



SURVIVORS

after suicide

A Program of Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center

JANUARY/FEBRUARY/MARCH 2002 • VOLUME 15, NO. 1 • PUBLISHED QUARTERLY

“Chin Up!”

Jon Loring
Agoura, California

After I received word that our twenty-six-year-old daughter was missing and that the police were searching for her near her home on Treasure Island in San Francisco, *after* one of her shocked and grieving friends reported by phone that her body had been found, *after* I called my wife and spent an hour pacing frantically around the house as my mind raced out of control while waiting for her, *after* we composed ourselves enough to pack a few clothes and eat a few bites, *after* we raced three hours up Highway 101 to break the news to our son and his wife in Paso Robles after midnight, *after* I awoke shortly after two a.m. and gently laid my hand on my wife’s abdomen where she had once carried our daughter and started quietly sobbing, *after* I spent the remaining part of the night pacing and wailing out of control until I called my best friend in Santa Barbara at 5:00 a.m. and continued to wail with my mouth in a form that I have only seen in a Picasso painting, *after* my wife and I (now with my son and his wife) raced the rest of the way up the 101 to San Francisco, *after* we identified her body behind the glass window at the Medical Examiner’s office and sat with her body for another hour talking to it, *and after* we spent time visiting with Sarah’s grieving friends in her apartment, *someone suggested that*

we all walk over two blocks to the place where she had died.

After the previous nineteen hours, this was something I did not want to do—but reluctantly grabbed an iris from a bouquet someone had brought—and followed the others, all with flowers in hand, in the solemn procession. In a large walk-in closet, on the second floor of an empty apartment in a vacant building, was her sleeping bag, a few extinguished candles, cookies and juice and snacks gathered to one side, and splatterings of her dried blooddrops from where she had awkwardly attempted to inject herself with more drugs beyond all the other drugs she had ingested orally. It was where she had spent her last lonely night, journaling the last moments of her odyssey as she slipped away. I stared at the scene, silently, and carefully placed the iris on the floor.

On the way out the front door, someone commented on the immense geranium plant in beautiful magenta bloom. My wife suggested that we take a clipping from the plant as a way to remember Sarah. I protested: I did not want to remember this place, to return to this island, nor to return to this city—*ever*. We kept walking.

That was May 3rd, 2001, the day after our daughter died. In February 2000, she had suffered a traumatic brain injury while snowboarding at Lake Tahoe. After a year and four

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I Will See You Again

Jackie Bowman
Tarzana, California

I have tried to write this for five years and every time I sit down to do so, I always end up crying and not finishing. To even relive that day crushes my heart and soul. I’m not sure I can finish today but I am going to try.

The last day I saw my mother was a bad day. The date was June 14, 1996. Her name was Ruth Bowman, and she was 54. My mother had been a recovering alcoholic for years but she had fallen off her wagon. She had gotten a

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Lois Bloom Honored

Ester Bryant presented Lois with a County of Los Angeles Proclamation at the SAS holiday potluck dinner in December.*

Story on page four.

**From L.A. County Supervisors Yaroslavsky, Molina, Burke, Knabe, and Antonovich.*

SAS exists to help people resolve their grief and pain in their own personal way, and to help them move forward in their lives, positively and productively.

Explaining Suicide to Children

Lauren Schneider, LCSW
Children's Program Director,
Our House

If you are reading this newsletter you probably have already been touched by a suicide and may wonder what impact it has had on the children in your life. You, better than anyone, know that this type of death can be more difficult to grieve than other types of deaths. For example, you may have already

experienced a withdrawal of social support, a “conspiracy of silence,” and/or your own difficulty believing that the death was intentional. In addition, due to the sudden, unexpected nature of the death, you had no time to prepare mentally for it and probably no chance for good-byes. This often makes your loss harder to grieve.

Also, when death is a result of suicide, the task of telling your child or children is even more difficult. The immediate aftermath of the death is a time of confusion and intense emotion for everyone involved and it is difficult under those cir-

cumstances to make any decisions about what to tell children and how much to involve children in the funerary rituals.

According to Grief Specialist Linda Goldman (2000), thousands of children each year will be directly impacted by the suicide of a parent, and one young person dies by suicide every 90 minutes. Regardless of the age of the child, it is always important to offer simple, truthful explanations about the cause of the death. Accurate information is crucial to the grieving process, and without facts your child will have difficulty with the first task of mourning, *Accepting the reality of the death* as identified by the leading authority on grief, Dr. J. William Worden.

The following examples are helpful tools for explaining suicide to children and helping them on their journey toward healing:

For very young children: First explain, “their person that died had been feeling very, very sad and could not think of any other way to end the pain/sadness.”

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I Will See You Again *continued from page 1*

D.U.I., lost her job, just been released from a 72-hour hold, and her new and abusive husband had just gotten out of the hospital and was too sick to care for her. I think the last straw was my brother (her baby) had just moved out seven days before. We'd been fighting for a week and I'd been staying with a friend, stopping by for nothing more than a change of clothes.

That day I woke her up from her nap. She was mad. She sat on the couch (that seemed to be her domain), in that house with the curtains closed and the darkness that was her life. I still have the picture of her 80 pound, frail little body in my mind as she turned up her bottle, took a swig, then tipped it my way and said, “thanks for coming by.” I stood in the doorway and thought *Mom I love you*, but I didn't say it. To this day I will never forgive myself.

The next morning my pager kept going off until I answered it. My cousin's words still ring in my ears: “You have to go home. Your mother is dead. She shot herself last night.” I hung up the phone and dropped to my knees in disbelief. No—my mother would never do that, she just left and she is on vacation. Not my mother who had dealt with me for years and all of my threats of suicide when pain was too much for me. I wasn't going to accept this. Later I even went so far as ordering the autopsy report because I convinced myself that my stepfather killed her. My mother would not have done something like that. Well she did. A .38 in her mouth took my mother's life and my own for that matter. She took her own pain with her, yet in a strange way, left it

behind for my brother and me.

The next six days were a blur. I began drinking heavily. I couldn't sleep, I couldn't eat, I couldn't shower, I was scared to be alone, yet I wanted no one around me. I went through the house punching out her pictures, screaming at the top of my lungs. In my drunken state I lit the couch on fire, burning up the bullet hole along with her stained blood. I cracked. How was I to ever live a life of normalcy again? Who was going to be there to help me cry? Who was going to be there to fight with me over stupid mother-daughter stuff, then tell me they loved me and it was for my own good? No more *I love you's*, no more hugs, no more lying my head in her lap when I hurt. Suddenly I was more alone than I had ever been. *Where was my mommy???*

I will never forget my last image of her in the casket. She looked so tired—not at peace like everyone said. I didn't leave her side. I wanted her to breathe. It was all a sick joke. I was afraid she might just wake up and tell me, “Shape up Jackie or this will be real” but she didn't. And it was real. When they closed that casket a whole new world of “dealing” had just begun.

My brother and I hadn't gotten along in years, but somehow we began talking. I found Survivors After Suicide, and read every book about suicide that I could find, soaking the pages with my pain. I started going to therapy. I would hold a pillow as tight as I could and pretend it was my mother. Tell her how much I loved her and missed her. When I dumped my story into the SAS meetings, it helped me to dump the grief. The most important thing was accepting that

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Explain what he/she did to end their life, “she took a whole bottle of pills which made her body stop working and then she died” or “he used a gun to make his body stop working, and then he died.”

While most people who are depressed are not suicidal, most suicidal people are depressed (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, 2001).

Therefore, **for school aged children** you can add: “Mommy had a disease called Depression which made her feel so sad and/or angry. Because of the disease she could not think clearly like we do, so she could not think of any other way to get help or end her pain except to end her own life.”

We strongly suggest that you conclude by reminding a child there is always someone willing to help and suicide, or the act of making your body stop working, is not the right answer.

With adolescents: It’s important to be both truthful and thorough in your explanations while remembering to emphasize that they are not to blame.

Developmentally, an adolescent is on a course of individuating and separating from the family. It’s important to remember that expecting them to assume parental or adult responsibilities prematurely because of the absence of the deceased could interfere with this natural and imperative developmental outcome.

When we are unable or unwilling to discuss a suicide openly with children it sends the message that there is something shameful or fearful. This contributes to the potential loneliness and sorrow the child may already be experiencing. Other people in the child’s environment such as teachers, babysitters, camp counselors may have similar difficulty talking about the death. It is always preferable for a child to hear the truth from the person they trust most in the safest setting possible. **Children eventually will learn the truth.** It might be from other children on the playground. This will only add to their confusion and might lead to feelings of anger. When children don’t learn the truth until adulthood, they may feel betrayed by those they trusted.

When there’s been a suicide, issues of blame, guilt and shame are often stimulated in both adults and children. A child may experience the act of a parental suicide personally.

This often affects their sense of self worth and creates feelings of abandonment. Unexpressed anger, guilt and shame can impair the child’s ability to form meaningful relationships in the future. Some survivors have indicated that the suicide causes them to become relationship-phobic, avoiding closeness because they become overwhelmed with anxiety, choosing to leave (or push others away) rather than suffer another abandonment. Others indicate the need to seek intimate connections to ward off feelings of isolation and loneliness and may enter too indiscriminately into relationships. On a positive note, Harvard researcher Phyllis

Silverman (2001) found that most childhood grief survivors are able to remain committed in relationships.

The way a parent interprets the death for a child will strongly influence the child’s understanding of the event. Therefore it is important to choose the interpretation that will least affect the child’s self esteem and worldview. It is important to help children see themselves as survivors rather than victims and to empower

children to lead happy, healthy lives. One way to do this is to help child survivors remember the person that died loved them and that the death is not the child’s fault. Another way to help children is to keep memories of happy times alive in conversation, keep photos and personal belongings of the person that died on hand, and by making a memory book.

There are many wonderful resources available to help children deal with their grief and keep their memories and relationship with the deceased intact. For more information about resources please feel free to contact **our house...** providing our community with grief support services, education, resources, and hope: (310) 475-0299 or (818) 592-4080.

BOOKS FOR HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH LOSS:

But I Didn’t Say Goodbye: For Parents and Professionals Helping Child Suicide Survivors
Barbara Rubel, \$14.95

Sad Isn’t Bad: A Good-Grief Guidebook for Kids Dealing with Loss
Michaelene Mundy, \$6.95

The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages
Leo Buscaglia, Ph.D., \$9.56

When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death
Marc Tolon Brown, \$7.95 (suicide mentioned; glossary in back)

Words to Use When Explaining Suicide to Children

Suicide: The act of killing yourself so that your body won’t work anymore. People who kill themselves often do so because they feel there is no other way to solve their problems or to end the pain they are feeling. Sometimes they feel hopeless that things will never get better and that life is not worth living. But, there is always another answer.

Death: When a person’s body stops working.

Depression: Extreme feelings of sadness and hopelessness that lasts a long time

Guilt: Something we feel when we think we have done something wrong or are the cause of something bad happening.

Grief: Natural feelings when someone close to us has died.

I Will See You Again continued from page 2

it wasn't my fault. The relationship with my brother grew and we realized all we have is each other and that is enough to keep us here.

I love my mother and I miss her so much. When two of my friends saved me from my own attempt, I realized it wasn't my time. I was put on this earth for some purpose and I'm staying until God takes me, and then I will be reunited with my mother. I have no other choice but to understand my mother made her decision—but it doesn't have to be mine.

I love you mom, wherever you are, and I miss you so much. Please watch over me and guide me. I will see you again, when it is my time.

Jackie lost her best friend to suicide shortly after finding the courage to write her story. Please go to www.twotoomany.com and click on the bottom puzzle piece (survivors) to read this story in its entirety.

Lifekeepers Memory Quilt

For too many families, suicide becomes a shameful secret. Each person thinks they are alone. Interestingly, if we have the courage to talk about our loss, we find we are not alone. Many have shared the pain we feel. Too many.

We can offer a tangible message to educate our nation, our neighbors, and our legislators that we who survive want to help others find a way to live. You can share your pictures and sentiments by dedicating a square in the Lifekeeper Memory Quilt, offering the image of your loved one. Two quilts have been completed. We are presently putting together the third.

A \$20 fee covers the cost of material, labor and postage necessary to create the visual tribute to our sons, daughters, sisters, brothers, moms, dads, friends. You will receive a cotton quilt square and instructions on how to proceed. Catherine Montgomery is taking over the coordination of the quilt from Leslie Hill who did a beautiful job on the first two and is taking a well-deserved time out.

If you would like to honor a loved one with a square let us know. All 50 states have come together in this joint effort to educate the world for the need to reduce the incidence of suicide. The two existing quilts have been displayed at national meetings.

We want the world to know they lived and were loved and deserve to be remembered.

Yes, I want to create a quilt square to honor:

Send the material and instructions to me:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number(s): _____

Enclosed is my \$20 check or money order made out to Catherine Montgomery to cover the cost of material, labor and postage.

Mail to:

C. J. Montgomery, P.O. Box 948, Redondo Beach, CA 90277
or call Catherine at 310.316.2527 for information.

Screening of Film *DIFFERENT PLACES*



On December 4, 2001, many friends and supporters of the Suicide Prevention Center attended a fund-raising screening of *DIFFER-*

ENT PLACES by the award-winning writer/director James Edwin Barrett. The film features three compelling stories about survivors of suicide, a topic the filmmaker is intimately familiar with as his mother Dorothy Louise Barrett took her life when he was just 12 years old.

Barrett wrote, produced, directed and edited the film. A true labor of love, *DIFFERENT PLACES* serves as a platform for Barrett to discuss the unique emotional complexities of suicide, the eleventh leading cause of death in the United States.

"More than 30,000 people are lost to suicide each year in the U.S. alone," says Barrett. "But even in the 21st century, the subject is still a 'taboo' topic of conversation. The irony is that this type of loss is more baffling than any other because the victim 'chose' to die. It needs to be discussed, especially within our own families. With *DIFFERENT PLACES*, my goal is to speak to survivors and non-survivors alike in a compelling short drama that shows three survivors in three different stages of healing."

Barrett, who wrote the screenplay for *DIFFERENT PLACES* during the fall of 2000, was motivated to "explore the point-of-view of surviving suicide, and how such a loss affects the lives of those left behind." Because of his own life experience, Barrett is a Survivor-Facilitator with the Suicide Prevention Center's Survivors After Suicide (SAS) Program. He drew upon the experience of losing his own mother and was inspired by the stories of survivors that he had heard over the years to create *DIFFERENT PLACES*.

After the screening, Barrett along with Susan Celentano, another SAS facilitator, led a discussion about the film with audience members. Many were moved and felt the film provided an opportunity to learn about a subject matter that is still too often surrounded by stigma. Others acknowledged the film's ability in provoking an open dialogue among its viewers.

"Considering the high number of suicides in the U.S. each year, there are thousands more family members, lovers, friends, and co-workers touched by suicide," concludes Director Jim Barrett. "*DIFFERENT PLACES* is a film that provides the viewer with a sense of support, not unlike that experienced in group setting. The ultimate goal of the film is to spark discussions among survivors and non-survivors alike. Communication is the key to survival. That includes helping our friends who are non-survivors to communicate with us."

Thank You, Lois!

More than 45 people brought food, flowers, and gifts to honor Lois Bloom at the SPC's Annual Holiday Potluck Dinner in December. Lois founded this newsletter after losing her son, Sammy, to suicide, and made it her mission to provide our community of survivors with hope, education, and resourceful information ever since. After sixteen years, she has decided to move on. She plans to spend more time with her children and grandchildren, to complete the book she is coauthoring, and to continue her local SAS volunteering and nationwide work.

Many shared memories created with Lois since she came to the SPC shattered and grief-stricken nearly twenty years ago. Toni Sargent, Norman Farberow, Carole Chasin, Jay Nagdimon, Kita Curry, Ester Bryant, Stan Lelewer, and Cecilia Urwin spoke of their appreciation for Lois and her dedication to helping other survivors. In addition to the beautiful proclamation presented by Ester Bryant, Lois received a plaque made of etched glass from the SAS staff recognizing her years of service as editor and writer. Stan Lelewer, whose story appears below, donated the cost for this edition of the newsletter in Lois's honor.

After a meal of lasagnas, pastas, salads and desserts, the closing ceremony began with Lois lighting a candle, and passing the flame on to light each of the candles she'd handed out. Leading the group in remembering loved ones, she



Carole Chasin, Ester Bryant, Lois Bloom, Jay Nagdimon, and Kita Curry

began by naming her beloved Sammy, whose nineteenth anniversary had just passed. Lois then walked the room with a basket filled with shells for people to choose from—shells she and her husband, Sam, collected at Santabelle Island in Florida while celebrating their fiftieth wedding anniversary. For her final gift of the evening, she brought everyone's voices together to read aloud a prayer of hope and acceptance. Cecilia Urwin, who the SAS staff also recognized with a plaque for her many years in helping Lois produce the newsletter, graced us with a moving rendition of *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*. But, the singing didn't stop there—someone remembered Lois would be celebrating a birthday in two days. The evening concluded with birthday wishes and much-deserved applause.

Thank you, thank you, thank you, Lois, for finding a way to connect survivors, and for your tireless efforts to communicate and educate.

Meet Stan Lelewer: Survivor, Benefactor, Philanthropist, Counselor...



The Survivors After Suicide program would very graciously like to thank Mr. Stan Lelewer for donating the cost for this edition of the SAS newsletter. Stan is a survivor who lost his son, Stephen, July 25, 1993. He became involved with Didi Hirsch three years later by taking the SPC crisis line training and vol-

unteering "on the line" until February, 2001. During that period he also participated, as a survivor, in a Survivors After Suicide support group and was subsequently asked to be a co-facilitator and Telephone Support Counselor. Stan has co-facilitated many groups and has spoken with many survivors while they are waiting to enter an SAS group. His

involvement extends to serving on the committee for the annual 5K/10K Run/Walk, as well as the SAS Advisory committee. In September 2000, Stan was elected to the Board of Didi Hirsch CMHC where he serves on the Budget and Finance committee, as well as the Financial Resources committee. His goals include helping to create an endowment, expand the board members involvement in significant fund-raising events, to contribute personally and solicit funds to help ensure the long-term success and influence of Didi Hirsch and, last, but not least, Stan pledges to work to expand our suicide survivor program and create an outreach program to better acquaint the Los Angeles community with our role in suicide prevention and survivor counseling. Thank you again, Stan, for all you have done and plan to do for the welfare of so many.

Contributions 11/7/2001 – 1/18/2002: *A million thanks for your generosity!*

IN LOVING MEMORY OF:

Dorothy Barrett from Chris Parnell
Ruth Bowman from Jackie Bowman
Kris Buhbe from Maria and Michael Buhbe
Fred C., Jr. from Jean and Fred Calhoun
Judy Chapman's son from Karen and Mark Gordon
Laura Roanne Cole from Barbara and Mel Cole
Glen Dail from Carol Dail
Bradley J. DeLoof from Janice DeLoof
Jeffrey Gutin from Nina Gutin
Jennifer Laura Justus from Annette and Jim Justus
Theodore Katzmman from Rev. Gayle F. Katzmman
James Leitner from Marilyn Sperka
Ginga from Mr. and Mrs. John D. Ralford
Andrew Langdon from Harry Langdon
Rebecca Suzanne Lemmon from Mr. & Mrs. Robert E. Lemmon
Donna Neil from Terry Neil
James O'Mara from Colleen O'Mara
Noel C. Parrish from Emilia G. Parrish

Emmanuel Pascual from Cathy Pascual
Lois Petrovich from Roxie S. Goodman
Ethel Rieker from Paul Reiker
Jerry Taylor from Susan L. Bloom, John Chambers, Patricia A. Charlton, Angela Cheung, Corrine Cortinas, Joan Crocker, Wendy Edmisten, Monica Genewich, Marlene and Victor Gerson, Judith Johnson, Clyde Juloya, Andreea Lua, Drenda and Stephen Miller, Susan and Craig Purcell, Connie and James Racusin, Nancy Ramseyer, Ellen Shumsky, Zona Steffen, Nga Tu-Mendoza, Marilyn Turner, Patricia and Jeffrey Van Bogaert, Susan and Jerry Weil, Ronald White, Carolyn and John Williams, Janet Yarbrough

Robert Vogt, Jr. from Eileen J. Vogt
Dallas Whitney from Carol and Douglas Whitney
Laura Wilson from Susan Celentano

IN HONOR OF:

Lois Bloom from Mr. and Mrs. Stanley D. Lelewer
Barbara Hornichter from Dr. and Mrs. Sidney Rosin
Karl Rieker from Paul Rieker

That Day

*This Black Dark Cloud
That hung over you
Was all-consuming and wearisome
Depleting your whole being,
taking your all
No longer allowing, you to be you
Yes this cloud
Little by little, was swallowing
you up
You saw no way out
Too many tears
You didn't want to be here
You were at ease with your decision
You had come to terms
You were ready, to part
From us all
Not in the fall
But on a beautiful spring day
And the songbirds,
they all sang for you
And the chimes, they all rang for you
On that day you left
On that day, you decided to go*

—Josie Shahabi
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Calendar of Upcoming Events

MARCH 23

SAS Co-faciliator/ Telephone Support Counselor Training

Saturday, March 23rd,
9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
at Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health
Center, in Culver City

Any survivor who is interested in volunteering their time may contact Carole Chasin, program coordinator, at 310-751-5370 to enroll in the training.

APRIL 10-13 (Wednesday–Sunday) 35th Annual American Association of Suicidology (AAS) Conference

"Suicide Prevention: Opportunities & Challenges Along the Continuum of Health & Illness." The Healing Conference is scheduled for Sunday. For information see: www.suicidology.org.

APRIL 24

Living with Grief: Loss in Later Life

The Compassionate Friends' cooperating partnership with Hospice Foundation of America's "Living with Grief" teleconference, moderated by Cokie Roberts, ABC News. Visit the HFA website www.hospicefoundation.org or call HFA (800) 854-3402 for a list of program locations and contact information.

MAY

The first week of May is National Suicide Prevention Week.

JULY

SPAN-USA Annual Awareness Event

Join other survivors from all over the United States for the Annual Suicide Prevention Advocacy letter delivery to Capitol Hill. All State's Quilt Display. For information see: www.spanusa.org.

Visit www.afsp.org's 2002 Survivor Support Groups Directory, and view their new state-by-state guide to meetings.

SYMPTOMS OF MAJOR DEPRESSION

Persistently sad mood or absence of emotions.

Feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, guilt, pessimism or worthlessness.

Substance abuse.

Fatigue or loss of interest in ordinary activities.

Disturbance in eating and sleeping patterns. Irritability, increased crying; anxiety and panic attacks.

Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions.

Thoughts of suicide; suicide plans or attempts.

Persistent physical symptoms or pains that do not respond to treatment.

DANGER SIGNS OF SUICIDE

Talking about suicide.

Statements about hopelessness, helplessness or worthlessness.

Preoccupation with death. Suddenly happier, calmer.

Loss of interest in things one cares about.

Unusual visiting or calling people one cares about.

Making arrangements; setting one's affairs in order.

Giving things away.

A suicidal person urgently needs to see a doctor or psychiatrist.

“Chin Up!” *continued from page 1*

months of therapy and drugs and on-going care from her family and friends, and varying levels of functionality and three admissions to suicide wards, she died.

Four months later, on September 3rd of Labor Day Weekend, after two days of visiting with Sarah’s friends in San Francisco, I persuaded my reluctant wife to return with me to Treasure Island, to walk through Sarah’s old neighborhood, and even to the place where she had died. Our roles had reversed. It was a kind of holy pilgrimage for me. I stood outside the apartment and gazed at the padlocked door and the geranium beside it. With my wife standing in the gusty wind, watching from perhaps fifty feet away, I knelt and broke off a small clipping from the plant and picked one of the few remaining flowers.

In doing this, out of the unconditional love a parent has for a child, I could somehow _____ my daughter’s last act here on earth. So what is the missing word? “Accept?” “Affirm?” “Respect?” “Honor?” It’s none of these and somehow all of them and more—and something different. I truly loved and love my daughter. Her birth was the happiest, most transforming day of my life. The depth of loss with her death is beyond measure. If I love my daughter *unconditionally*, I cannot but accept-affirm-respect-honor her last decision—to end her life.

The geranium clipping somehow survived the airplane trip back to Los Angeles, a subsequent overdose of Miracle Grow, and now grows (in its dormant phase) in a pot by our kitchen sink—as one of many signs of our love for her.

What happened in the four months between absolute repugnance for this poor little plant and absolute acceptance of it?

Years ago, I read a lot of “process theology,” based on the philosophy of A.N. Whitehead, while a graduate student at Claremont, California. It opened my understanding of God, human freedom, tragedy, and other deep issues. This provided a nurturing context for my experience of Sarah’s life and death.

Also, thanks to our counselor Susan Celentano, my wife and I developed a growing almost Zen-like capacity to accept paradoxes and all the other things we now have to hold in our consciousness: the *what-if’s*, the *if-only’s*, the *why’s*, the *why-aren’t-you-grieving-the-right-way?* game that we play back and forth with each other, the emptiness of the holidays without Sarah, the well-intended but seemingly inappropriate things that people sometimes say to us. Her forwarded mail. Life amidst death. We are developing an ability to accept things that can never be resolved—to accept the unacceptable—in the same way that what never could

have happened, happened.

We are in uncharted waters. We experience times of deep, immobilizing grief in the midst of living our lives every day. We sit at our daughter’s grave in the sun or pouring rain, looking past old tombstones to the sea off Santa Barbara. We get up, go to work, and enjoy our lives. Though we had once vaguely sensed that some far off day each of us would be cremated, we bought a pair of cemetery plots, next to hers. I listen to music from her CD collection. Trout fishing at a small High Sierra lake at nearly 11,000 feet in late August, I cast out and unconsciously turn towards where my daughter should be laughing and fishing, nearby. I watch videos of her telling stories, ironically, in silence, using American sign language, for classes she took to help the hearing-impaired. I hang her stocking on the fireplace at Christmas knowing that Santa won’t be coming.

My wife Susan and I live in a world where part of a geranium plant that once graced the entrance to the place where my daughter killed herself sits in the sun by our kitchen sink. I live in a world where the parent of one of my students, aware of Sarah’s life and death, tells me encouragingly, “Chin up!”

Nothing will be resolved. Nothing will be all right. Life will go on. I will accept it. Sarah, I love you.

Have You Lost a Family Member to Suicide?

I am a doctoral student in clinical psychology at Loma Linda University, and I am conducting research on Survivors of Suicide (family or friends who have lost a loved one to suicide). I am also a survivor of two suicides of family members. The purpose of this research is to shed light on the many ways a suicide may impact family members. I am hopeful that my study will help non-survivors to better understand the social and psychological consequences of suicide for family and friends.

If you are interested in this research, your voluntary participation is requested. Participation will be anonymous and results will remain confidential. Statistical analysis will be based on group results and will be reported in grouped format only. Participation entails completing a survey of approximately 150 questions about your thoughts, feelings, and social experiences following the suicide of a family member.

YOUR PARTICIPATION IS GREATLY APPRECIATED!!!!

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Please **CALL** Monica Hodges, M.A. at (562) 397-6294,

EMAIL mhodges@deltanet.com, or **MAIL** the request form to:

Monica Hodges, M.A., C/O Hector Betancourt, Ph.D., Loma Linda University Graduate School, Loma Linda, CA 92350

Yes, I am interested in participating in this study. Please send me:

The entire package More information about _____

Send to: _____

Address: _____

City/State: _____ Zip _____

Or call me at: _____ Best time to call: _____

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Also include the issue date and year the article appeared. Kindly send us a copy of any reprints for our authors to the attention of Deborah Pikul, Editor. Thank you.

View this newsletter online at www.suicidepreventioncenter.org. Click on Bereavement.

SURVIVORS AFTER SUICIDE NEWSLETTER

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4760 S. Sepulveda Blvd.
Culver City, CA 90230
(310) 751-5324

Crisis Line Number:
(310) 391-1253

Editor: Deborah Pikul
(dpikul3@aol.com)

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