



# COMFORTING FRIENDS

Published monthly by Sacramento Chapter of Friends For Survival, Inc.  
A National Outreach Program for Survivors of Suicide Loss  
P. O. Box 214463, Sacramento, CA 95821 (916) 392-0664  
[www.friendsforsurvival.org](http://www.friendsforsurvival.org)

MARCH 2009 Volume XXVII Issue 3

## EDUCATION/SUPPORT MEETINGS

Call: Marilyn Koenig, 916-392-0664

John O'Neal, MD will be our speaker. He will be sharing information on depression and medication; when to get help and the latest research. Join us for a special meeting with helpful information /suggestions & with friends who are walking this journey together.  
This meeting is always held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday.

## NEWS BETWEEN FRIENDS

### Raffle winners are:

Grand prize - Michelle Murphy, Colfax, CA  
First Prize - Sandy Little, Sacramento, CA  
Second Prize - Susan Viley, Roseville, CA  
Third Prize - Elaine Watt, Woodland, CA  
Fourth Prize - Sue Hodam, Sacramento, CA  
**A very big thank you to EVERYONE that bought tickets and supported this fund raising effort.**

Fifteen volunteers have donated hundreds of hours over the last two years to produce volume 3 of our year of healing project. *Cherished Inspirations from Comforting Friends* is a compilation of the very best articles from 10 years of our newsletters. It is 154 pages and available for a donation of \$20.00 plus \$5 for postage / handling if we mail it to you. They are also available at our meetings.

If you find comfort and encouragement from our newsletter, this is for you.  
It also makes a great gift for yourself and others.

Please see page 2 of this newsletter for a heartfelt column from one of our newest board members, Gail Beeman.

The American Association of Suicidology will be holding their annual conference in San Francisco, the week of April 15. The Healing Conference for survivors will be only on Saturday, April 18<sup>th</sup>. For information call 202-237-2280, [www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org)  
Our memorial quilts will be displayed at this event.

## FRIENDS FOR SURVIVAL IN GRASS VALLEY

Call: Marilyn Koenig, 916-392-0664

## CHRISTIAN SUPPORT FOR SURVIVORS

Call: Marilyn Koenig, 916-392-0664

## FRIENDS FOR SURVIVAL IN CHICO

Call: Marilyn Koenig, 916-392-0664

## FRIENDS FOR SURVIVAL IN GALT

Call: Marilyn Koenig, 916-392-0664

## FRIENDS FOR SURVIVAL IN THE BAY AREA

Call: Marilyn Koenig, 916-392-0664

We have a local support network on the web [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com). list is on the left hand side, click on groups, type in SACRAMENTO\_SOS, click on join this group. If you have questions call Bobby, 209-471-1743 or email [bharr@sbcglobal.net](mailto:bharr@sbcglobal.net)

**Check out our new website. Scott Garcia, our webmaster, is updating and add new features regularly. We welcome YOUR comments and suggestion.**

You can help us financially by donating your car, truck, RV or boat. Go to our website, [www.friendsforsurvival.org](http://www.friendsforsurvival.org) for the link to our auto donation program, or call 866-538-7366. If you have questions, please call us at 916-392-0664

You can help us save money when YOU move! We spend up to \$40 each month to receive forwarding addresses (from the post office) for families that have moved. Please notify us in advance, if you can, before you move.



### Suicide's Aftermath: The Search For Healing

*by Nomi Berger*

Healing is a matter of time.

But how does one measure it? In days? In months? In years? Is sooner better than later? Is there such a thing as too little time? Or even too much?

Unfortunately, healing is a process without maps or guidelines. It's as individual as the loss that spawned it. Mine was the suicide of my nineteen-year-old brother Peter, in 1968.

Confronted with the choice of living with the trauma of his death and going mad, or burying it and going on, I chose to bury it. And for the next 27 years, it remained buried, while I myself remained frozen in the grief process.

But if grief was my prison, then guilt was its warden. Because my brother's last words to me were, "Help me." Three weeks later he was dead. And I was left haunted. Haunted by my failure as a sister to save her only sibling's life. Haunted too, by a wide range of emotions: anger and denial; sadness and loss; and pain. Violent, searing pain.

Whenever I looked for the answer as to why my brother died, I was told, "Hey, it was the sixties."

To blame the times for his destruction seemed logical enough. For if ever anyone had exemplified the 1960's, it was my brother. Brilliant. Inquisitive. Adventurous. Impulsive. Fearless.

A marginal student, he dropped out of university in his sophomore year. For the next fifteen months, he lived with a wide circle of friends in Montreal's flourishing hippie community. And it was there, in that shadowed world of drugs, mysticism, and pseudo-Eastern philosophies, that he rose, quickly and briefly, to a position of exalted, yet questionable prominence.

In a desperate bid to save my brother's life, my parents signed the papers committing him to a psychiatric hospital for observation and treatment. Two days before his scheduled commitment, he was arrested for drug possession by the RCMP and jailed. My father, an attorney, arranged to have him released on bail in order to enter hospital, but he was discharged—without my parents' consent—after a scant, twelve-day stay.

Six days later, he was found dead in the bedroom of a friend's house.

That night, I wrote the first in an ongoing series of poems about him. Ever since childhood, I'd used poetry as a way of exercising my secret demons and assuaging my private pains. Now, in the depths of an agony unlike any I'd ever known, it was like returning to the welcome embrace of a dear and trusted friend. And so, whenever I felt that familiar

surge of pain inside me, I'd write a poem. Then I'd slip it into the large plastic box that lay hidden at the back of my clothes closet.

As the years passed, I found other, more public outlets for my pain; short stories and eventually, novels. Then three years ago, as I was beginning work on a mystery, I suddenly and inexplicably became obsessed with the need to find out everything about my brother's death as well as his life, from those who'd known him as I never had.

And so, I set aside my fiction and embarked on a journey, both of discovery and self-discovery. After decades of secrecy and sublimation, it seemed I was ready now to thaw the ice that had kept my brother frozen in time and kept me, frozen in mourning. All he's left me when he died was fragments of himself. What I needed was a counterbalance to those fragments. I realized that unless I could see my brother as a whole person, I'd never come to terms with what had happened to him. I'd never be able to let him go. And I'd never be able to take those first, long-delayed steps toward healing.

During my search, I discovered, among other things, that my brother had been well-loved. That everyone who'd known him had thought him extraordinary. That they'd been permanently scarred by his death. That they were less now than they were when he was alive.

They spoke of his unique intelligence. Of his limitless energy and creativity. Of his charm. His generosity. His magnetism. Said one of his friends, "Peter didn't pass through people's lives unnoticed. Those who experienced him are still holding pieces of him."

What a tribute to him. What a comfort to me. What blessed consolation for a spirit in need of just such consolation. I hoarded each precious testament like a miser hoarding gold, and used them as paving stones for my path to healing.

But I was not alone in that path. With me was my long-time therapist, who helped me do what I'd never been able to do before: strip away the mental armor shielding my heart. He taught me the more one talks about a painful subject, the less power that subject has. The more one's exposed to a particular trauma, the less frightening that trauma becomes.

And so, I began to talk. And as I talked, we began, gradually, to separate the strands of my emotions, starting with my anger. I learned that I'd stopped its natural evolution in order to protect myself. To heal, I would have to direct my anger where it rightfully

*Continued on page 4.*

belonged: at my brother, for squandering his potential and throwing away his life.

I learned that by stopping the grief process and going into denial, I was preserving my brother as the brother I remembered: kind and good, funny and sweet, loyal and loving. That way I wouldn't have to admit that the young man I'd adored, who, with his near-genius IQ, could have been and done anything, had chosen instead to embrace the corrupted dogma of the sixties, drop out of society, and deal in drugs.

I learned that part of me had never accepted the fact that my brother was dead. That I was always waiting for him to reappear, to explain that he's been out there someplace all along, hiding. It was time for me to acknowledge the truth. That he wasn't going to reappear. That he wasn't out there someplace hiding. That he was, in fact, dead.

And I learned that my guilt was misplaced. I could not have saved him. By the end, the sheer quantity of marijuana and LSD he'd ingested would have changed him—his personality as well as his brain—utterly and completely. The choice he made to end his life would have been the choice of a mind destroyed by the very drugs he's used originally to expand that mind.

After many, many months of talking, I finally asked me therapist about closure.

He told me that, like grief and anger, it too, was an evolutionary process. And that I'd know I'd achieved it when I had a feeling of release, a feeling of peacefulness.

Thankfully, I have those feelings now. Because I have, finally and undeniably, begun to heal. The grief has faded. The guilt has eased. The anger has lessened. And the pain has been reduced to a tender, muted ache. The sadness, though, remains. Because to put it simply: I miss my brother. Miss what he might have been. Miss what we might have shared together. Miss the sweetness of unfulfilled dreams and unrealized possibilities. His dying tore a jagged hole in my psyche, and although I've stopped expecting it to close completely, it has begun to shrink, and the edges are smoother now.

I've traveled a great distance these last three years and learned more than I'd ever hoped or expected to learn. To me, however, the greatest lesson has been this. There can be an end to the grief process: one can seek and ultimately find peace of mind. No matter how late one starts down the path of healing, it is never, never too late.

I draw my strength from that and carry on.

*Nomi Berger is an author and poet who lives in Toronto, Ontario. Her search for the truth about her brother and her own search for closure is chronicled in her book, My Brother Peter, reprinted from The Forum, March/April 1999.*

#### 4.

#### SAFE PASSAGE

As I continue grief's journey, my body aches from its burden of overwhelming sorrow.

My throat is tight, my stomach knotted, my chest bruised with an inner hurt that makes it difficult to draw a breath. It feels as if my skin has been removed and I am exposed to the brutality of the world, undefended even by a thin portion.

I can only hope that as with other journeys, there will be a time for rest. And as with other hurts, my body will someday heal.

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We need a grieving room for all of us who are mourning, a quiet, safe place of solace where emotion is sacred and the continual falling of tears generates the energy for our healing.

We need a grieving room with thick walls to keep despair outside and hope secure within, and, on the floor, comfortable pillows to remind us to rest.

*excerpts from Safe Passage: Words to help the grieving hold fast and let go, by M. Puma.*

*reprinted from TCF, Orange County Chapter Newsletter, August 2003*



#### Reflections of a Survivor, A Basic Plan for Survival *by Linda Fiatt, Las Vegas, Nevada*

##### Choose to Survive

We must give ourselves permission to grieve deeply for a season.

##### Stay Connected

While on the healing journey we must ask God and safe, supportive people to be our traveling companions – to share our sorrow, ease our fears, defuse our anger, and process our guilt. In relationship we have a much better chance to reclaim our joy.

##### Practice Acceptance and Forgiveness

We must give ourselves grace and truth and time to eventually accept our loss and forgive others and ourselves.

##### Slowly Get Back In the Game.

All the while we must gently and gradually ease ourselves back into reality.

##### Be the New You

We are forever changed, yet essentially the same living, breathing, loving, inherently precious children of God.

##### Share Your Experience

We can now be seasoned traveling companions for other survivors on the recovery road.

*reprinted from SBS newsletter, Portland, Oregon,*



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*reprinted from Healing the Hurt Spirit, Daily Affirmations for People Who Have Lost a Loved One to Suicide by Catherine Greenleaf*

#### **March 27 --- My Moral Compass**

When someone we love suicides, our moral compass spins wildly and get scrambled. That, in part, explains so much of the confusion around suicide loss. Many of us before our loss thought suicide was evil, bad, or unlawful. But then someone we loved suicided and we were plunged into a moral dilemma. How could we condemn someone we love so much as evil? We discovered we would have to judge our loved one as bad, or change our attitudes about suicide. Many of us have chosen the latter. By allowing the taboo surrounding suicide to lift, we are freed of antiquated and limiting beliefs. We follow our hearts so that we can have compassion for our loved one, and so that we might both have some peace.

***My moral compass went into a spin  
and landed at an open heart.***

