



# The Lighthouse

Newsletter of Touched by Suicide, Survivors Gather

Volume 12 Issue 2

Summer/Fall 2014

## Inside this Issue:

From the Editor	1&2
Readers Response	1
Have All the Stories Been Told	2
Have You Seen	2
Book Signing and Discussion	3
Two Newspaper Articles	3
Book Review	4
Depression To Mania	5&6

## Readers Response

The Lighthouse has been a blessing to me. Reading it gives me glimpses into other people's lives. I know it has helped people to better understand suicide, especially to help the ones left behind.

**Ramona Curtis**  
Seattle, WA



## From the Editor

### AS WE SEE IT: WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Why was the photograph of this man on the front cover of the August 25, 2014 Time Magazine? And, why was the story of his death prominently reported in both print and video, including TV and social media, around the world?

It is hard to believe that anyone would not have been aware of Robin Williams' death by suicide August 11, 2014.

The Time issue, in appreciation of Williams, lead with a photo essay "The Heart of Comedy ... one man with a thousand voices brought joy to millions but could not sustain it himself" by Richard Cordless. "Boxing the Black Dog" by Dick Cavett addresses the question of unshakeable depression that goes hand in hand with the gift of great performance. And a reprint from March, 2011 reports on Williams' replies to ten pertinent questions about his life as a comic celebrity.

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention reported a dramatic traffic increase in their website in the days following Williams' suicide. They also reported that requests for media reprints, expert interviews and numerous other interviews of local staff and volunteers were provided.

Among the many items read or submitted, one caught my immediate attention. It suggested that suicide is a fatal symptom of depression ... that Williams died from depression and not suicide. He had a sickness that caused pain beyond endurance.

The story of Robin Williams has brought about a heightened interest in mental illness, manic depression and suicide. The attention given to these concerns that suicide support groups address continuously may lead to further educational efforts, research and funding.

*"As We See It" Continued on page 2*

**"As We See It" continued from page 1**

Those who loved Robin Williams and his performances as a comic, actor and entertainer may now be more cognizant that his vulnerabilities are the kinds of vulnerabilities that thousands upon thousands of others face in communities around the world.

When a well-known and appreciated person seeks to end his life via suicide then perhaps a broader audience becomes involved in addressing solutions to mental health issues. They may become more supportive of legislation, social action through organizations at all levels, and a willingness to contribute to the goal of positive mental health for all.

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**HAVE YOU SEEN?**

- [After an Attempt, A Guide for Taking Care of Yourself After Your Treatment in the Emergency Room](#), SAMHSA, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, pamphlet, 14 pp.
- [Bipolar Disorder in Adults](#), Publication No. 12-3679 25 pp.
- [Bipolar Disorder in Children and Adolescents](#), Pub. No. 12-3680 21 pp.  
 Both publications : National Institute for Mental Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Revised 2012. Available from NIMH Resource Center, 1-866-615-6464

**HAVE ALL THE STORIES BEEN TOLD**

Over the years of editing The Lighthouse I have been aware that stories submitted usually reveal a desire and a willingness to let others know of circumstances and outcomes.

It is no easy journey to reflect on and then tell how suicide impacts the lives of survivors. Their stories are honest and sincere. They may seem shocking but they may also provide a better understanding of suicidal thought and actions and how survivors respond.

So are there any stories yet to be included in The Lighthouse? Are there storytellers who just haven't found the time or the words to organize their thoughts and put them in writing?

I want to encourage readers to consider contributing to the reservoir of stories, poems and essays, or to encourage others who may have something important to share. ALL the stories will never be told, but each addition helps to enlighten our readers while also providing the storyteller with emotional and spiritual uplift.

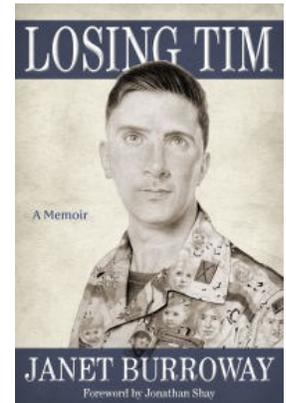
## BOOK SIGNING AND DISCUSSION

Janet Burroway, [Losing Tim, A Memoir](#). This is a mother's story about a soldier son who took his life. She provides a view into how soldiers and military contractors are changed by their combat experiences.

[Losing Tim](#), is Burroway's story of grieving for her son, Tim Eysselinck, who served in the U.S. Army, became a contracted de-mining specialist in Iraq, and took his own life upon returning to his home in Namibia on April 23, 2004. He had just turned 40. Thirty years after she wrote that essay — and 10 years after losing her son — Burroway is still thinking about what she could have done.

"Well, I sort of felt he was making the wrong decisions, and you can never be sure," she says. "I mean I could have pushed harder, argued harder, about the simplicity of the moral framework that he was buying. Trying to understand what happened to him became the project of the book, the plot of the book."

Burroway, an award winning author, did a reading and book signing September 24 at the Lake Geneva, WI Public Library. She will conduct a book discussion there October 15, 2014.



## TWO NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

- Rachel Pruchno, "When My Mom Committed Suicide," [Chicago Tribune](#), August 17, 2014. Rachel was 21 when her 51 year old mother took her life in 1975. Now she recalls those memories as she absorbs the implications of a recent similar story – that of Robin Williams.
- Melissa Westphal, "Living unashamed of suicide," [Rockford Register Star](#), September 7, 2014. This is the story of Ray of Hope, the suicide support group in Rockford and its two founding leaders, Carole Buhl and Karen Pfile. [Ray of Hope suicide support group meets the 2nd and 4th Thursday of every month at 7:00pm. The meeting is held at Gloria Day Lutheran Church at 4700 Augustina Drive, Rockford.](#)

**Chicago Tribune**

**Rockford Register Star**

Also listed along side this article is information about events of interest: Out of the Darkness Community Walk, Sept. 28; Suicide: Its Effect on Individuals, Families and Communities Conference, Nov. 7; Survivors Day Memorial, Nov. 22. Check the newspaper for details, locations and contacts.

## BOOK REVIEW

Bronnie Ware, *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*, Hay House, Inc., Carlsbad, CA, December, 2013, 4th Softback Edition, 243 pp. Digital ISBN 978-1-4019-4066-9.

The title of this book is deceptive. But the subtitle clarifies the intent of the author in sharing her life's story --- "A Life Transformed by the Dearly Departing". It is her life that is being transformed during a number of years of attending to older persons through palliative care.

Bronnie Ware is an Australian who has had more than her share of heartaches and setbacks. At one point she seriously considered that it was time to end her life. She states, "It doesn't matter how many people are around you. If there is no one available who understands you, or accepts you as you are, loneliness can readily present its agonizing self. The loneliness became so unbearable, the ache in my heart so constant, suicide became an occasional accompanying thought." (pp. 139-140)

She writes with openness and honesty. It is understandable that this small volume has been published and distributed not only in Australia but also in the United Kingdom, South Africa, Canada, India and the United States.

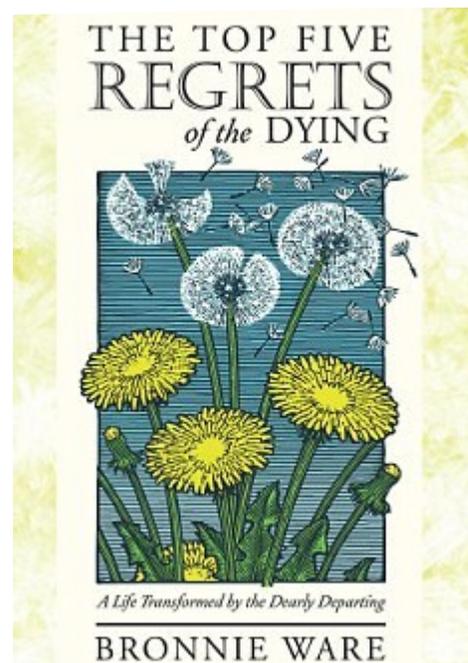
The five regrets of those whom she lovingly responded to as a "carer" were:

- 1) The courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.
- 2) Not to have worked so hard.
- 3) The courage to express my feelings.
- 4) Stayed in touch with my friends.
- 5) Let myself be happier.

This is a compelling story of compassion, love and sensitivity as Bronnie cares for the needs of her dying patients in their homes, and in the process finds her true self and direction for her future.

This is one of the most heartening and helpful books that I have read in my adulthood. I think you will find it the same for you.

**Bud Wiener**



## DEPRESSION TO MANIA

I have been thinking about manic-depression since I received your interview questions, and now since Robin Williams' suicide I am thinking about it even more.

I think I have known about manic-depression my entire life, not the words, but the ramifications of it. I can remember my father saying, "HE WASN'T LAZY. He worked harder than anyone I have ever met." I was very young, listening in to an adult conversation. He was speaking about his father. His sister had commented that their dad was lazy and just sat there when there was work to be done. She was angry because she had to pick up the slack. My father was emphatic about his father working so hard. I thought the whole thing odd, two people I loved disagreeing so adamantly about my grandfather.

Several years later when I was still in elementary school I was working with my mother on genealogy. Several old people commented on my grandfather's grandfather saying he just sat there. He didn't lift a finger. "It was the wife that kept things going." I remember reacting to this statement, too, because I did not know a grown man who just sat.

Not many years later my father seemed out of control, working like mad and then drinking to rest. Several years later, there was my own father just sitting.

Everyone knew something was wrong. No one knew how to do anything that might help. Everyone was at a loss. People who hadn't seen him would not believe that my father would ever just sit. It was so out of character. He would go from a skinny 185 pounds to a gross 325 pounds. The scale was seeing the swing of manic depression. Working 23 hours a day hard labor to 23 hours a day sitting in a big chair is mania and depression, manic-depression. That was my mother and father's life for more than a decade.

At this writing my sister is suffering with manic-depression, and all who love her are suffering, too. Genetic behavior? Learned?

When my mother read a magazine article about manic-depression she had a profound a-ha experience! She made an appointment to see the doctor, took the article with her, and went into partnership with a medical professional to try to help my father. Shortly thereafter my father had a stroke. I insist it was brought on by the manic depression. They always say there is a trigger event which brings on the depression.

The whole family goes along for the ride. They are unable to do otherwise. Manic depression affects everyone, but the focus is on the person needing help. It would be a blessing if people would recognize that EVERYONE is involved and needs help.

I have had students and staff who were suicidal. Intervention with medical professionals made the difference, but hospitalization in a psych ward is not anything I would wish on anyone.

I wish that people would understand one thing about those who die by suicide. It is NOT a selfish act. Suicide is the end result of a person in terrific pain. Persons may be saying to themselves, "the world would be better off without me." Suicide can be an act of love if seen from the suicidal person's point of view.

***"Depression To Mania" continued on page 6***



# The Lighthouse

**Touched By Suicide  
Survivors Gather**

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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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## ***"Depression to Mania" from page 5***

Fast forward to Robin Williams. Is there a more perfect representative of manic depression? Zany mania, drug dependency and alcohol abuse to the depths of despair. Why did Robin Williams die by suicide? He had so much to live for! Just think of his \_\_\_\_\_ (you fill in the words). He chose suicide because of the need to find release from the pain and in that state of mind he thought the world would be a better place without him. I disagree and grieve for the man and his family. If his death is a gift let it be to shed more light on manic-depression, more funding for research, more understanding of suicide on all levels.

**Ramona Curtis**  
**Seattle, WA**

***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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