

Survivors After Suicide

Your Path Toward Healing • Erasing the Stigma • Suicide is Preventable

A Program of Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services Fall 2018

Anthony Bourdain and Kate Spade Tragedies Spike Calls to Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Hotline

By Randy Levin-Cohen

The recent suicides of international culinary icon Anthony Bourdain and renowned fashion designer Kate Spade devastated their legions of fans. Calls to the Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Crisis Line more than doubled as people attempted to reconcile the celebrities' public personas with their private struggles with depression.

Many callers to the Crisis Line reported feeling shocked that these well-known talents, at the top of their game, died so unexpectedly. People often assume that because celebrities are rich and famous they don't have problems. But mental illness is an equal-opportunity condition that includes people of every age, race, gender, religion, and socio-economic status.

Both Bourdain and Spade appeared to have everything to live for and gave no warning signs they would take their lives. A gifted chef, writer, and award-winning television documentarian in *Parts Unknown* and *No Reservations*, Bourdain,



taught us that by simply sharing a meal, we could find common ground while celebrating our differences. Although he battled bouts of depression, according to friends, before he died he seemed happy and in love, a painful reminder of how difficult it is for us to recognize another person's pain and suffering.

Bourdain's death came just days after Kate Spade's suicide. Her husband revealed "Kate suffered from depression and anxiety for many years and was actively seeking help and working closely

with her doctors to treat her disease, one that takes far too many lives."

According to Dr. Anne Schuchat, Principal Deputy Director of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "suicide is one of the top 10 causes of death in the U.S. right now, and it's one of three causes that is actually increasing recently, so we do consider it a public health problem - and something that is all around us." In 2016 alone, about 45,000

lives were lost to suicide and the problem is getting worse.

In June 2018, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention published a survey showing suicide rates increased by 25% across the country from 1999-2016. The report finds twenty-five states experienced a rise in suicides by more than 30%. More than half of those who died by suicide had not been diagnosed with a mental health condition.

According to the study, the problems most frequently associated with suicide

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Board of Directors Tours New Suicide Prevention Center

Support the Hope and Light Campaign

The Hope and Light Campaign has successfully raised \$11 million of their \$15 million dollar goal to make the dream of a new state-of-the-art Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Center a reality. The move to Century City takes place this fall and will house a mental health clinic, special services for children, a training academy for mental health professionals and a research and evaluation hub under one roof.

According to a new report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicides are up 25% across the nation, and Didi Hirsch' staff and its board members are working hard to raise the additional funds needed to meet the increasing demand for crisis services, expand support to other survivors at risk, including children, educate more people to recognize and respond to suicide warning signs and help save lives.



Rick's Corner

There is no time frame for our grief. We may try to impose a construct to facilitate moving forward only to find it a Sisyphean task. All we want is to minimize the pain and stem the flow of tears. I liken this to the human evolution chart.



In the beginning we are bent over with the pain of our grief, unable to stand up, let alone move forward. As we begin to process our loss, seeking help and allowing others to provide support, we can stand a little straighter, take larger steps and attempt to keep our focus on a future of acceptance and the integration of our loss into our lives.

Then, BAM! A thought, a song, a familiar face or an event can kick us back to those first hours and days of our grief.

Over time, the happenstance of these setbacks occur less frequently and we learn to allow them to happen.

And that is the purpose of our drop-in groups, potlucks and *Alive & Running 5K Walk/Run*.

Promote hope, offer support and bring us together.

Peace and Love,

Rick

Rick Mogil
Program Director
Didi Hirsch Suicide Bereavement Services

Resources for Survivors and Suicide Prevention

HELP LINES

**Didi Hirsch Suicide Crisis Line
Los Angeles and Orange Counties:**
(800) 273-TALK or (800) 273-8255
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:
Teen hotline staffed by teens
6-10 pm: (800) TLC-TEEN, (800)
852-8336, or (310) 855-HOPE
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

Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services:
11 sites in L.A. and Orange Counties
L.A. County (888) 807-7250
O.C. (714) 547-0885
www.didihirsch.org

**American Association of Suicidology
(AAS) (202) 237-2280**
www.suicidology.org

**American Foundation for Suicide
Prevention (AFSP)**
(888) 333-2280 www.afsp.org

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
For families 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

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Nonprofit support organizations may
reprint material from our newsletter.

More resources at www.didihirsch.org

Waiting for the Day

By Tom Morse

Today, I'm waiting for the day -
Waiting for things to get better,
But I know that's not gonna
happen overnight
And my soul hurts, because I am so
very tired of waiting.

Today, I'm feeling out of sorts,
Hoping things will get better,
But it's hard, for many feelings run
at me
And try to overwhelm, and I want
to quit.

Today, I'm yearning not to grieve,
Wanting to be free of the loss and pain,
Not knowing how or when that
might be
As I drift from day to day and inside
it's not quiet.

Today, I'm asking for a friend,
Anyone, someone, who can come
alongside
And wait with me, and help me
bear the weight
As it takes too much to bear it alone.

Today, I'm frustrated, and unsettled and
I don't want to keep feeling like this;
I want it to get better; at least a little -
And my nerves are just about shot.

But, Today, I realize that this may not
Happen on its own;
But I can reach out slowly, in tiny steps
And maybe even touch it at the edges.
A place that lets me have some hope -
Even as I cry or shout, or fold back into
myself later...

Today, today, today
Maybe I can stop waiting for the day
And make it Now.

Pasadena Task Force Moves Forward with Safety Measures for Iconic Colorado Street Bridge



You might recognize the elegant Beaux Arts arches, ornate lamp posts and railings of the Colorado Street Bridge of Pasadena from the movie *La La Land*, when Mia and Sebastian strolled across it at dusk. Built in 1913, it spans 1,467 feet across the Arroyo Seco - a canyon connecting Pasadena to Los Angeles. Named for Colorado Street, now called Colorado Boulevard, it was hailed as the longest and tallest bridge in Southern California and is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Sadly, this architectural masterpiece has a tragic history. According to the city, over 150 people have jumped off the bridge to their deaths since 1919. As a result of the recent increase in suicides and attempts from the bridge, the installation of temporary fencing at the alcove locations was completed on July 24, 2017.

Last year, Pasadena Mayor Terry Tornek and the City Council decided to explore more permanent ways to curb suicides from the iconic bridge. A Task Force comprised of experts in architecture, engineering, historic preservation, mental health, suicide prevention and public safety was selected to find solutions that will stop people from jumping off the bridge while preserving the bridge's national historic status and architectural integrity.

Patricia Speelman, Division Director of the Suicide Prevention Center at Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services, was selected to participate on the committee. Impressed by the extent the entire community was involved in contributing their expertise, she praised the efforts of the city engineers, the police and fire

departments. "I can't tell you how many lives the police and firemen have saved because of the sheer volume of times they were called to that bridge - and they were literally able to dissuade people from jumping," said Speelman, who spoke several times about the best practices and the efficacy of suicide intervention measures.

The committee met several times to consider a variety of safety measures to monitor the bridge. They looked at installing physical barriers, self-help signage, intercoms, call boxes, cameras and modified lighting to increase visibility. They also considered using volunteers to patrol the bridge and motion sensors to alert responders. The suggestions were ranked by expected effectiveness, aesthetics, environmental and emergency services impact, and time until full implementation.

Based on these criteria, the Task Force prioritized creating physical barriers and ledge modifications as permanent measures. They also suggested updating the bilingual signage to include the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number, the new text line and the message: "Feeling Hopeless? We Can Help."

On May 9, 2018, City Council approved a \$400,000 budget for the design phase of the protective barriers. The next step will involve architects and engineers making presentations to the City Council on their proposed plans for installing barriers. Then it is up to the Mayor and City Council to decide which option will provide the most effective solution for stopping suicides off Pasadena's historic bridge and preserving its status as an iconic treasure.

Shaming and Naming

By Susan Auerbach

We survivors don't always realize how shame and stigma around suicide seep in under our skin, even if we live in communities that seem to be open and understanding. When we lost our 21-year-old son, Noah, to suicide in 2013, the rabbi's eulogy spoke of Noah's unbearable pain, the demons of depression, and the need not to blame the family or the victim. Two years later, I was ashamed at how easily I could still be sucked into shame and stigma.

My grief journey had coincided with the long preparation for an adult group *bat mitzvah* at my synagogue; I'd struggled to concentrate on Hebrew and theology through the worst period in my life. When the big day finally came, I decided not to include the part of my speech about suicide grief because I didn't want to dampen the celebratory mood of other families at the event. As a result, I felt invisible during the ceremony compared to classmates who shared highly personal stories in their speeches. When I'd previously read the class a reflection on how Noah's suicide made me feel far from God, one person commented, "too much information." I felt shocked and shamed in spite of sympathetic hugs from others. Is it any wonder I was wary of sharing my experience in a public ritual?

At family gatherings in the first couple years, I used to mention Noah's name often to signal that it was OK to talk about him and his death—but hardly anyone took me up on the offer. So I got used to self-censoring and holding back from reminiscing about Noah for fear of bringing sadness, silence, and contamination into the room. Is this a surprise when most relatives avoided mentioning him?

The first year or so on my blog, I referred to Noah only as "N." I thought I was protecting his privacy or reputation

in the wider world by keeping talk of his suicide and its aftermath separate from his identity. When I finally started posting about Noah as "Noah," it was a relief, restoring his personhood and our connection. I still kept my full name out of the blog for fear that my students or colleagues would search for my name online, see the blog, and judge me. I didn't want them to know that I was the mother of a young man who killed himself, especially if they didn't know me well; I didn't trust them to understand. The blog listed "Mourning Mom" as author rather than my name for its first four years. I only changed it four years after the suicide when my grief memoir was about to be published and I would be fully "outed" as a survivor. I had to check with my husband and living son about using their names or Noah's last name in the book, lest it somehow harm them or our family name.

Naming has a lot to do with shaming around suicide but also with resilience and community. The most moving moment at gatherings of loss survivors for me is always the closing ceremony when we light candles and stand in a circle, each speaking our lost one's name and their relation to us. Some people, like me, have more than one name to say. It's at these times that I publically own my experience as surviving both a father's and a son's suicide. We survivors stand up and speak the names of our lost ones with sadness, love, and pride. These names that are spoken less and less as time moves on. These lives that we'll never forget. Sharing and speaking their names, we stand together against shame and stigma.

And of course, at suicide prevention walks/runs, we wear the names of our lost ones on our backs for all to see. The first time I went to the *Alive & Running 5K Run/Walk* in Los Angeles, I was amazed

to see thousands of young people noisily lining up for T-shirts and water bottles like at any fundraising race. Afterwards, I thought of changing out of my T-shirt when I went to a nearby café. But the cafés were full of people in T-shirts promoting suicide prevention and the name of the person whose memory they were honoring. The S-word was outed on a sunny Sunday morning while other people enjoyed their brunch or cappuccino, and there was no shame. This gives me courage.

This article was adapted from I'll Write Your Name on Every Beach: A Mother's Quest for Comfort, Courage and Clarity After Suicide Loss by Susan Auerbach.

Autumn Sonata

By May Sarton

If I can let you go as trees let go
Their leaves, so casually, one by one;
If I can come to know what they know,
That fall is the release,
the consummation,
Then fear of time and the
uncertain fruit
Would not distemper the
great lucid skies
This strangest autumn,
mellow and acute.
If I can take the dark with open eyes
And call it seasonal,
not harsh or strange
(For love itself may need
a time of sleep),
And, treelike, stand unmoved
before the change,
Lose what I lose to keep
what I can keep,
The strong root still alive
under the snow,
Love will endure - if I can let you go

Anthony Bordain and Kate Spade (Continued from cover)

are strained relationships, life stressors often involving work or finances, substance use problems, physical health conditions, and recent or impending crises. Mental health professionals state the most important takeaway is that suicide is an issue not only for the mentally

ill but for anyone struggling with serious lifestyle problems.

The intense media focus from these high-profile suicides helped raise awareness not only about suicide but also about the Suicide Prevention Lifeline, which experienced a significant increase

in call volume after news agencies proactively publicized the number. Higher public awareness also generated an outpouring of people inquiring about how to become a volunteer crisis counselor on Didi Hirsch's Crisis Line.

Introducing Joanna Constanza!



Joanna Constanza is Orange County Survivor Support Services' newest hire and joined Didi Hirsch in May 2018 as the Bilingual Administrative Assistant. She is also working on her Bachelor's Degree in Psychology. Although Joanna is new on staff, she has been part of the Didi Hirsch family since participating in the *Alive and Running 5K* as a survivor after suicide. "I lost my brother, who

was also my only sibling, to suicide almost five years ago in October of 2013. At that time, I knew absolutely nothing about suicide other than generic information," says Joanna. After a year of attempting to learn to deal with her new "normal", she began searching for resources and information to better understand suicide and how to cope with her grief.

During one of her late-night searches, she found Didi Hirsch's *Alive and Running 5K* and immediately felt empowered to do something to help and raise awareness while also honoring and keeping her brother's memory alive. 2015 marked the start of Team MAC, named for her brother's initials: Manuel Antonio Constanza. "I feel very fortunate to be working for an organization whose mission I so passionately support and I look forward to learning and contributing to Didi Hirsch's efforts to help those in need."

Disconnected

By JoAnn Hatfield

I am watching from the outside in. An observer.

I don't know this person.

This person that gets up every morning.

Goes to work.

Goes through all the motions.

This person that has a goal every day to get so much done - yet accomplishes little.

This person that so many people, after 2 years...believe is doing just fine.

They are relieved.

I watch her:

She talks.

She moves.

She smiles.

She laughs.

But I don't know her.

I am empty. Exhausted. Scared. On the outside looking in.

Will I ever climb back into this person?

Congratulations on Your Promotions!



Jacquelyn Rivera is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in the Suicide Survivor Support Services program in Orange County. Recently promoted to Assistant Program Director, Jacquelyn began her 13-year association with Didi Hirsch interning in the Child and Family Division while pursuing her MSW at USC. In 2004 she was hired as a full-time child and family therapist. "The Suicide Prevention Center has become like family and the people we serve and support in Suicide prevention, intervention and bereavement are the reasons why I love to come to work every day," says Jacquelyn.



Sandra Yi-Lopez started as a student intern at Didi Hirsch Excelsior House in 2011 and got involved with the Suicide Prevention Center where she was ultimately hired after graduation and has been working ever since. Now a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in the Survivor Support Services program in Orange County, Sandra was recently promoted to Lead Clinical Supervisor. In her new role, she looks forward to supporting staff development and continuing to foster a safe place for survivors of suicide loss and suicide attempts.



Jasmine Cantoran joined the Orange County Survivor Support Services team in January 2015 after temping as a Bilingual Administrative Assistant. Promoted to Bilingual Training and Outreach Coordinator in March 2018, Jasmine also translates presentations in Spanish and leads the O.C. Speaker's Bureau. While working at Didi Hirsch, Jasmine discovered she is a suicide loss survivor and her family chose to suffer in silence. Jasmine now wants to learn everything she can from the suicide prevention team to help others get the support they need and erase the stigma.

IN HONOR OF

Daniella S. Ayala
Claudia Barasch
Mark Burkes
John C. Castillo
Kita Curry
Clay Daniels
Charlotte Fletcher
Robert Floch
Adele Hare
Generation Hopeful
Patty Kaplan
Pam Kluff
Janine and Henry Lichstein
Nathan Lichtman
Gail Kamer Lieberfarb
Laura Ornest
Noel Parish
Oscar Rizo
Scott Rowland
Andrew Rubin
Nancy Rubin
Talia Shapiro
Gerilyn Shorten
Cheri Yousem
Eileen and Robert Zigman

IN MEMORY OF

Elliot
Susan Anderson
Amit Bendavid
Scott Bentley
Brenda Beresford
Sammy Bloom
Barbara Blum
Anthony Bourdain
Suzanne Bussard
Daniel Cabrera
Micheal Cohen
Jennifer Eileen Daclan
Neal Drapkin
Ronnie "Oni" Edwards
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David Sliff
Jean Standing
Jean Stein
Brandon Toh
AJ Trevino
Joshua Van Poucke
Miguel Vazquez
Christiane Wilke
Paul Woodrow
Erika Zimmermann

February 21, 2018 through July 27, 2018

UPCOMING EVENTS

20th Annual Alive & Running 5K Walk/Run

Sunday, September 30, 2018
7:00-9:45 a.m.
West 88th Street and La Tijera Boulevard
Just north of Los Angeles Intl Airport

AFSP International Survivors of a Suicide Loss Day

Saturday, November 17, 2018
Visit afsp.org for times and locations of events
in Los Angeles, Ventura and Orange Counties.

Survivor After Suicide Winter Potluck

Saturday, December 8, 2018, 6:30-8:00 p.m.
Veterans Memorial Park, Rotunda Room
4117 Overland Avenue, Culver City

Celebrating 20 Years of Alive & Running



On Sunday, September 30th at 8 a.m., over 2,000 runners and walkers will join together in Westchester near LAX to celebrate the 20th annual *Alive & Running 5K Walk/Run for Suicide Prevention*. In honor of two decades of fundraising for suicide prevention

advocacy, a special team of former honorees from Didi Hirsch's annual *Erasing the Stigma Leadership Awards* will participate in this exciting event.

Emceed by actor, director and comedian, Dennis Dugan, this uplifting, life-affirming gathering remembers

loved ones lost to suicide while raising funds and awareness for the Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Center.

The first in the nation, the Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Center is a national and world leader in training, research and services for people who have thought about, attempted or lost someone to suicide.

The Center is one of two in the nation that takes calls 24/7 in English and Spanish from around the United States. It is also one of only three in the U.S. that answers calls on the National Disaster Distress Helpline.

Didi Hirsch trained over 10,000 people last year - including LAPD's SWAT teams, the FBI, firefighters and other emergency responders - how to recognize and respond to warning signs.

In addition to promoting awareness about suicide, proceeds from *Alive & Running* also support the expansion of lifesaving services at the Suicide Prevention Center's new home in Century City which opens this fall.

For more information or to register for *Alive & Running* please go to www.aliveandrunning.org.

It's More Than A Potluck

By Randy Levin-Cohen

This summer's SAS Potluck meant more than just bringing delicious food. It served as both a graduation for those who completed their survivors' support group, and a metaphor for being able to, even in the depths of grief, create something beautiful together - a meal and community.

Dr. Nina Gutin, Ph.D, a psychologist and survivor, co-facilitates the San Gabriel SAS group with Marilyn Nobori. "We're in this together - sharing the burden of grief and the enjoyment of this meal, even in the face of the pain," she explains.

The potluck provides a safe place where talking openly about loss is accepted and encouraged. Through activities like Healing Through Writing, participants are invited to read their

writing aloud or share something meaningful by someone else. Because there are few places survivors can openly talk about what they're experiencing, having the open mic gives everyone the opportunity to speak uncensored and without judgment.

When a fellow survivor tells their story, it helps others validate their feelings and assure them things will get better. This ritual evolved from the realization that one can use one's own trauma to help others navigate through their grief. "As a survivor, to be able to create meaning when someone is feeling life is meaningless is really powerful and gives you purpose," says Dr. Gutin.

The potluck ends with a closing ceremony. Candles are lit to signify the movement of this healing process



through time: past, present and future. Everyone holds hands and has the chance to say their loved one's name; to hear and acknowledge the reality of the loss.

"Although everyone's loss is different, you're experiencing the loss together," says Dr. Gutin. "The potluck's rituals may vary but the intent is to honor our loved ones while supporting each other in a communal way."



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.



Sunday, September 30, 2018
7a.m. – 9:45a.m.

**West 88th Street and
La Tijera Boulevard near LAX**

www.aliveandrunning.org

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 the 4th Wednesday of each month, 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.
Meeting Dates: Oct 24, Nov 28, Dec 26, Jan 23

San Fernando Valley

Meets the 2nd Saturday of each month, 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Meeting dates: Oct 13, Nov 10, Dec 8, Jan 12

Santa Ana – English

Meets the 1st Wednesday of each month, 6:00 – 7:30 p.m.
Meeting dates: Oct 3, Nov 7, Dec 5, Jan 2

Santa Ana – Spanish

Meets the 2nd Thursday of each month, 6:00 – 7:30 p.m.
Meeting dates: Oct 11, Nov 8, Dec 13, Jan 10

South Bay

Meets the 2nd Sunday of each month, 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Meeting dates: Oct 14, Nov 18, Dec 9, Jan 13

West Los Angeles

Meets every Saturday, 10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Eight-Week Groups

Groups meet once a week for an hour and a half for eight consecutive weeks starting in February, June and October 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