productivity and unfettered wellness. My relation to mood disorder has evolved over time where I no longer believe when I am depressed it is forever, and when I am well I am waiting with suffocating fear and loathing for the next depression to seize me in its death-grasp.

I had met a friend at a hospital who had survived a serious suicide attempt. He said, "I understand the kind of excruciating pain you're in, but please remember when you end your pain through suicide, you begin the pain of all those you've left behind." My friend did not frame this statement as a way of instilling guilt in me for pursuing a self-destructive course. He really wanted to provide an intervening thought bubble that would delay my acting upon brute impulse.

I am grateful to all those who have helped me weather the many storms I have had and will continue to encounter.

**Steve Lappen**  
**Medford, MA**

\* A decisive, irrevocable step.

## ANOTHER NFL SUICIDE

Paul Oliver, age 29, took his life at home in Marietta, GA in September, 2013. Oliver was a professional football player with the San Diego Chargers from 2007 to 2011. He was released by the New Orleans Saints after training camp in 2011 and returned to San Diego.

By 2012, there had been 12 suicides of active and retired NFL players in 25 years. Player concussions and their aftermath has been an on-going issue as all concerned examine the ravages of a violent sport and how to instigate changes in rules and equipment that would help prevent serious head injury.



## WEIGHTLESSNESS

*Hobbled by an illness invisible to you,  
But starkly real to me.  
Watching with bitter envy as all the runners  
Pass by me in a blur and cross the finish line.  
They are ready to meet new challenges,  
Enter new races.  
I, with burdens too great to bear,  
Inch slowly to the distant finish line.  
Suddenly I'm jolted by an image so compelling  
I must act on it without delay.  
Within view is the race's starter,  
With the pent up conviction of a cheetah  
About to seize upon his prey,  
I thrust myself on to him.  
I wrest away his pistol.  
Before he can react, I aim at my temple and fire.  
There is a crack, then a thud.  
My eyes bulge then come to rest,  
All the while remaining open.  
There is a momentary charge of intense pain,  
A headache greater than which no other can be conceived.  
And then, there is the release,  
The blessed state of weightlessness.  
Floating without a care.  
Immune to all burdens.  
Immune to all joys!  
I'm so sorry Nick!  
I'm so sorry Ben!  
I love you so.  
But how will you know?  
And then, there is the release,  
The blessed state of weightlessness.*

**Steve Lappen**

## A BUDDHIST APPROACH TO SUICIDE PREVENTION

James Ure suggests that Buddhism can greatly help those with mental diseases. It teaches "exercises" that empower individuals to be their own saviors by mapping out how suffering is created in the mind and then offering practical, therapeutic practices. He further states that "changes in how we perceive the world can reduce mental anguish resulting in a greater sense of happiness, stability and peace."

A Buddhist monk offers help to Japanese through "death workshops". He uses guided imagery and meditation to provide suicidal individuals with a means of refocusing their lives towards a positive future. Rather than seeing only reasons to die, they can now see infinite possibilities for their lives.

From: The Buddhist Blog, June 26, 2013.  
<http://thebuddhistblog.blogspot.com/>

## MAKING AN IMPACT THROUGH FILM AND VIDEO

**I.** At a recent film festival in Seattle *Alien Boy: The Life and Death of James Chassee* was a feature film that told the story of a 42 year old schizophrenic. James Chassee's mental illness appeared during his late teen years. As a indigent, shy, frail, fearful man living on the streets he had frequent run-ins with local law enforcement. Chassee died from respiration arrest in the police station from man-handling by cops.

The film highlights how such people who are mentally ill are failed by the system and thus a matter of public policy and budgeting priorities.

From: Seattle Weekly, September 25-October 1, 2013

**II.** A suicide prevention video was recently released in New Mexico that addresses the needs of Native American youth, focusing on suicide in the Southwest. The film is directed toward tribal leaders and policy makers and can be viewed at: <http://honoringnativelife.org/>. Suicide is the ninth leading cause of death in New Mexico which has a rate twice as high as the national average.

From: Indian Country Today, September 11, 2013

**III.** Last fall the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) released a video for suicide attempt survivors, *Stories of Hope and Recovery*. A highlight of this presentation is the story of Jordan Burnham who in 11th grade was hospitalized with suicidal thoughts and alcoholism. Following a suicide attempt at age 18, he turned his life around with support, counseling and medication.

SAMHSA issued and updated a national strategy for suicide prevention in 2012. It identifies action goals and objectives to help reduce the suicide rates.

Recommendation and resources are provided in the article that announced the video.

See: SAMHSA News, Fall, 2012, Vol. 20. No. 3  
<http://www.samhsa.gov/> or 1-877-726-4727

***SAMHSA News Furnished by: Tammy Lewis, Rockford, IL.***

## BOOK REVIEW

The Family Guide to Mental Health Care: Advice on Helping Your Loved Ones, Lloyd I. Sederer, M.D., W. W. Norton & Company, 2013, 312 pages

The focus of this well-written book is on helping family and friends understand and cope with mental illness. The book is very well organized and any jargon is explained in short order. The index takes you with ease to the subject you are interested in.

The author is the director of the New York State Office of Mental Health and has served on the faculty of Harvard Medical School . So how was he able to write a book that is so accessible? It's a wonderful mystery.

This is a weighty subject for such a remarkably short book! The first chapter: "Mental Illness: What Families Can Do" sets the tone. In the chapter "A World of Hurt: The Faces of Mental Illness" each diagnosis is described. A short case study is presented in a few paragraphs followed by a paragraph or two of "What Might This Diagnosis Look Like To You?" Next is a short section on how a diagnosis is determined, told in basic layman's terms. Finally, the options for treatment are discussed, including medications, effective types of psychotherapy and self-management techniques.

Chapters on medications, types of psychotherapy and rehabilitation, paying for mental health, mental health and the law, and on "Recovery: Why Believe?" add another layer of knowledge without being overwhelming. One appendix walks the reader through appointments and emergency care and when each is appropriate. Another mentions books and websites for further study, while a thirds gives thumbnail sketches of many of the Mental Health Measurement Scales.

The positive, straight-forward tone will be most welcome to those who are bound to worry about their loved ones. Millions of American families are affected by the confusion, misunderstanding, tension, fear and denial that mental illness brings. This book is for all of us.

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

## SWISS EXECUTIVES DIED BY SUICIDE

Recently, two top businessmen in Switzerland took their lives within five weeks. These Swiss executives had prominent positions with a well-known insurance corporation and a telecom operation. They complained of being in extremely stressful situations both in the workplace and in their personal lives.

Some people inflict stress on themselves - often high achievers - which may eventually lead to workaholism, depression and even suicide. These cases highlight the need for better understanding and appreciation of the risks involved with stress, and the need for providing mental health programs and information.

From: Wall Street Journal, September 7, 2013

***Article furnished by Anna Hatzipanagiotis***  
***Mt Morris, IL***



## The Lighthouse

**Touched By Suicide  
Survivors Gather**

**Volume 11 Issue 2  
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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 on the first Wednesday of every month 7:00–8:30 pm at Hospice of the Rock River Valley, between Dixon and Sterling at 264 Illinois Route 2, Dixon.

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