

# Comforting Friends



Published monthly by Friends for Survival, Inc.,

a National Outreach & Support Organization for Those Affected by a Suicide Death

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National Edition

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## News Amongst Friends!

### Raffle Prize Winners!

*First prize:* romantic weekend,  
Tom & Kathy Collins, Yuba City, CA

*Second prize:* timeshare,  
Bill Couch, Lincoln, CA

*Third prize:* \$150 gift card,  
Nancy Hix, Citrus Heights, CA

#### Additional prizes:

Walmart gift card, **Margaret Beach**, Sacramento

Handmade afghan, **Jill Miklos**, Hermitage, PA

Wine basket, **Jeanne Olson**, Sacramento

Lavender sachets, **Tom & Kathy Collins**, Yuba City, CA

Therapeutic massage, **Linda Ostrofsky**, Sacramento

Therapeutic massage, **Rebecca Vargas**, Sacramento

*Thank you to everyone that supported this fund-raising appeal. Your efforts helped us to reach our goals for 2009.*

### Donate a Car, Get a Deduction

You can now help us financially by donating your car, truck, RV, or boat. You can do this online:

[www.YouAutoDonate.com](http://www.YouAutoDonate.com)

go to "choose your charity." You will find Friends For Survival on the list or you can call 866-538-7366.

If you have questions please call us at 916-392-0664. We appreciate your support!

### Matching Funds

When you make a donation to us please check to see if your employer does matching funds. Many companies do this and what a great investment to double your donation to us. Just ask your employer.

### Cherished Inspirations

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 ten years of our newsletters. It is 154 pages and available for a donation of \$20<sup>00</sup> plus \$5<sup>00</sup> for postage / handling if we mail it to you. If you find comfort and encouragement from our newsletter, this is for you.

### Check our our website

Scott Garcia, our webmaster, is updating and adding new features regularly. We welcome your comments and suggestions. You can now donate online through our website using our paypal connection. If you are shopping online, just go to:

[www.FriendsForSurvival.org](http://www.FriendsForSurvival.org) and link to Amazon.com to place your order. We will receive a percentage of your total purchase.

### Quilt

Many of you live in areas that do not have access to the national suicide memorial quilt program. Therefore, we are putting together a national memorial quilt. For a suggested donation of just \$10<sup>00</sup> we will send you a quilt packet that includes materials and instructions. We already have three quilts and they are used publicly to increase suicide awareness. Check our website to view pictures of some of our quilts. Your participation will enhance the national effort to prevent suicide.

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## A Suicide Survivors Beatitudes

by LaRita Archibald

**Blessed** are those who recognize our grief is compounded: that we grieve the death of a beloved person, but foremost, we grieve the cause of the death—suicide.

**Blessed** are those who give us permission to mourn the loss of one dearly loved, free of judgment, censure and shame.

**Blessed** are spiritual guides who relieve our concerns for the repose of our loved one's soul with the truth that God is All-Knowing, All-Loving and All-Forgiving.

**Blessed** are those who don't offer the meaningless cliché, "Time heals," because, for a long while, the passing of time holds no meaning or value for us.

**Blessed** are those who don't say, "I know just how you feel," but instead say, "I am here for you. I will not tire of your tears or your words of sorrow and regret."

**Blessed** are those who have the patience and love to listen to our repetitive obsession with "why?" without offering useless answers or explanations.

**Blessed** are those who reaffirm the worth of our deceased beloved by sharing memories of his/her goodness and times of fun, laughter and happiness.

**Blessed** are the mental health care providers who explain to us that, very probably, our loved one died of a terminal illness called depression.

**Blessed** are those who challenge our sense of omnipotence with the reminder that no one has enough power or control over another to cause them to end their life.

**Blessed** are the first responders to our loved one's suicide who try to relieve our sense of guilt and responsibility by assuring us "This death is not your fault."

**Blessed** are those who lend acceptance to the value of the relationship we shared with the one who died by allowing us to speak of them and "what might have been."



**Blessed** are those that allow and encourage us to use our loved one's death in a manner that gives our loss and grief meaning and purpose.

**Blessed** are those who do not expect us to find "closure," "grief resolution," "recovery," or to "be healed," understanding that these terms define "grief work in progress" that will take the rest of our life.

**Blessed** are community caregivers who direct us to suicide bereavement support groups where our anguish is understood, our loss validated and where we are encouraged by the example of others who have traveled this road before us.

**Blessed** are long-term survivors after suicide who role model. Not only can we survive, but, in time, we can thrive... we can regain peace of mind, restored confidence, renewed productivity, and revived zest for living.

*Reprinted from The Survivors Group (friends and families of suicides) newsletter, Norwell, MA, May – June 2004*



### Volunteers Needed for Parent Survivors of Suicide Study

#### *Posttraumatic Growth of Parent Survivors of Suicide*

Despite the burden of suicide in the United States, very little is known about the experience of losing a loved one to suicide.

The purpose of this study is to investigate what factors may contribute to personal growth in the aftermath of this kind of loss.

Participants should be a parent who has lost a child of any age to suicide within the last two years. The survey is conducted on-line and takes less than 30 minutes to complete.

*Participation is completely confidential.*

If you are interested, please visit:  
[www.posttraumaticgrowth.com](http://www.posttraumaticgrowth.com)

Principal Investigator: Melinda M. Moore  
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# One Family's Tribute

*The Farrell Family*

The members of our family wanted to share our experiences as survivors of suicide with other families facing the trauma of a suicide of a loved one. Michael died five years ago after suffering a brief but severe bout with depression. Our mom, Peggy; the rest of Michael siblings, Nancy, Mary, Anne, and Mark; and his nieces, Kate and Sarah; describe their feelings surrounding Mike's death, and the experiences we all share as survivors.

**Mom:** In January of 1992 our family gathered for our second annual Vermont ski weekend. It was extremely cold, but some skied while others kept the fires going. My son Michael, 40, was being treated for clinical depression at the time, and we were hopeful that our reunion would be therapeutic and fun. On Monday morning, however, we realized his anxiety and despair had deepened. A call to his therapist resulted in his admission for treatment.

Michael was released after a few weeks and resumed his position as an Assistant District Attorney in Brooklyn. Though the signs of hopelessness had not disappeared, he seemed to be trying to deal with his inner conflicts. On Monday, February 24, he jumped to his death from his apartment building in New York City. In a moment, my family became a "survivor" family.

The ensuing days were consumed with pain and endless questions of "why?" I was horrified by what he had done to his body, his life, and to the lives of our family who loved him. As his mother and a nurse who had dealt with other people's pain and tragedy, should I have been more aware and astute about his depression? I believed he would get through his illness. I would review events leading to Michael's suicide, wondering why we did not have the power to save him. I began private therapy and joined a survivor support group. The group provided me with an opportunity to tell my story and to listen to others progressing through the aftermath of suicide.

Those experiences eventually led me to take an active role as a co-facilitator of a group at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. I started volunteering with the NJ Chapter of AFSP, and currently serve as its Chair. I am pleased with a pilot

project for survivors that we have recently begun in NJ. It involves training lay volunteers who reach out to newly bereaved families, encouraging them to seek help through survivor groups. Volunteering with this project and other Foundation programs has become an important mission in my life.

**Sister Nancy:** My brother spent the weekend before he died visiting with my family in Boston. On Saturday, he seemed much better than he had been in the year since his struggle began with a deep depression. Sunday, he was very reluctant to drive back to New York with our sister, Mary. We took group photos on the driveway and planned our next reunion. Looking back at the photos, the strain of the last few months was etched in new lines in his face.

I was in a friend's office when my husband called to tell me Mike was dead. I went into mental and physical shock, hearing the news, yet denying what I was being told. I thought at first that it couldn't be true; he couldn't have done what he promised not to do.

Family, friends, and survivors meetings helped me through the next days and weeks. My children's school psychologist advised me to share as much of the truth with them as I could bear at the time, reserving the whole story for a point when they—and I—could deal with it. It was good advice.

Mike's funeral service was a celebration of his life, and right away we planned a scholarship fund in his name for a program he had been active with. The fund was kicked off formally on his birthday the next year, and has attracted new friends with each celebration.

My mother, my brother, sister, and I all attended a support group meeting just three weeks after Mike's death. We were all a bit in shock still, not knowing if we would even be able to speak. As the meeting began, I listened to each speaker's story and felt that I was not alone. Later, we broke into groups and other survivors told us how they have coped with their own loss. In later months, I would compare my reactions to those in the group to reassure myself that my feelings were normal. I realized that a mild aversion to heights that had recently turned into fear on bridges or airplanes was a result of the trauma of Mike's death. Time helped to lessen such reactions and talking to my family and



others helped me to realize I was working through a grieving process.

Since that time, I have joined the Board of the New England Chapter of AFSP. My goal is both to help other survivors cope with their loss, and to support research to prevent suicide. Michael's loss will never be eased completely, but perhaps another Michael will live; another family will not know our pain. That will make all the difference for me.

*Kate was 9 when her uncle died. She is now 14.*

**Nieces Kate and Sarah:** It's strange how I remember a lot of the small and insignificant things that happened that day, more than I remember Mike himself. Sometimes I think that the harder one tries to hold on to certain memories, the quicker they start to slip away. For example, I remember that my dad picked us up from school that day instead of my mother (who usually picks us up). I also could tell you the room at school I was sitting in, and the friend I was talking to when I saw my father's face.

Of course, when it happened I was too young to be told that my uncle had committed suicide, so that piece didn't fit in until much later. When I did learn that, though, I had a hard time with it. I couldn't figure out why Mike would want to leave me. I was pretty sure that he loved me, I never did anything to make him feel otherwise, and I knew for certain that I loved him. I knew that he was sick, but what I didn't understand until now is that his kind of sickness could cause him to kill himself.

*Even though Sarah was 5 when her uncle died, she recalls being told about his death.*

I was in the car, all excited about school, when my father told me that my uncle had died. I stopped and thought, and I think I started to cry. I remember going home and seeing my Mom sitting on the couch, sobbing. So my sister and I and my father all joined her.

**Sister Mary:** On the first morning following my brother's death I was barely able to distinguish the difference between true depression and the pain of a broken heart. Although the events surrounding his death were shockingly horrific, painful, and frightening, I awoke the next day feeling as though I might just make it, knowing that my own feelings of despair had subsided just enough to allow me to carry on. Many months later I came to realize this as the difference between those who are seriously depressed like Mike was, and those with a fairly healthy psyche. That is probably when I began to forgive my brother for what he had done. I, fortunately, had the tools to

get through what life handed me, but his depression stole that ability from him. Michael had no hope. That is how he was able to end his life that day.

I will never know exactly what happened to Michael that day. Was he going to go to work and something stopped him? I spoke to him that morning, and may very well have been the last person he spoke with. I thank God that I told him how much I loved him. Although it has brought me some comfort to know that I said that, still I will always feel as though there was something else I could have said or done to stop him. Through the help of support groups and endless hours of discussion with family members and friends, I now know that you can be responsible to someone, but not for them.

On the day before Mike died, he gave me a hug that I will never forget. He squeezed me so hard (he never let go first). And sometimes if I try really hard, I can conjure up the memory of that powerful hug.

**Brother Mark:** I never could have imagined that one event would abruptly change the course of my life and the lives of my family. That's the impact suicide has—it alters your entire life. You try to live through the incredible pain, sorrow, and confusion that this irreversible act creates. You ponder the "what ifs," and how your loved one cheated himself and you of the wonderful gift of life.

How does one become a "survivor"? Simply, but extremely arduously, by just surviving. Survive by seeking professional therapy, guidance, and support. Most importantly, exercise your emotions: cry, scream, talk, write, etc., and use any and all coping mechanisms that will benefit you. Be certain to verbalize your feelings, positive or negative. And take one day at a time.

Life is different for me since the death of my brother five years ago. The things that helped me cope may not necessarily benefit you, but you will ultimately find something that helps you through your grief. Promise to love your family and friends, and most importantly, yourself.

**Sister Anne:** My brother Michael's suicide left me unprepared. You see, I am always prepared. The year he died, I was working two jobs, writing my dissertation and settling into a marriage. For many people one of these activities would have been a full-time pursuit. For me, it was business as usual.

When Michael died I was not ready for my own horror, sadness, guilt, anger and shame. I didn't know what or how much to tell others; many did not know

*~ Continued on Next Page*

what to say to me. As a family, we knew very quickly that we would not hide the truth; hiding just "wasn't us." We were quickly overwhelmed by the support our friends and family gave. They shared their memories, they cried, they comforted, they made us laugh. They sustained us. They confirmed that sharing our sorrow was the only way to move toward hope.

Yet, there were questions left unasked by polite friends, intrusions imposed by others. I did not want to consider whether the truth would hurt Michael's good name, my family or me. As I left my family to return to my life, I found myself unprepared again. I took a deep breath, put my life on auto-pilot, and told the truth: about Michael's suicide; about my horror, my sadness, my anger.

An unexpected source of comfort came from friends, co-workers, and even casual acquaintances. It was the sharing of secrets. While expressing condolences, people told me stories they had never told anyone. I heard about other suicides, miscarriages, and mental illnesses that really were not my business. People mentioned them to provide comfort, connecting with me through their own complicated losses and hardships. Sharing eased their sorrow and mine. You see, I was not prepared, but I was not alone.

*Our family's journey through grief these past five years has taught us many things. Now, we try to remember Michael with more joy than sadness. We cherish the memories of his extraordinary life, and know we will keep his smile in our hearts forever.*

*Reprinted from Lifesavers, published by American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Fall 1997*

## Feb 2: Manifesting Love

by Catherine Greenleaf

Perhaps you have lost your beloved to suicide. The next person you are to love will arrive in your life when the time is right. In the meantime, there are many different ways to manifest love in your life. Meditation and prayer are two of the best. Any activity that invites you to concentrate in silence—like walking in the woods, exercising, crocheting an afghan, gardening, needlework, painting model airplanes—is a form of prayer and mediation. There are dozens of different pursuits that allow for movement and yet a detached contemplation. Create anew with your hands and create new love with your heart.

Today, I will keep busy with a hobby I love—one that allows silent contemplation and prayer.

*Excerpt from Healing the Hurt Spirit, by Catherine Greenleaf.*

## From Marilyn, with Love

This February newsletter focuses on love: love of family, love of self and love of those who have helped us through our tragedy. As all of us



support and work together we can make a positive difference in our own lives and the lives of all the families we touch. Our faithful volunteers are dedicated to accomplishing their specific tasks to encourage you on your journey of grief and recovery.

As we begin our 28<sup>th</sup> year of service, we look back at what we have accomplished. We have responded to more than 7,300 families, mailed 652,470 monthly newsletters, facilitated 1,410 monthly meetings, and presented 24 all-day conferences and retreats. In 27 years, 568 volunteers have donated over 82,000 hours. We plan to hire a volunteer co-ordinator this year to train and expand our volunteer base and better serve our volunteer leadership teams. In Northern California, these teams facilitate 8 monthly meetings within a 100 mile radius.

Our budget in 2009 was \$40,000. The budget needs to grow in 2010 simply because the number of families that contact us continues to grow. Our funds are carefully monitored and we strive to stretch our budget. We are always looking for ways to operate more efficiently. During the past year, we received community donations of office space, meeting space, and office furniture, and supplies. Our part-time staff has been very busy. One thing you will notice is that this newsletter has a new look. All of our materials are being updated and the office is being organized. Even our technical support has been expanded thanks to consultants who have donated their expertise.

Your continued financial support, volunteer support, and emotional support has accomplished all of the above. Your wonderful notes of thanks are an inspiration to our volunteers and staff. We encourage you to share any ideas you may have to help us improve our programs of support. Where ever you live, you can volunteer with us. We do need people who are willing to write notes for us and we would like to resurrect our pen-pal club using the Internet.

Your continued support will enable us to sustain FFS and it's efforts to support survivors across this country. Your notes confirm that FFS does make a difference. A very big thank you and love to each and everyone.

**To all who donate to Friends For Survival through United Way.**

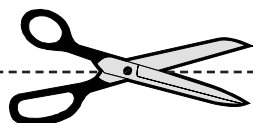
*These tax-deductible donations help pay the phone bills, printing costs, postage, and contribute to the comfort and encouragement of other survivors. A special thank you to all who help and share and donate on a regular basis.*

**Your generous response is extremely helpful!**



### **Practiced Friendship**

We send out 3400 monthly newsletters to all 50 states. Our desire is this monthly newsletter be a practiced friendship: a friendship that is sensitive, respectful and understanding. The sharing in the newsletter encourages us. We are not alone in our grief. The sharing allows us to reach out to others rather than focus exclusively on ourselves. The healing comes when we can weep with others and for others. Your letters and notes have affirmed our efforts and are a source of great encouragement to the volunteers behind F.F.S. We thank you for sharing with us your journey of grief and healing.



*Please mail to: Friends for Survival, P.O. Box 214463, Sacramento, CA 95821-4463*

*Enclosed is a gift of :*

\$12<sup>00</sup>       \$25<sup>00</sup>       \$50<sup>00</sup>       \$100<sup>00</sup>       Other: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Love Gift in Memory of \_\_\_\_\_

From \_\_\_\_\_

*Special Designation:*

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ for Web site      \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for Office Staff      \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for *Cherished Inspirations* (book)

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

***I am committing \$ \_\_\_\_\_ / month for the next twelve months to fund the office staff.***

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please consider remembering Friends for Survival in your will.*

I have remembered Friends for Survival in my will or trust.

Please send me estate planning material on remembering Friends for Survival in my will.