



The Lighthouse

Touched By Suicide
Survivors Gather

Volume 9 Issue 4 Spring 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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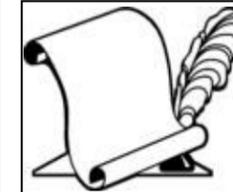
Newsletter of Touched by Suicide, Survivors Gather

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From the Editor AS WE SEE IT: SURVIVORS AS STORYTELLERS

In a recent article by Terry Tempest Williams*, the subject was films and filmmakers, particularly documentaries that expose reality and get at truth. She quotes Robert Redford, founder of the Sundance Film Festival, "We're not hearing the truth about a lot of issues...When the focus (in documentaries) is on personal stories we learn the truth of current situations and events."

Williams suggests that independent film makers are storytellers who are activists and whose role is to find their audience and build new audiences. "Storytelling is the umbilical cord between the past, present and future. Stories become the conscience of the community..." says Williams.

What then of stories told by suicide survivors? Do their personal accounts published in **The Lighthouse** provide our audience and new audiences with realities that reveal truths about "current situations and events" surrounding suicide issues and concerns? Are their stories raising conscience awareness about the human condition, mental health concerns and life and death issues? These are documentaries in print rather than film. While their impact may not be as great as the visual impact of a video presentation, they nevertheless provide opportunities for mental visualization of situations faced by suicidal individuals and the survivors who relate their stories.

The stories in **The Lighthouse** are essential to the purposes of this newsletter – to enlighten, to inform, to raise conscience awareness, to contemplate issues surrounding suicide and its prevention, to expose stigma and bias and to provide solace to other survivors.

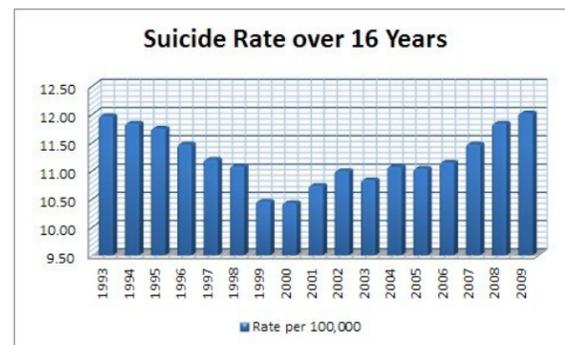
Throughout the years serving as editor of this newsletter, I have been keenly aware of the difficulties as well as the relief that suicide survivor storytellers feel. I know this personally from assisting some of them in being comfortable and wanting to share their experiences. There can never be too many storytellers for **The Lighthouse**. They not only serve our readers, but also can provide the writers with therapeutic release and possible closure.

* "Sundance's Winter Revolution," *The Progressive*, February, 2012

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SUICIDE RATES REPORTED

In 2009 there were 36,909 suicide deaths reported in the United States. These latest figures put suicide as the tenth leading cause of death, equal to 12 in 100,000 persons. This rate has increased since 2000 and is the highest in fifteen years. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) also reported that nearly a million people attempt suicide each year. Men are nearly four times more likely to die by suicide than women. Every 14.2 minutes someone in the U.S. dies by suicide.



GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING ITEMS TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

- Handwritten, typed or e-mailed items will be accepted
- Submissions may be edited or condensed for clarity and/or space limitations
- Credit is your decision – full name, first name, initials or anonymous. Hometown will be included unless requested otherwise
- Items will not be returned unless requested
- Editor assistance is available for advising on composition, flow, length, etc.
- All submissions greatly appreciated – stories, poems, news items, critiques, references and reviews

Recognizing Higher Risk of Suicide with Depression

Friends and loved ones are at higher risk when their depression is accompanied by:

- Feelings of hopelessness, purposelessness and/or desperation
- Extreme anxiety, agitation or anger
- Severe problems with sleeping
- Increased alcohol or other drug use
- Feeling trapped – like there is no way out
- Withdrawing from friends, family and society

From: "Suicide Prevention: What You Need To Know", brochure Swedish American Hospital, Rockford, 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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HEALINE IN THE "NOW"

Healing is a process which is unique and different for each of us as survivors. With time and patience I have come to know that healing can be found in every moment and that it continues to enrich my life. After my husband chose to die by suicide fourteen years ago my journey towards healing emerged from the drowning darkness of grief. I understood I was not accountable for his death and believed that living in misery was optional, and I chose to ask myself important questions about my next direction.

Without really knowing what I was going to do, I chose to move forward with as much energy and grace under pressure as I could summon from my internal and external resources. When exhausted and feeling incapable of finding a path, I looked to my three young boys and reduced the seemingly complex challenge to a simple desire for moving forward. I decided to surround my family with people who appreciated us for who we were and to take every opportunity to engage in and create positive, affirming experiences for my children. With the support and help of loving parents, family and friends I was able to commit to unconditional acceptance, love, and a happy life for myself and my children as guiding principles.

This commitment was a good beginning, but it has been achieved with varied degrees of success. At times I have been up and down like a roller coaster. While my goal is to achieve movement with ease and flow, a continuous state of healing has taken time.

I accept that some days are as fantastic as I could want them to be. Other days are a reminder of many losses which make me feel as if I have taken too many hits. I sometimes struggle with avoiding feelings of anxiety, fear and frustration and work on waking up to a fresh day everyday. Lower energy days and challenges make the concept of constant peace and stability seem elusive. I forgive myself if I blew it the day before and resolve to strive harder to refocus my intention to proceed with positive, open, embracing energy and create predominant success with optimism and new ideas.

I have found it important to embrace growth and change and to believe that everything is as it is meant to be. I know that when I am feeling strength, confidence and faith in myself I enjoy everything in my life and every moment. At my best, I am incredibly grateful for all that I have. At my worst, it seems that I give in to thoughts that pull me back into loneliness, experiences from the past and dreams of the future. I realize that the most important thing is to live in the now. What works to switch me on to the present is to imagine connecting myself to everything around me with love and appreciation while relinquishing anger, fear and blame.

Achieving "healing in the now" has been my goal, and is now my choice in every moment. I am able to forgive the great guy who died and realize that the exceptional, abundant life I desire for me and my family is already present. I have discovered that healing does not have a correct path. I have learned that questioning when I will get healed is an illusion because there is only now. Who I am and who I truly want to be is a matter of choice.

What has been said about healing in many ways by many people through many faith teachings became real to me through an Algonquin Shaman. He said:

"I want to help you remember that you are powerful; you are eternal; you can heal when and where you want; and that your healing is not conditional upon any outside or external sources, including people who have hurt you. You can get back any power you surrendered to anyone or anything, or power you felt someone took from you. You are not alone, and that what is needed, but does not exist, can be created with what you have available now."

I choose this wise counsel when I notice myself faltering, and I take healing action by loving myself and being grateful knowing that I have always had and will always have everything I need.

Arden Jackson
Caledon, Ontario
Canada

SUICIDE PREVENTION AND SUICIDE ADVOCACY NAVIGATING OVER ROUGH TERRAIN

When my son, Ryan, overdosed on aspirin for the last time, I asked myself how I could have prevented him from taking his life. I soon learned that this question always led to a dead end. Now I know I couldn't have done more than I was doing as a loving father. At 26 he was tormented by the daily problems that accompany schizophrenia – paranoid thoughts, maintaining relationships and jobs, taking medications, escaping through drugs and alcohol, and coping with the chores of money management, health care and cleanliness. His disease created a daily struggle making a quality life unattainable.

After he was gone, I was mired in a deep sadness and I sought counseling from others who had experienced a similar loss. I read about suicide, grief, and death hoping to understand what had happened. I also wrote in my journal and for suicide survivors' newsletters and spoke to college classes and support groups about Ryan. As an activist, I participated in suicide awareness walks to make a public statement about this issue.

After thinking about suicide prevention and suicide advocacy, I've broadened my views on these topics. I have more empathy for those who choose to die when they reach a high level of frustration about life. I know that I can't feel their feelings and think their thoughts, and so I respect their decision to end their earthly existence. I know how hard it is to disengage from my own grief long enough to appreciate my son's pain and sense of hopelessness that led to his decision to die by suicide.

My perspective on suicide takes the shape of a two-sided coin. On one side is an all-out attempt to save a precious life. On the other is the acceptance of someone's decision to end a life that appears to be unlivable. To act on behalf of the "saving side" of the coin, I donate money to suicide prevention organizations. I write and speak to others about my experiences with suicide and demonstrate for greater public awareness of mental health and other conditions leading to suicide. For example, bullying and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, race, class, or religion can result in discontent and death. I can attempt to right these societal wrongs in an effort to help those who live a hell on earth. I can support organizations such as the American Association of Suicidology (www.suicidology.org); Stop a Suicide Today (www.stopasuicide.org); or AASRA Suicide Prevention (www.aasra.info). On the "accepting side" of the coin, I can empathize with the person choosing to end his or her life. I can view death as part of life's cycle and embrace its inevitable arrival. I can give my support to organizations such as the World Federation of Right to Die Societies (www.worldrtd.net); Compassion and Choices (www.compassionandchoices.org); and the Final Exit Network (www.finalexitnetwork.org) – all promoting life-ending decisions after reflecting on the alternatives to living under unbearable conditions. I can support the decriminalization of assisted suicide as it exists in Montana, Oregon, and Washington in the United States.

I've finally reached a peaceful point to balance the deep sense of loss of my only son because I believe that Ryan took his life to ease his pain. I have greater respect for his decision to end his life and enter the great mystery. He believed the Teton Sioux holy man, Frank Fools Crow, who said, "It's a good day for dying." He chose May 19th, 1998 as that day. He knew that death is a natural extension of this adventure called life and he wanted to be first to explore it before I followed him.

Clifford Knapp
Oregon, IL