



# SURVIVORS

**after suicide**

A Program of Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2004 • VOLUME 17, NO. 4 • PUBLISHED QUARTERLY

## A Thousand Days Out

Jon Loring  
Agoura, CA

I remember one time, driving back from an afternoon of surfing near Ventura with my daughter, Sarah. She was a sophomore in high school at the time. We had stopped at a roadside stand for burgers, fries, and shakes. We drove along, happily exhausted and chawing down. With a radiant sunset in the sky behind us, she turned from looking out the back window, smiled, and said, "Life can't get any better than this, can it?"

Sarah, my first-born, was the kind of person who, after she went to college, you could call on the phone, start out in mid-sentence, and she would be right with you, without missing a beat—and with a laugh. *continued on page 3*

## Observations From...

Rick Mogil  
Studio City, CA

The opinions and conclusions expressed in this article are from the tortured and rambling mind of the author and do not reflect those of the editor or any organization based on this plane of existence.

We have many and various relationships throughout our lives. Most often we begin with our parents. With them, we learn that our needs will be met. We learn to trust. We trust that they'll provide us with sustenance, comfort and a clean diaper. We trust that they won't let us fall from our bike the first time the training wheels are removed. We love them, we fight with them, we think they don't understand us, and we certainly don't understand them (*What do you mean I have to finish my homework before I can watch TV? Howdy Doody [Sponge Bob...] is on in 3 minutes! Can't I watch it first? Please, please, please! Bobby's mom lets him!*).

And then there are the "siblings," the intruders, the interlopers, the *You'll take your brothers with you to the beach or you won't be able to go out Saturday night* siblings. Sometimes they're the idols you worship and are forever measured against, sometimes *continued on page 4*

## Please Welcome Tom Rankin



### Didi Hirsch's New Suicide Prevention and Bereavement Services Coordinator

Tom Rankin comes to Survivors After Suicide (SAS) with some pretty hefty credentials. And, when asked, "Are you ready and rarin' to go?" he answers, laughing, "Of course!" Believe him.

Catherine Montgomery, Redondo Beach, CA

Tom's new title is Suicide Prevention and Bereavement Services Coordinator. That's not only a mouthful, it calls for a pretty heavy commitment. *continued on page 4*

## On Life After Suicide: Mariette Hartley Connects With Survivors at Potluck



above: Lois Bloom, Dr. Norman Farberow, Mariette Hartley, and Sam Bloom at the Survivors After Suicide Summer Potluck.

left: Barbara Dallis unveiled our fourth quilt. *additional photos on page 5*

## SAVE THE DATE

## National Survivors of Suicide Day

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 20<sup>TH</sup>, 2004

At the UCLA Faculty Center—See Calendar of Events, page 6

**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.**



Tom Rankin, J.D., M.A.

## Tom's Column

The SAS Summer Potluck drew its largest crowd ever, bringing over sixty survivors together to share their experiences and to enjoy an array of marvelous food. **Mariette Hartley** spoke eloquently about her personal

journey as a survivor, moving people with her genuineness, humor, and wisdom. **Susan Celentano** and **Barbara Dallis** unveiled a gorgeous new Lifekeepers Memory Quilt that honored nineteen loved ones who died by suicide. **Jay Nagdimon** presented **Carole Chasin** with a plaque to commemorate her many years of service as the SAS Coordinator, and thanked her for the intelligence, love, and hard work that she brought to expanding and organizing SAS. A balloon release at the end of the potluck brought tears to the eyes of almost every survivor, reminding us of our love for those we lost to suicide.

I would like to thank all the speakers, committee members, volunteers, and survivors who came together as a community to help make this potluck a day of hope and remembrance. Special thanks go out to **Lois Bloom**, **Mary Halligan**, and **Catherine Montgomery** for showing up early to help set up for the potluck, **Sam Bloom** and **Ester Bryant**

for staying late to clean up (Lois and Mary stayed late too, bless them!), and **Debbie Pikul** for creating the elegant programs. Our next communal event will be the **Holiday Potluck** in early December... please join us!

An exciting new SAS endeavor will be the **Suicide Response Team (SRT)**, which will coordinate with the Los Angeles Mayor's Volunteer Corps Crisis Response Team to immediately respond to the scene of a death by suicide. SRT volunteers will be trained to assist family members and friends through the intensely difficult first few hours after the death of a loved one. Extremely experienced co-facilitators will be trained for the SRT on September 13, to serve as a pilot group that will train future SRT volunteers.

Thank you so much to the countless survivors and mental health professionals who have helped me learn over the past two months, especially **Carole Chasin** and **Jay Nagdimon** for invaluable training, **Norm Farberow** and **David Davis** for expert co-facilitation, and **Sam Heilig** and **Barbara Ravitz** for agreeing to let me observe your next SAS group. I invite phone calls at (310) 751-5370 if you would like to share your thoughts about how the SAS program might better serve survivors.

Tom ☺

*Tom Rankin serves as Didi Hirsch's Suicide Prevention and Bereavement Services Coordinator*

## Alive and Running 5K/10K Walk/Run

You have a few extra months to get in shape! We are postponing the 8th annual Alive and Running 5K/10K Walk/Run from Fall of 2004 to Summer 2005. We will be using this extra time to develop strategies to strengthen the 5K/10K, which has plateaued both in number of runners participating and sponsorships. We plan to use this time to create an extraordinary event by building a strong event committee, securing major corporate sponsors and developing an exciting array of prizes and awards for event participants.

As we concentrate on the future, we will stay in contact with our loyal friends and donors by developing a special "non-event" fundraising campaign around the usual time of the race. Please join us in supporting this effort—look for more information in your mail in the next few weeks.

The 5K/10K draws together friends and family and community, and we look forward to planning an even bigger and more successful event in 2005. We hope that those of you who have volunteered on our race committee in the past will do so again and we encourage newcomers to join us as well. If you would like more information about the race or the committee, please contact Flaviola Arroyo at (310) 751-5455 or farroyo@didihirsch.org

*We look forward to seeing you next Summer!*

## Lifekeepers Memory Quilt

**We are starting another Lifekeepers Memory Quilt.** Like the four we have completed, this quilt will serve as 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. Our quilts are displayed at national meetings, suicide-related conferences and other events. All 50 states have come together in this joint effort to educate the world for the need to reduce the incidence of suicide. You can share your pictures and sentiments by dedicating a square in the Lifekeepers Memory Quilt, offering the image of your loved one. A \$20 fee covers the cost of material, labor and postage necessary to create your visual tribute. You will receive a cotton square and instructions on how to proceed.

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

Send the material and instructions to me:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number(s): \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Mail to:**

Mary Halligan, 21422 Grant Ave., Torrance, CA 90503  
or call Mary at 310-316-4392 for information.

## A Thousand Days Out *continued from page 1*

Somehow, though, a series of events and forces came together in Sarah's world in such a way that at age 26, she ended her life.

That was more than a thousand days ago.

What in the first days after her death seemed an impossibility—namely, *living* and going on—has with each passing day actually happened. Sometimes, I have to stop and ponder what a miracle it is. It has been three years and three months since Sarah died. In the first days of shock and numbness and deep grief, I wasn't able to imagine even getting through a year. At times, it was a day-by-day affair, sometimes even hour-by-hour, or minute-by-minute—day and night.

But somehow, this gradually evolved into something less quantifiable. And now, here I am in the early part of the fourth year, having made it this far. Still, an hour hardly passes without thinking of her in some way. She has always remained very much alive in my heart. And, life is going on.

In meeting new survivors of the awful tragedy of suicide, I feel my heart go out to them. I feel so bad for their loss. I have known their shock and numbness and the uncertainty and deep sadness with which they must now live life. And to these people, I would like to offer a word of hope.

It is possible to go on. Here is a little bit of how my wife and I have made it this far.

From the start, we never tried to deny the reality of what happened. We read and re-read our daughter's notes. We spent hours at the cemetery. I even wondered at times how many trips—how many bouquets of flowers—it would take to get through it. Of course, there is no answer. We talked openly about our experience with others—close friends, our family, our counselor, small groups of other suicide survivors, and, when appropriate, even strangers. We kept many of her things to spark memories of what once was. We stayed in touch with her friends; in fact, we camped once with them in the High Sierras and are planning to do so again. We fought and “won” a few battles that related to issues of Sarah's life and death—on behalf of her memory. We established a camping scholarship fund in her name for deaf children at the school where she worked. We got into helping other new survivors, through phone counseling and hospice. I kept a journal. While we have not created any shrine for her in our home, we display her pictures along with those of other family members and friends. We light a candle for her at all family gatherings and special anniversary days. We have not avoided the issue of suicide when it has arisen in movies, books, the news, and elsewhere. In fact, suicide and related issues seem so omnipresent in the culture, these have become almost a joke to us when they come up unexpectedly. *continued on page 5*

## The Gift

*A gift, I'm told, you've left behind,  
That I must seek and find;  
But pain too deep, and missing you  
Have blocked my open mind.*

—Iris Bolton, from “The Suicide of My Son,” ©1977

The idea of any gifts arising from our grief may have seemed inconceivable at first, but with time, our gifts are revealed. Later in Iris's poem, we discover that the music her son composed became her gift. Lois and Sam Bloom's son, Sammy, died by suicide 12 days before Christmas, 1982.

Three days after our son's suicide, we received a phone call from Edwin Shneidman, Ph.D., professor of Thanatology at UCLA, asking our family to meet with him. Our son was a patient at the UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute (NPI) for three months, and Dr. Shneidman was asked to have a healing session for the staff who knew Sammy. We didn't know Dr. Shneidman but agreed to meet with him.

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### Lois Bloom, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA

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The following week our family met in Dr. Shneidman's office. Expressing his condolences, he told us the staff who worked with Sammy during his hospitalization was very fond of Sammy, got to know him well and was very upset about his suicide. They expected Sammy to recover. Dr. Shneidman asked us, “What happened after he left the hospital seven months ago?” We explained what we thought had happened during our two hour meeting. Dr. Shneidman thanked us and as we were leaving he said, “Mr. & Mrs. Bloom, if I can help you, please call me!”

The following day my husband called the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center (LASPC) asking for a referral for a therapist. During his conversation he told them about Dr. Shneidman's offer. “You won't find a better therapist to help you,” he was told, “he's a prominent suicidologist, the co-founder of the LASPC, founder and first president of the American Association of Suicidology and has authored numerous books, articles and chapters on suicide.”

I called Dr. Shneidman for an appointment the same day. Expressing concern for me he asked, “Do you need to see me immediately? Are you having suicidal thoughts?” I told him I was okay and made an appointment for the following week.

“How are you doing?” Dr. Shneidman asked each time we met with him. We told him how devastated we were, about our great sadness, numbness, disbelief and my anger at Sammy's psychiatrist. He said that if we came to him feeling happy he'd be terribly worried because that would mean we were suppressing our sadness. *continued on page 7*

## Tom Rankin *continued from page 1*

Looking at his past accomplishments, he appears to be up to the task(s).

Asked what he wants to do in his new position, he graciously answers, "Well, first, I want to learn from the good work Carole's (Chasin) done. One of my goals includes creating Spanish speaking survivor's groups in the areas not previously served because of language barriers."

He has a heavy schedule with speaking engagements and

helps coordinate the Suicide Response Team, directing survivors to Crisis Intervention Services, and making them aware of the services at SAS. He speaks to many groups, including schools, speaking to staff and students.

Rankin, 28 years old, comes to this work with some personal experience. His mother, in the throes of postpartum depression, died by suicide when he was just nine months old. A stepmother filled the void, but his father, an attorney, told him at an early age of his *continued on page 6*

## Observations From... *continued from page 1*

they're the protectors who tease and torment you gleefully.

We have friends, short-term and lifelong.

We have spouses, partners, children and pets.

Some relationships we work harder to maintain than others. Spouses and partners are the hardest as there is the constant battle for supremacy in the kingdom. The home unit balancing act requires exquisite skill in diplomacy, subterfuge, negotiation, commitment and medication.

The relationships that begin at birth (yours or your siblings) are more often taken for granted than any others. They are the longest relationships we will (or should) have in our lives. Your parents will always love you no matter what you do, and your siblings will always be there for you. Your spouse or partner signs on for the good, the bad, and the ugly. But what happens when a relationship is torn asunder? When it severed in a most violent, sometimes unexpected way, by suicide?

When it is a parent, you are left without the beacon that always lit your path. You can't go running home to Mommy when someone bruises your ego. You can't run to the protective embrace of your father when someone bruises your body. Your life guidance counselor has closed their door to you forever. They become a footnote in your historical record. They are no longer a living reminder of your past.

If it is a sibling, the older brother whom you idolized but who took you to the beach with his friends when he really wanted to tie you to your crib, or the younger sister whom you took under your protection but you had to take to her ballet lessons when you really wanted to go cruisin' with the guys, it is a cessation of the flow from your past to your future. It is a connection to your family that has been severed. You grieve quietly to protect your parents from further anguish. You are overlooked in the initial days of shock and disbelief and are expected to be strong for the rest of the family. You are no longer the eldest of four children. You are now one of three. Or you are no longer the baby of the family. You become the only child.

When you made a commitment to share your life with a spouse or partner, you expected to walk hand in hand into

the twilight of your lives. Instead, you are left holding your own clenched fist. You have lost your present. Your future is forever changed. The fabric of your family is starting to unravel. Who will comfort you in your time of emotional need? Who will nurse you when you are ill? With whom shall you share the joys and heartbreak of parenting?

Parenting.

I cannot begin to imagine what my fellow survivors, who have lost children, are going through. I have heard their stories, shared their anguish and cried unabashedly for their loss, for they have lost a major portion of their future. For some, there will be no grandchildren. For others there will be constant living reminders in the faces of their grandchildren. Our children are not supposed to precede us in death.

How often after a loved one's suicide do we look in the mirror or at their picture and say *Why did you do this to me (mom and dad, the kids...)?* or *Oh, I wish I had your courage...* or *You had so much to live for!* or *I can't go on without you!*

Or wonder how they could be so deeply depressed that they would want to end their lives.

I believe we all suffer depression to some degree. Not just sadness but depression, depressive thoughts. It is why we love our families so fiercely. To have one of them removed from our lives by their own hand is shocking to our system, our psyche. How can we not be depressed over this act?

Then there is the fear that their type of depression is hereditary, and when will it manifest itself in other family members, even ourselves?

How do we deal with all of this?

Every morning when we awake, we make a decision. Are we to live or die? God/Nature/Gaia/Emperor Ming makes most of the final decisions. But we do have input on the number of days we have on this Earth, even if it is a struggle to face our lives.

We can look up not down. We can share our lives and feelings and not keep them bottled up. We can seek others with a shared experience. We can reach out to others to offer comfort and guidance.

We can continue to live with purpose. ♡

## SAS Annual Summer Potluck



*Mariette Hartley praised the lifelong work of Dr. Norman Farberow while addressing a crowd of more than sixty at this summer's potluck.*



*Barbara Dallis, our Quiltmaker Extraordinaire, and Susan Celentano. Survivors presented Barbara with a fleece blanket embroidered with the sentiment "Thank you Barbara from our community of survivors."*



*Mark Vierra, Barbara Dallis, Art Borgquist, Josie Shahabi, Bobbie Mathers, Diane Williams, and Gittel Boxall honored the memories of loved ones by creating squares for the new quilt.*



*left: Dr. Jay Nagdimon expressed his gratitude for the years Carole Chasin served as the coordinator of the SAS program. After Carole spoke, Dr. Nagdimon introduced our new Suicide Prevention and Bereavement Services Coordinator, Tom Rankin*

*right: Lois Bloom guided survivors in closing out the day with music and a balloon release.*



## A Thousand Days Out continued from page 3

But, as our counselor, Susan Celentano, says, you can only look into the fire for so long.

So, along with engaging the tragedy these past three years, we have done our best to create diversions just so we could keep going. We kept working. We remodeled our house. We traveled. We ate. We even got into going to the opera; the slow deep emotional dramas of opera (other people's grand problems) were somehow comforting. We did things that would just keep us going and engaged—regardless of the fact that our hearts were not often into most of whatever it was we were doing.

Most experiences after her death have had a hollow quality. This hollowness, I think, has gradually diminished through time and, I hope, may eventually go away altogether. No guarantees, though. Still, it has been important to stay engaged in other areas of life simply to survive.

We have thought endless times about the events and forces that came together in such a way that they culminated in Sarah's death. Early on, our minds did nothing but race like rats down a maze in a vain effort to gain some under-

standing. In time, we gave them more measured consideration—together with all the regret, guilt, disappointment, and even anger we felt. While all these things do matter, we ponder them only occasionally now—and only to come once again to the bitter conclusion that things can never be made right again. Throughout this process, we have sought to nurture a spirit of forgiveness both for others and ourselves.

One book I read early in my grief talked about how people choose how they experience something. I used to believe this and did my best to make "healthy choices." But there have been times, even recently, when my experience of emptiness and the void in my life was just so strong, I gave up trying to *choose* my experience and just let the feelings happen. In time, somehow, these feelings subsided and I moved on to other things.

People ask how our marriage has survived. Such tragedies often destroy even the strongest of relationships. Early on, we had some very difficult times and still do, but much more rarely. Thanks to our counselor, we learned to accept and respect each other's differences in grieving. Knowing and accepting the simple truth that men and women grieve differently has made all the difference.

*continued on page 7*

## Contributions 05/01/04 – 08/31/04: A million thanks for your generosity!

### IN LOVING MEMORY OF:

**Betty Leichhardt** from Melinda Pike  
**Casey Michael Smith** from Beverly Smith  
**Daniel Boxall** from Cipolla & Calaba, Robert Israel Levy  
**F. Joshua Korkowski** from Yolanda C. Loughrin  
**Fred L. Calhoun, Sr. and Fred L. Calhoun, Jr.** from Jean Calhoun  
**Jennifer Ann Brown** from Nina and James Brown  
**Jimmy Satterfield** from Mary Ellen Satterfield  
**John DeMott** from Dolores A. DeMott  
**Johnny F. Humbert** from Christine Humbert  
**Joshua Erman** from Andrew Erman  
**Lincoln Shea** from Dianne Shea  
**Nancy Robin Gould** from Doris and Roy Danchick

**Shari Jane Potter** from Chuck and Rissa Potter  
**Tetsuhiro Kan** from Gary Anderson  
**Toney Ross** from Richard Ross, Ph.D.  
**William McCloskey** from John F. Bauer, D.D.S., Nancy Briseno, Laura Conrad-Fargher, Nick and Irene Dailey, D.C. Hardwick, Janice and Fred Tanabe

### IN HONOR OF:

**From Bonkers to Botox** from Julianne Grossman  
**Carole Chasin** from Dale Rose  
**Debbie Pikul, on her 40th birthday** from Susan and Jonathan Loring  
**Diana Stein** from Diana Fiedotin, Marilyn Rosenthal  
**Jay Nagdimon's 10 year anniversary** from Kimberley Lew  
**Julianne Grossman** from Virginia Austin, Mr. and Mrs. Blaine Handell, Paula J. Hannahs  
**Thomas P. Keane** from Kathy Keane

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## Calendar of Upcoming Events

### OCTOBER 23 - NOVEMBER 26, 2004

**Conversations with the Rose Petal Rug**  
Brand Library & Art Center, 1601 West Mountain Street, Glendale, California 91201. Artist and suicide survivor Janice DeLoof presents this interactive piece to encourage discussions about family matters which may include mental illness and suicide among other family topics. Family photos will be displayed, including some of Janice's son and others lost to suicide. Performances will take place on October 23rd and November 13th. Call 818.548.2051 for more information.

### SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2004 The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's Sixth Annual National Survivors of Suicide Day

At the UCLA Faculty Center. Simultaneous survivor conferences will take place across the country. This year's theme is *Depression and Suicide Across the Generations*. A registration form for survivors and professionals is available at [www.afspla.org](http://www.afspla.org).

### SUNDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2004 AT 7PM The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting

Light a candle for all children who have died. See [www.compassionatefriends.com](http://www.compassionatefriends.com)

### FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2005 NOPCAS 7th Annual Conference

See [www.nopcas.com](http://www.nopcas.com)

### APRIL 13-16, 2005 American Association of Suicidology 38th Annual Conference

Omni Interlocken Resort, Denver/Broomfield, Colorado. [www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org)

### JULY 16-17, 2005 Out of the Darkness National Overnight Experience in Chicago

AFSP designed this national walk event to help raise awareness about depression and suicide. Go to [www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org) for online registration. To attend this event with others from Southern California, please contact Susan Celentano at 661.260.3119.

### SUMMER 2005 Alive and Running 5K/10K Walk/Run

Postponed until Summer 2005. See page 2.

### E-MAIL AND ONLINE RESOURCES

**National.** To subscribe to the Survivor e-Network for email updates on a variety of survivor-related topics, send your name, address and survivor information (who you lost and when) to [enetwork@afsp.org](mailto:enetwork@afsp.org).

**Local.** Mark Vierra, a member of our survivor community, is organizing an online group where survivors can post photos, poems, stories, etc. To join, please email Mark at [irknots39135@yahoo.com](mailto:irknots39135@yahoo.com)

## Tom Rankin *continued from page 4*

mother's passing. So it was not a secret but it was a loss, however belated, for Rankin. He grew up in Kenilworth, a suburb of Chicago, Illinois, and came to California for his education.

His eyes on a legal career, the "family business," led him to complete work on a law degree, a doctor of jurisprudence, at Stanford Law School. He wanted to find some way to help, within the courts. "I wanted to make a real-world difference," he says. "I wanted to find an area in which I could serve with passion."

Somehow, he never quite found the key to that satisfaction in law, so he went back to school and now holds a Master's degree in clinical psychology with an emphasis on marriage and family therapy from Pepperdine University. A brief internship in the movie industry was not only fascinating but, as all experiences are, taught him even more about human nature.

He started with SAS as a volunteer on the SPC Crisis Line in January of 2003. For the last two years, he's also provided individual, couples, and family therapy at the Center for Individual & Family Counseling in North Hollywood, a nonprofit counseling center.

One of his duties at SAS will be to train co-facilitators to work with survivor groups. He hopes to expand the training to a two-day format—two Saturdays instead of one.

He talks to and helps survivors, during their difficult time on the waiting lists, before they can start in a group. The healing can really begin when they find, in a group, they are not alone, that others share and understand their grief in a nonjudgmental way.

"I'm always looking for new ideas, and I'm making myself available on the phone as much as possible," he says. He invites anyone struggling through the grieving process to call. "SAS exists to help," he says. ♡

## A Thousand Days Out *continued from page 5*

We understand that we are not often in the same place as we deal with our daughter's death—and we give each other the space to grieve as each one needs to.

There is of course no end in sight, no sense of “closure.” What will happen is unknown. When my son and his wife brought news several weeks ago that they were expecting their first child, I did my best to act happy and excited, but it was hard. It was only when they brought “pictures” of the baby *in utero* and announced that it was a boy, that I found myself experiencing unadulterated joy for the first time since before Sarah's death. This joy was a gift.

This is not any easy journey. Everything now is held differently. I don't laugh the way I used to. However, I am no longer in that horrifying abyss of the first days, weeks, months, and year after Sarah's death. When I come across another person who is a year or two or ten further down the road than I am, I listen carefully to what she or he says. I have asked older people how they have dealt with tragedy and loss in their own lives. The ones further down the road seem to have their lives more in balance; they have more wisdom; they seem to allow for more happiness and joy. They are good teachers. I sometimes get more than a glimmer of these possibilities.

Perhaps the evolution of my experience is reflected in the cycle of dreams I have had over this time. At first, there were a few violent dreams—Sarah being bloodily murdered in various nightmarish circumstances. Then, mercifully, one night in a dream, I had a vision of my daughter glowing in a radi-

antly white dress. She gave me a warm embrace and explained to me that she was moving to New York and insisted, “Don't worry, Daddy, I will be all right.” Then, after a while, for several months, there were “cemetery dreams”: peaceful visions of Sarah dead in a cemetery at night, small mounds of fresh cold moist dirt, an open grave, an open empty casket, her body lying on a bier, light glowing behind her—visions like these. And now, over the past few months, Sarah has been present in a few of my dreams of everyday life as if she had never died—just a part of the family that she had never left. And this is strange of course; it would be a good conclusion to it all, but I suspect there will be a further evolution in these dreams.

We've completed our first thousand days and nights, and we may well have another ten thousand to go. I guess the most amazing thing to me is that we have made it this far. Things have gotten, if not better, different. I don't think there is any major threshold or any big prize or anything, waiting down the road, but the journey will go on. I am pretty sure there is no such thing as “closure.” We need somehow to learn to live with loss, as so many others have done before us.

I have been out surfing a few times since Sarah died. Sometimes alone. I think of her in these times and know that she has a completely different place in my life now. And I know as I'm driving back that life does go on. It's important to get beyond the cliché of this, and to keep living as authentically as we can, having an openness to whatever comes *and* living with the loss. ♡

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## The Gift *continued from page 3*

He said, “Your son is dead and that is the worst possible thing that could happen to you!”

During another session my husband expressed his concern for me. He wanted to help me and felt helpless, frustrated not knowing what to do. I, on the other hand, expressed my lack of understanding of why my husband was not angry at Sammy's psychiatrist. Dr. Shneidman discussed our different feelings with us and asked us to actively listen to one another, not judging what the other person was saying or feeling.

At our last meeting, Dr. Shneidman told us he could no longer see us because of a teaching engagement he had in Israel. He told us about a colleague who he thought we'd like who had extensive experience in helping survivors. We saw Sam Heilig, MSW, (another gift) for a number of weeks.

The postvention efforts we received from these experts at a very early stage validated our feelings, and we learned we could help one another better than anyone else by actively listening to each other. By really listening we better understood how the other was feeling, and this brought us closer to each

other. They introduced the possibility that we would find a way through our grief, giving us hope that we could/would learn to live with our tragedy and at some point be happy again. Further, they reduced the aftereffects of the most traumatic event we'll ever experience.

The gratitude we feel for these kind, very special, caring persons is enormous. Never will we forget their gift! ♡

*“No one is capable of gratitude as one who has emerged from the kingdom of night. We know that every moment is a moment of grace, every hour an offering; not to share them would mean to betray them. Our lives no longer belong to us alone; they belong to all who need us desperately.”*

— Ellie Wiesel

### LOIS BLOOM'S “MOURNING AFTER SUICIDE”

The new rewrite of this popular grief handbook is available now! Call 800.537.3394 from 8:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Eastern.

Individual copies are \$3.00.

<i>If you require larger quantities:</i>		100-249 . . . \$1.75
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## SURVIVORS AFTER SUICIDE NEWSLETTER

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