



The Lighthouse

Newsletter of Touched by Suicide, Survivors Gather

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CHECK IT OUT

O'Rourke, Meghan, The New Yorker Magazine, "Good Grief", Feb 1, 2010, pp.66-72.

A critical analysis and review on grief, stages of grief theory, time spans, rituals, research and references.

Eldora Pearson (see page 3) states that "the article opened up many new ideas. O'Rourke's article would provide a solid basis for discussion by any group searching for an understanding of grief."



From the Editor

AS WE SEE IT:

JOURNEY TOWARD ACCEPTANCE

The journey begins in the moment when death by suicide occurs and we become aware of that fact. For most, it is a shocking recognition that a life no longer exists and one is left with lingering questions. How did it happen? What did I miss? What could I have done?

Suicide is an action that begs to be rationally comprehended while the emotions are on full throttle. What was believed to be a reasonable life now is a shattered illusion.

Some suicides are well planned, carefully organized with pre-warnings issued. In some instances a letter or note may be left to be discovered. Other suicides occur in a flash of an instance without warning and without the possibility of preventive intervention that might have provided opportunities for reconsideration and redirection. Each situation is recognized for its own uniqueness but when viewed as 'one of many', analysis might suggest common patterns and projections that could lead to future preventative actions.

Survivors are on a long journey of coping, comprehension and courage. It is not an easy trip to take and help along the way is usually welcomed. Such help comes in many forms ... counseling, good friends and extended family, prayer, meditation, reading the literature, long walks, keeping a journal and, for some, the nurturing comfort of a support group.

This journey toward acceptance of a suicide death is not defined by a time frame. It is not a journey of acceptance, but one that is continuously moving toward acceptance. Whether you are a family survivor, a friend or a "concerned bystander," this is a journey that can give hope and meaning to the lives we live now and in the future.

While we look back on lives that were lost, we journey ahead in our own lives honoring the memory of those who died by suicide

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IN THE NEWS

Niagara Falls, NY – A 34 year old bioengineering researcher from the U of I, Champaign, IL died in an apparent suicide when he plunged over the falls. He had feared that his university position would not be renewed according to colleagues. Reported 6/10/10

Shenzhen, China – News reports in May and June indicate that 18 people died by suicide or attempted so far this year in a Foxconn Technology factory complex. This is a Taiwanese firm that employs some 400,000 Chinese workers in two campus-like complexes where workers eat, sleep and work on assembly line jobs. Workers complain of harsh management practices and long working hours. Many young migrants, 18 to 24, are from distant rural villages. The complex area is less than a square mile. The factory makes products and components for global electronic firms such as Sony, H-P, Dell and Apple. Learn more details on-line at "China Foxconn Incident."

New Haven, CT & NYC - The May/June, 2010 Yale Alumni Magazine reported that a popular, gifted and compassionate student died by suicide. He left New Haven March 30, went to the 86th floor observation deck of the Empire State Building, eluded guards, and jumped to his death. He was 21 years old and from Austin, TX. The article stated: "What weighed on his heart is a deep mystery we may never comprehend."

SUICIDE IN THE MARINE CORPS

In 2009 there were 164 attempted suicides among Marines. This year, through May, there have been 89 attempts. Last year there was a record 52 confirmed or suspected suicides and so far this year there have been 21. While the Marine Corp is half the size of the active-duty Army, the rate of suicides per 100,000 was greater in 2009.

A training program aimed at stemming the problem was instigated last year with some hint of progress being made. However, suicides are rising in all branches of the military and researchers are struggling to understand the causes.

Source: USA Today, June 8, 2010

DECIDING WHAT TO PRINT

In our last issue's Dateline we reported on the Minneapolis Star Tribune's Sunday page one article about elderly suicide. How does the news media decide about publishing prominent stories on suicide and mental health? Is the press more willing lately to report stories that promote understanding and aid in prevention?

In this instance, in the March 24 Star Tribune, the editor provided a look at decision making when revealing "a difficult but important story about suicide." Nancy Barnes' commentary is an excellent behind-the-scene account of the processes, deliberations and timing that it took her and the editorial board to reach their decision on printing a front page story about elderly suicide.

Note: I still have the commentary and upon request, I will send you a copy via mail or email.

Bud Weiner
Editor

RESPONSES AND REACTIONS

In Vol. 7 No 3, Winter, 2010, survivors were invited to share experiences or statements that were positive or discomfiting (AS WE SEE IT: How Should I Respond?). Eldora Pearson provides some provocative and poignant answers to that question in a very straight forward format.

After the loss of my husband by suicide in 1993, I survived because of family, friends, colleagues, students, and even strangers who surrounded me with their concern and compassion. Most said to me what I needed to hear, but we live in a culture which does not deal with death very well, and some well-meaning words did not bring comfort. Here are some of them, along with my reaction, which I thought but did not state at the time.

How are you? [We are starting with the basics here. It took a while before I did not cringe at this simple greeting. I could not say, "Fine". I was not fine; I was miserable. I often responded to the greeting with, "I'm working on an answer to that question."]

I know how you feel. [Do you? Grief after a suicide is an individualized agony. I do not think anyone can presume to know another's emotions.]

The worst grief is the loss of a child. [Will this statement make me feel better? Is there a hierarchy of grief? Should I feel relieved that my husband and not one of my daughters died? My heart does not work that way.]

You are going through the second (or any other) stage of grief now. [I think this cut-and-dried grief stage business is over-rated. Of course, there are common characteristics of grief, but the idea that there is a predictable progression from one tier to the next seems to me a simplification of human emotions.]

Time will heal your sorrow. You'll get over this. [This is not a mosquito bite or a broken arm. My heart, along with my normal life, has just disintegrated. I cannot think in terms of days stretching into months stretching into years as remedy for my grief.]

Are you depressed? [I do not remember how I responded to this question. Of course, I am overwhelmed with a feeling of loss. Have I left the impression that I need medication?]

I think you are going to blossom now. [Is losing my husband supposed to work to my advantage? I did not feel he was holding me back in any way.]

You must not feel guilt. [Why not just ask me not to breathe? You cannot get over the guilt unless you go through it.]

Your husband probably had everything planned ahead of time. There is nothing you could have done to stop him. [Maybe this is true, and I know the words are meant to reassure me that I am not to blame. But then I have to accept that he put on a dramatically convincing charade the last days of his life. That possibility exacerbates the hurt.]

You should get a dog. [Lose a spouse, gain a pet. I understand the thought behind this idea. Those who suggested it did not mean to imply that a pet would replace my husband. Yet, I still smile at how strange it sounds to me.]

Here are some of the responses that helped to sustain me:

You're in my prayers. [When I couldn't pray, the sure knowledge that others were praying for me gave me strength and helped me cope.]

Continued on page 4

Continued from page 3

The memorial service was inspiring. [Many comments on our farewell to Dan made me feel that we had honored him and at the same time helped those in attendance cope with a senseless death. I needed that affirmation.]

I don't know what to say. [But you have just said something meaningful; you have acknowledged that my situation is very difficult, and you wish you had the "right" words to comfort me. These words also acknowledge that grief is not the same for everyone, and words that would help someone else might not resonate with me. The silent presence of a friend is eloquence enough.]

You are strong. [My backbone was on a par with a wet washcloth, but it helped to know that others thought I was doing well. I do not care if they were saying those words to make me feel better. It worked.]

Let's get together for lunch. [Now you're talking.]

I admired your husband so much. [Hearing recollections of some event in my husband's life and words of appreciation for him were solace to my soul. Shared remembrance was a source of healing for me.]

We send our tears. [Sometimes simple ways of conveying sympathy, like these words that came from a cousin, mean more than any Hallmark verse. A note with only the words, "Still thinking of you", could make my day.]

I'm sending something I think you might appreciate. [I received books, significant quotations, original poems, and articles—all appreciated.]

I am just calling to check up on you. [Thanks! It does not matter what we talk about.]

You are loved. [When bereft of the love of your life, it is good to be assured that others hold you in their hearts.]

Since we all experience grief differently, other suicide survivors might totally disagree with some items on these lists. Whether words were helpful or not so helpful, I know that everything said to me was meant to bring solace. I am grateful.

Eldora Pearson
Elgin, IL

RESULTS FROM THE OUT OF THE DARKNESS WALK

It was quite a warm day on May 23rd, but there was an enthusiastic turnout in Sterling, IL to raise money for suicide prevention. The three mile walk began and ended at Sterling High School with 251 participants raising \$6,691.27 for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's education and research programs. Donations are still coming in to help shine a light on this important issue.

COMING IN THE FALL ISSUE

The theme for the fall issue of The Lighthouse is: Visual Artistic Expression, A Different Way of Addressing Suicide. Readers are invited to submit, via mail or e-mail, a drawing or sketch which will make for a unique newsletter that touches our readers in a special way. Your creative work can be representational or abstract, titled or not; and with your name and home city. You should also include a brief interpretation or comment. Deadline: End of August.



ATTENDING THE GATHERING

I am completing my senior year at Aurora University with a major in Social Work. My recent attendance at a meeting of Touched by Suicide, Survivors Gather was new for me and very educational. Listening to the group members share their stories allowed me to put theory and real life together.

I was not sure what to expect when I first showed up for the meeting but found the group to be very welcoming and open. I was concerned that just my presence would make those present uncomfortable and unwilling to talk. While I was an outsider, the participants were all willing to share their experiences with suicide losses and also myths that they had encountered.

One of the main myths that I noticed, and was most believed, was about someone who expressed feeling suicidal or wanting to end it all. The group seemed to agree that just because someone talks about suicide doesn't mean that they will not follow through.

I found it comforting that there is a place where those touched by suicide can come and talk with other people who have an understanding of what they are experiencing. This is a group that I would highly recommend to anyone who has experienced a loss by suicide.

I would like to thank the group for welcoming me and sharing their experiences with me, and say that I am sorry for your losses.

Christine Steinhaus
Sterling, IL

BACK IN TIME - I

Norma Jean Baker was born June 1, 1926 in Los Angeles. She was found dead as a result of a drug overdose in her Brentwood, CA home August 5, 1962. Baker, better known publicly as Marilyn Monroe, was a model, singer and an actress. "She was an extremely lovely person who was not able to overcome the terrible emotional burdens which were part of her childhood and which were aggravated by tremendous fame."

There were several theories about how her death occurred. Was it a deliberate or accidental self-administered overdose? Were the drugs administered by someone else? Was there a connection to her housekeeper, doctor, government, the mafia, FBI, or movie studio either alone or in combination with any of the others? Arthur Miller, husband, and her psychiatrist assumed that it was an accidental suicide.

Marilyn Monroe was an icon of Hollywood, the entertainment industry and an adoring public. Her thirty-six year life span was filled with vibrant drama, both on and off the stage and screen, but also with heartbreak and sorrow. Like others whose lives are cut short, we might wonder what her life might have been like today at age seventy-four.

BACK IN TIME - II

Katmandu, Nepal – Nine years ago news agencies reported a horrific incident of violence. The details of the story were confusing and slow in coming with various descriptions and accounts.

Dipendra Bir Birkham Shah, age 30, crown prince, was angry over a marriage dispute in which his mother would not allow him to marry the lady of his choice. At a royal dinner the prince killed ten of his family including his father, the king, and his mother. He then left the room and mortally wounded himself with a self-inflicted gunshot to the head. Dipendra reigned as king while in a coma for three days before dying. The massacre and suicide took place in June, 2001.



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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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SUBSCRIBER FEEDBACK

"Mass media is finally dealing with death by suicide more now, not just with statistics but with human stories of the effects on surviving family and friends. We think the influence of discussions (written and personal) like your newsletter is making the difference, even if your influence is not directly traceable. Many thanks for keeping us on the mailing list." **Note:** More feedback is certainly welcomed! Bud Weiner

MASS MEDIA HEADLINES

Headlines may not tell us all we need or want to know, but they do bring attention to issues and concerns of the day. AWARENESS of what makes the news is one important link in the chain of events that helps keep the public focused on cause and effect of suicide and contributes to the goal of PREVENTION:

- "Senate looks at suicide on Indian reservations"
- "More sleep might prevent teen suicide"
- "Embattled Metra chief kills self"
- "Relatives are left confused, isolated and full of grief"
- "Shrouding suicide in secrecy leaves its danger unaddressed"

MILTON BRADLEY, SEATTLE MARINER OUTFIELDER

Chicago Cubs baseball fans recall last season when Milton Bradley was "kicked off the team". Erratic behavior, anger, and emotional outbursts were reported but never fully explained. He just needed to be gone! The same happened in 2008 with the Texas Rangers. Now, this season in Seattle, Bradley's story of personal difficulties is revealed in a May 24 Seattle Times article by one of its sports staff reporters. He describes incidents on and off the field that caused Bradley to realize that he needed help, "To help get negative feelings and thoughts that he admits even included suicide, out of his head." Bradley has had anger issues in the past and sought counseling on his own, but this time he asked the Mariners for help, and they obliged. With time off and counseling he has come to better understand and accept his life. Counseling sessions will continue as he seeks to have a happier existence both on and off the field as a 32 year old professional baseball player.

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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