

Survivors After Suicide

Your Path Toward Healing
Erasing the Stigma – Suicide is Preventable

A Program of Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services Spring 2016

A Most Magical and Extraordinary 10 Year Anniversary

By Greg Santilli

*“Remember Red, hope is a good thing,
maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies”*

– Andy Dufresne, *Shawshank Redemption*

My name is Greg Santilli, and I am a survivor of suicide loss. On August 16, 2005, I lost my only sibling brother, David (Dave) Phillip Santilli, to suicide. Dave was 43 years old at the time of his suicide. My family and I were devastated from this great loss, and our lives were forever changed.

Three weeks before Dave's death, he stopped by our home to talk about his life challenges, and to seek help and guidance. During that short visit, one of the things I did was show him a short segment of one of my favorite movies, *The Shawshank Redemption*. I've always loved this movie because the theme is about not letting go of hope. It demonstrates the tenacity and endurance of the human spirit, even under the most adverse circumstances. The movie is about the value of a true friendship that can stand the test of time. The part of the movie that I showed Dave is the scene where "Red" (Morgan Freeman) reads the buried letter from his friend "Andy," (Tim Robbins) specifically, "*Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies.*" I shared this to help explain the whole concept of hope to Dave, in order to help him create hope in his own life. But he



Greg Santilli and Tim Robbins on the magical 10th Anniversary of Greg's brothers death.

was so deep in his depression, I don't think he could hear or understand what I was saying. A few short weeks after that visit, Dave would be dead.

In the first four and a half years following Dave's suicide, I wallowed in intense grief and overwhelming feelings of guilt for not having been able to save Dave's life. A series of events happened that brought me to my Didi Hirsch eight-week Survivor After Suicide program. That program, the people that facilitated it (Susan Celentano, Mariette Hartley), and

the other fellow survivor participants, ultimately saved my life. I will be forever grateful!

This past June, almost 10 years after Dave's suicide, I attended the wedding of a good friend of mine, Michelle, also a survivor of suicide loss. At the post wedding brunch I met my friend's sister, Karen, for the first time. I was invited to join her and her wife at their table for brunch. June 2015 was also around the time that there were two fugitives who had escaped from a New York prison. I commented that this current event was like a real life *Shawshank Redemption*. What ensued was a very

passionate and enthusiastic conversation about the movie and, more specifically, about one of my two newfound friend's own experiences where she had visited the actual "Shawshank" prison in Mansfield, Ohio. I was beside myself with interest and excitement, and we even planned a trip to visit Shawshank together.

As the 10th anniversary of Dave's death approached, I was feeling anxious about how I would feel on that day and how I would choose to spend it. I would go cycling frequently to help me contemplate the upcoming

continued on page 3



Rick's Corner

Raw vs Aged.

No, I'm not talking about beef or sushi.

This is about length of time since the suicide of a significant person in our lives.

Which brings me to Raw.

We have added an additional service to our bereavement outreach.

We will go to the home/school/business/agency that has experienced a suicide and provide bereavement support for those who are most closely impacted by the death.

This would be an informal gathering for survivors to talk about their feelings and ability to cope with the death and the person who has died.

When we go out on a Suicide Response Team call out (SRT), it is within hours of the suicide when survivors are mostly in a state of shock. All we can provide at that time is comfort and support for the moment. With bereavement support provided within several days of the death we can talk more about the person who has died, their history, relationships to family and friends, medical and mental health and stressors leading up to their suicide. We can delve into the survivors' relationship with the person, how the suicide has impacted their lives and how they are coping.

I know this is sounding like an eight-week group or individual intake but it is for the survivors of a particular suicide with shared

experiences and feelings. It is a one-time gathering for them to share with their connected survivors, hopefully to prepare them for the eight-week group.

Where was I going with this?

Oh, yeah.

Raw vs Aged.

The raw emotions that permeate the room can easily dredge up the feelings we had in the early hours and days after our significant person died by suicide.

The pain, grief, guilt and sometimes palpable anger can be a thick fog blotting out the light of hope. That is why we are with the survivors, to provide light in the darkness.

There is a cost for giving this support. Regardless of how far we are from our loss, there is a diminishing of our emotional bankroll.

Wherever you are in your grief, when you reach out to support a new survivor, remember to take care of yourself as well.

Self-care and engaging in activities that replenish are our safety net.

Peace and Love,

Rick

Rick Mogil has been program director of Didi Hirsch's Suicide Bereavement Services since 2007.

Resources for Survivors and Suicide Prevention

HELP LINES

Didi Hirsch Suicide Crisis Line Los Angeles and Orange Counties:

(877) 7-CRISIS or (877) 727-4747

Chat 12:30 pm – 9:30 pm daily at
www.didihirsch.org/chat

Text services also available

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:

(800) 273-TALK or (800) 273-8255

Lifeline Crisis Chat available 24/7 at
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

TEEN LINE:

(800) TLC-TEEN or (800) 852-8336

Teen hotline staffed by teens 6-10 pm
All other hours covered by the
Suicide Prevention Center Crisis Line
(877) 727-4747

Trevor Helpline:

(800) 850-8078

Hotline for gay, lesbian, bisexual
transgender or questioning youth

RESOURCES

American Association of Suicidology (AAS) (202) 237-2280

www.suicidology.org

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)

(888) 333-2280 • www.afsp.org

Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services:

Eleven sites in LA and Orange Counties
(888) 807-7250 • www.didihirsch.org

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill

for family of people with mental illness
National: (800) 950-6264
www.nami.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

www.samhsa.gov

Suicide Prevention Resource Center

(877) GET-SPRC or (877) 438-7772

www.sprc.org or www.sprc.org/thepark

NEWSLETTER

Survivors After Suicide Newsletter is a publication of Didi Hirsch's Suicide Prevention Center. Survivors After Suicide provides support to those who have lost loved ones to suicide.

SAS Program Numbers:

LA: (310) 895-2326

OC: (714) 547-0885

Editor: Jayne Skeff

Editorial Board: Lois Bloom;
Samuel C. Bloom; Kim Kowsky;
Rick Mogil

Reprint Policy:

Nonprofit support organizations may
reprint material from our newsletter.

More resources at www.didihirsch.org

anniversary date and I finally had an epiphany on one particular bike ride. Although I could not know what that day would feel like, I did know without question what we would do. It was such a no-brainer. First, we would go to Santa Monica Beach, the beach we practically lived at each summer during junior and senior high school. Dave loved that beach and he couldn't get there often enough. Next we would watch some live hockey being played as this was Dave's favorite sport. Finding a live hockey game however, posed a challenge. The Kings would not be playing in August, and a friend's son would not start his hockey practice until two days later. After feeling quite a bit of anxiety about how the anniversary day would go, I concluded that things were in God's hands, and that if everything did not go as planned, I would just have to accept that.

On August 15th, the day before the anniversary of Dave's death, I went for a bike ride and thought about how much I did not want the next day to come and how unfair things were. I was not in a positive or hopeful mental state at all.

The morning of August 16th, I started off the day by posting nostalgic pictures of Dave on my Facebook page to honor his life. I still felt very down. I picked up my brother's best friend Bob, and his brother John. As soon as Bob got into the car, I immediately started to feel better. He's the only tangible part of my brother I have left. We proceeded to drive the streets from Hollywood to Santa Monica Beach. Those familiar sites along Santa Monica Boulevard in West Los Angeles felt nostalgic and my spirits began to lift.

The next series of events that happened that morning were nothing short of amazing and almost unbelievable. We arrived at Santa Monica Beach and waited in our car in a long line to pay for our parking. Once paid, the parking attendant waved us to proceed ahead. As soon as I began to inch forward a rollerblader whizzed right in front of our car holding a hockey stick! My heart literally soared and I cried out, "Bob, the guys are down here playing hockey!" I immediately remembered that some 20 years ago, Dave used to often play street hockey at Santa Monica Beach with friends – the best of both worlds for him – hockey and the beach!

We proceeded to drive down the parking lot to line up with the particular life guard station that we always camped out at when we were at the beach years ago. When we got down to that section of the parking lot we were thrilled to see a bunch of guys playing street hockey in the same area that Dave had played. We agreed that we would immediately walk over and watch the game. Dave would have loved this!

We stood there for about five minutes and took in this beautiful, almost surreal site. For months I had worried about having hockey on Dave's anniversary date. And here it was, in the exact place that Dave had played years ago! It was like a dream come true. After a few moments relishing this site, I looked at Bob and said, "I have to go over and tell these guys how much happiness they have brought me."

I proceeded to walk over to one of the players who was sitting off to the side of the hockey arena, apparently taking a break and watching the other players. I approached him and openly told him, "today is the ten year anniversary of my only brother's suicide, and I cannot tell you how much happiness you guys have brought me by being out here playing my brother's favorite sport." Two other players skated up and a whole conversation ensued about my brother. They asked me his name, asked to see a picture of him, and we talked about him playing street hockey in that very same place, at his favorite Santa Monica Beach spot, some twenty years ago. Complete strangers, these guys cared about my brother and my enormous loss.

I was so touched, I asked the guys if I could take a picture with all of them. They readily agreed. Before leaving I told them my name, and asked each of them their names so that I could better remember this extraordinary experience. When I asked the last guy his name he answered "Tim." I said, "Nice to meet you Tim, I'm Greg." I looked away for a moment and then did a double take. For the first time I realized the great familiarity of Tim's face. I said, "are you Tim Robbins?" He answered, "Yes." I was dumbfounded. I said, *Shawshank Redemption?* and he nodded. I couldn't believe it was him! I told him how much I loved that movie. I asked and he agreed to take another picture with just he and I.

We spent the rest of the late morning and early afternoon on Dave's favorite beach and celebrated his life. We released blue balloons into the air and watched them float up to the heavens in his honor. All the while I could not stop thinking about the whole hockey and Tim Robbins experience. How could this have happened? Not only on Dave's anniversary, but at his favorite beach and playing his favorite sport. It was almost too much to comprehend.

That day I received many voicemails, texts, Facebook messages etc. There is one in particular that I think sums it all up best. My newfound friend Karen commented on my Facebook picture with Tim Robbins, his awesome friends, and me:

"Greg – my hugs and prayers to you on this difficult day. However, it is very apparent your brother wants you to remember "his" day with smiles and limited sadness. To have Mr. Robbins there (after all the talk we had in June) AND playing your bro's fav sport! You are a lucky man to have been blessed!"

I will remember that extraordinary day, August 16, 2015, for the rest of my life! What is most significant is this: If there ever was any doubt in my mind that my brother's soul was in heaven, that he was granted eternal life, that doubt vanished that day! A day that I had dreaded, a day that I had resented and did not want to come, actually became the most amazing, incredible, extraordinary day of my whole life. I am beyond grateful!

***"Remember Red, hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things,
and no good thing ever dies"***

Ten Things to Know about Grief

While your grief is unique, these are some common themes that many people experience.

1. Death can affect all aspects of your life

Grief is life-transforming – a journey between how things were and how they will be.

2. Grief is a natural process

Grief is a consequence of living, loving and having meaningful connections with others.

3. Individual differences in grieving styles

Each person grieves in his own way and with her own timetable. Some people openly express their emotions while others control them. Neither style is right or wrong; each can be an effective way through grief.

4. Children and grief

Children look to the important adults in their lives to learn how to grieve. Simple information about death and grief helps them.

5. Social connections and support

When grieving, it is normal to look at, change or sometimes end, certain relationships. Often the company of other bereaved people is particularly comforting.

6. Experiences you might have in grief

Intense pain and emotions that you have never felt before are a natural part of grief. So are fatigue, forgetfulness and irritability.

7. Fluctuations in the grief process

You will have ups and downs, good days and bad days. Value the good days as breaks or rests in your journey.

8. Self-care and what helps

Be gentle and patient with yourself. Keep some normal routines for health and social contact with family, friends, bereavement groups, or chat rooms. If you are concerned about yourself, seek professional counseling.

9. Time for grief

There are no time lines for grief. It takes as long as it takes which is often longer than you or other people expect. You will always have times when you think about, miss, and grieve for the person who died.

10. Grief as a spiritual journey of healing

The death of someone significant brings change that puts you on a different life path. Nothing will ever be the same, yet you must somehow find meaning in the new path before you. As the journey continues, you will experience healing and personal growth.

Michael's Poem

Please wake me from this nightmare, it's just too hard to bear.
Let me be able to hug my brother one more time to show him that I care.

I try not to be angry, I'm trying to understand.
Did we even cross your mind before you followed through with your plan?

I can't wait to close my eyes at night to sleep away the pain.
But when morning comes and I wake it all comes flooding back again.

I imagine this is maybe a glimpse of the pain that made you break.
To make you choose to go to sleep one day never to awake.

Why couldn't you come to me? I would have tried to help.
You didn't have to suffer like this all by yourself.

You deserved so much better, I wish you could've seen
All the love that surrounded you and people on your team.

You used to be my shadow. Be involved in all I did.
You used to be my other half, a smart-ass quirky kid.

A proud big sister, quickly I became.
I wanted to protect you and help you find your way.

I'm sorry if I failed you, I gave you too much space.
Now I'm left with a hole in my heart that can never be replaced.

Forgive me for getting caught up in my own life and things going on.
I feel like I looked away for a minute, turned back and you were gone.

You will forever be a reminder of how quickly life can change.
This gives me realization of priorities that need to be rearranged.

It makes me sad to think of all that you will miss.
There was so much life left to be lived, it's not supposed to be like this.

Your precious nephew is my only saving grace.
He helps take away the sting of the pain with every smile on his face.

If only you could see him now, he's growing up so fast.
I know he'd make you happy and even make you laugh.

Too smart for your own good, your future was so bright
At the end of all this darkness there has to be some light.

You strived for a perfection one could argue doesn't exist.
With expectations so high, you aimed to hit hard and were devastated
when you missed.

You had a gentle, kind and generous soul.
But let's not forget when I was wrong, you didn't hesitate to let me know.

Who else is going to make me eat weird and unknown things?
Take me out of my comfort zone to see what the next course brings.

I'm so happy that you found your passion for food and wine.
It seemed that you found your home in a New York state of mind.

But now I'll never be able to look at New York quite the same.
And you know I can't navigate the subway without you anyway.

I try to think of all the good memories to help me push through and be strong.
I cherish what we shared together and use that as fuel to carry on.

But please don't fault me for when I am weak.
When I need to cry and fall to my knees.

Instead help me to feel your presence and strength.
Help me know you're at peace and guiding the way.

My baby brother there will always be
A part of you that lives on in me.

The Suicide Prevention Center Announces New Director, Carolyn Levitan, LCSW

By Rick Mogil



Carolyn Levitan, LCSW,
Director of the Crisis Line

The Suicide Prevention Center is proud to welcome Carolyn Levitan, LCSW, as the new Director of the Crisis Line.

Carolyn's desire to help others began in high school with keen interests in teaching and social justice. During this time, she also had the opportunity to take an introductory class in Psychology. This experience ultimately influenced her to change her focus to one of helping people through difficulties in their lives and developing coping skills to reach their potential.

Carolyn went on to complete her undergraduate and graduate degrees at the UCLA School of Social Work. Her career began in a Child and Family outpatient clinic that

included hands-on field work in underserved communities in South Los Angeles.

Carolyn has been with Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services since 2012 in the Adult Division, moving into the role of Assistant Program Director. Originally she envisioned herself having a private practice but her involvement in program management has allowed her to find fulfillment in helping and guiding staff to provide mental health services for clients.

During her time at UCLA she was a volunteer on the peer-to-peer hotline and developed a healthy respect for the people who provide immediate counseling to those in need.

UPCOMING EVENTS

20th Anniversary Erasing the Stigma Leadership Awards

Thursday, April 28, 2016

Beverly Hilton Hotel
Beverly Hills, CA

Honoring Melissa Rivers and Maya Forbes
Performance by K.T. Tunstall
Eva La Rue to emcee

Survivors After Suicide Summer Potluck

Saturday, June 4, 2016

Veterans Memorial Park – Rotunda Room
4117 Overland Ave., Culver City

Alive & Running 5K Walk/Run for Suicide Prevention

Sunday, September 25, 2016



Lucia Jarrell

The Orange County Survivor Support Services team welcomes our newest staff member, Lucia Jarrell

By Jayne Skeff

We invite all of you to welcome Lucia Jarrell to the Orange County team. She is a Bilingual Marriage and Family Therapist Intern as well as Professional Clinical Counselor Intern. Lucia will be starting the first Spanish eight-week Survivors After Suicide support group and will also be providing suicide bereavement counseling for Spanish-speaking survivors and assisting with outreach and other program needs throughout Orange County.

Lucia acquired her master's degree from California Baptist University in Riverside. She was awarded a California MFT Stipend in 2012-2013 for her commitment to community mental health. Lucia is looking forward to providing support for the survivors in the community.

IN MEMORY OF

Julia Asher	Michael Gutierrez	Sarah Ann Loring	Lynne Miller Simon
Adam Baldarrama	Beth Hess	Cindy Love	Lawerence Sonny
Sammy Bloom	Dellion Dezube Hufford	Johnny Lynch	Bea Stern
Dorothy Bonds	Andy Hyman	William Irving McCahey	Brandon J. Sullivan
Ken Bowlus	Henri Iwasaki	David Modjallal	Robert Sumser
Kevin Delange	Kam Kamerschen	Andrea Monique Montes	Barbara Ann Taub
Joshua Erman	Tabandeh Katouzi	Don Mowery	Brandon Toh
Jimmy Feliciano &	Pam Kluff's mother	Maximo Munzi	Mike Vignovich
Michael Ortega	Sean Kowsky	Margaret Ou	Bruce D. Weinstein
James R. Fitzgerald	Kurtis	Shari Jane Potter	Austin Wells
Friend	Noah Langholz	Cathy Rabin	Matthre Werber
Jonathan Gray	Stan Lelewer	Mallory Richards	Katie Wing
Dr. G.	Matthew Lewis	Derek Schraeder	Aaron Yanagisawa
Dr. Nick Gutierrez	Daniel Lichstein	Tina Klein Siegal	

IN HONOR OF

Curley Bonds	Rick Gatlin	Kim Kowsky	Tami Ruth
Dr. Cohen	The Grigsby Family	Kirk Lee	Sam
The Incredible	Nina Gutin	Janine Lichstein	Becky Stock
Didi Hirsch Staff	Saw Htun and Myint Myint Ko	Howard Loeb	Christine Tarallo
Charlotte Fletcher	Dr. Erin Hubbard	Rick Leslie and Laura Ornest	Lyn Weissman
Marty Frank	Pam Kluff	Andrew Rubin	Eileen and Robert Zigman
Cindy and Garrett			

October 17, 2015 through March 1, 2016

Finding Gratitude Amidst Grief: Last Winter's Potluck

By Susan Auerbach, SAS Advisory Council

*When faced with the question, "What am I thankful for?"
Let's notice the sensations and emotions that arise.
And when gratitude feels beyond our grasp, let's say to ourselves and each other:
"I am present to...the sadness in my heart.
I notice...that this has been a difficult time.
I am aware of...the grief I am feeling.
I acknowledge ...my struggles and the struggles of those around me."*

– Rabbi Yael Levy

The theme of the winter potluck on December 5, 2015 was finding gratitude amidst grief. Potluck Committee members Mary Gayman, Nina Gutin, Jean Toh, and I struggled over the title. We knew a lot of survivors struggle with gratitude, especially in the early stages of suicide loss and at anniversaries, birthdays, or other triggering events. Yet gratitude also sustains many of us as we move through our grief journey. We had to recognize that survivors come to these gatherings from different places with different needs.

After a remembrance of Suicide Prevention Center Co-Founder Dr. Norman Farberow, the program began. The atmosphere was quiet and reflective. Nina and Jean shared how very far they felt from gratitude after losing a brother (Nina) and a son (Jean). For both of them, openness to gratitude came slowly and in small doses. In Nina's case, it came through awareness of other people's support for her loss and for Jean, in noticing the daily gifts of nature, like a bird in the backyard. Susan read the quote from Rabbi Yael Levy above and led a guided meditation. Afterwards, Jean invited everyone to take one of the bookmarks on their table, write or draw something they were grateful for and



then share their feelings in small groups. During the open mike that followed, survivors spoke about gratitude for SAS support groups, as well as other things that were on their minds about their loss. After the closing ritual of saying the names of our lost ones, we each took home a painted gratitude stone.

The guided meditation is included here in case you'd like to try it on your own. Is there anyone out there who could lead a short meditation at a future gathering? Or maybe you have ideas for potluck themes, activities, and closing rituals, or comments on past potluck programs? The next SAS potluck is Saturday, June 4, 2016. Contact anyone mentioned in this article with your thoughts or feel free to email me at sauerbach2063@sbcglobal.net – and thanks.

GUIDED MEDITATION on finding gratitude amidst grief: "Close your eyes and sit quietly for a moment. Feel your feet on the floor and your body in the chair, with your hands resting in your lap. Slow down your breath and breathe in gently for a count of 3, then out for a count of 3. Breathing in this moment, breathing out any distractions...[pause] Now I invite you to bring to mind the love you had for the person you lost...and as you think of this, place your right hand over your heart. Breathing in that love, breathing out...[pause] And now, think about someone or something that you are grateful to for supporting you on your grief journey... and with that thought, bring your left hand over your right hand resting on your heart... Breathing in the possibility of gratitude, now or in the future, and breathing out ...[pause] When you are ready, please open your eyes."





4760 South Sepulveda Boulevard
Culver City, California 90230

Mailing list changes cannot be made unless corrected or duplicated labels are mailed to SAS at the address above

NON-PROFIT ORG.
US POSTAGE
PAID
MERCURY MAILING
SYSTEMS INC.

SAS Group Meetings

Everyone who has completed an eight-week Survivors After Suicide Support Group is invited to attend scheduled monthly meetings at any of the locations listed below. There is no charge.

Drop-In Groups

San Gabriel Valley

Meets every Wednesday, 7:30 – 9:00 p.m.

San Fernando Valley

Meets the 2nd Saturday of each month, 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Meeting dates: March 12, April 9, May 14, June 11, July 9.

Santa Ana

Meets the 1st Wednesday of each month, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.
Meeting dates: April 6, May 4, June 1, July 6.

South Bay

Meets the 2nd Sunday of each month, 11:00 am – 12:30 p.m.
Meeting dates: March 13, April 10, May 8, June 12, July 10.

West Los Angeles

Meets every Tuesday night, 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.

Eight-Week Groups

Our eight-week support groups for those who have lost loved ones to suicide take place on the following schedule:

Group 1: Late February Group 2: Late May Group 3: Mid August Group 4: Mid October

Groups meet once a week for an hour and a half for eight consecutive weeks, with locations in Sherman Oaks, Culver City, Redondo Beach, San Marino, Santa Ana and Newbury Park.

Please call to be placed in a group. Los Angeles/Ventura counties: (310) 895-2326 or Orange County: (714) 547-0885