Once upon a time the world was sweeter than we knew. “Everything was ours, how happy we were then. But somehow once upon a time never comes again.”

Lyrics: “Once Upon A Time” from All American Musical 1962

Once upon a time I was a precious little girl and the world was perfect. I had a sweet older brother made of love and dreams. And I loved him. Together we constructed a world of joy while playing army men on the old lumpy quilt perfectly shaped for the hills and valleys for hiding from each other. He taught me to play catch and to throw like a boy. I loved his toys, no dolls for me. I loved his hand-me-down clothes, striped and plaid shirts, no flowerprint blouses. We were the best of friends. And life was most certainly wonderful. Then some few years into our bliss the oddest thing happened, we were the other people, the people to whom tragedy happens.

Suddenly, one perfectly beautiful day, our father died. Our mother experienced such great grief that she forgot to see that not only her husband had died but her children’s father had died too. She became dead mother walking. My brother and I were left alone together. He became frightened and weak and sickly. I became courageous and brave and protective. We looked out for each other. We loved each other. Once upon a time, life was lived happily ever before. Happily ever before life lost its perfection. Then time moved forward and life became more and more unclear. Innocence was lost, experience was gained and anxiety overtook my sweet brother’s love and dreams. I watched as he pulled away and moved forward into his own life. And to me it all became dreamlike. In slow motion with no sound to the words,
Once Upon a Time....

Of all the opening lines I could have used like “In the beginning…” (maybe a little too preachy) or “A long time ago, in a Suicide Prevention Center, far, far away…” (maybe a little too spacey. Well, maybe not for me), I felt the fairy tale beginning to be the most appropriate.

The suicide of our loved ones put an end to our fairy tale future with them.

For some it was the evil Troll, Depression, that turned their hand against themselves. For others it might have been the nasty Abuse twins, Lady Alcohol and/or Prince Substance, who make it easier for our loved one to give in to their impulses and impair their judgment.

Their death has altered our lives and the choices we make, dramatically.

It has been said they ended their suffering and pain and made it ours.

For many of us it has changed our path and purpose in life.

We certainly do not get the beautiful fairy tale ending we envisioned for ourselves.

More like a Greek tragedy.

It has also brought us into a new family: Survivors After Suicide, a place of support, safety and understanding.

And how did all of this begin, you might ask?

We were honored, at this Winter’s potluck on December 5th, to have the founders of the Suicide Prevention Center and Survivors After Suicide program who spoke about the beginnings of our organization and what they had hoped to accomplish.

Survivors were given the opportunity to share with us and the founders what SAS and SPC has meant to them, how it has helped in the healing process.

Thank you, everyone, for your support.

Peace and love,

Rick

Rick Mogil

Resources for Survivors and Suicide Prevention

Help Lines

Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services
Suicide Prevention Crisis Line
Los Angeles and Orange Counties:
(877) 7-CRISIS or (877) 727-4747

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:
(800) 273-TALK or (800) 273-8255

TEEN LINE:
Suicide hotline for teens staffed by trained teens 6-10 p.m.
(800) TLC-TEEN

Trevor Helpline:
Suicide hotline for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or questioning youth
(800) 850-8078

Resources

For full resource list go to www.didihirsch.org

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

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)
(888) 333-2280

Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services:
Nine sites throughout Los Angeles provide mental health care for those with severe mental illness and little money
(310) 390-6612

Suicide Prevention Resource Center
(877) GET-SPRC (438-7772)
www.sprc.org or www.sprc.org/thespark to receive the Suicide Prevention Resource Center’s online newsletter.
Dear Firemen,

It was over eight years ago that my husband, Lanny McCommon, took his life in our garage just a few blocks away from your station, and your team responded to the call. After suffering from severe, clinical depression for 4 years, Lanny gave up hope of ever being normal again. On April 23rd, 2001, he laid out a piece of rug on the floor of the garage, laid down on it, put the gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger. I had talked to him about 45 minutes before and realized that something was wrong. I could tell by the tone of his voice and our conversation. He had been telling me that when you get this sick, you don’t ever get better. He said, “Lanny’s not here anymore...he’s gone”. I tried to reassure him and told him I was leaving work immediately and would be home shortly. When I got home, he didn’t come out the back door to greet me as he normally did. His van was parked on the street, so I knew he had to be home. When I went into the house, I couldn’t find him. My worst fear was materializing. I ran back outside to get my garage door opener. As I opened it, there he was laying on the carpet in a pool of blood with the gun next to his hand. I can’t convey the shock and horror that I felt at that moment. The futility of what he had done hit me like a brick wall. I immediately realized that there was no undoing what he had done. His life and mine were over. I started screaming and crying and ran back into the house to call 911. The operator told me to go back into the garage and feel for a pulse to see if he was still breathing. He wasn’t. There was no bullet hole, which meant that he must have put the gun in his mouth. Oh my god! She then told me to walk down the driveway, to the front of the house away from the garage and wait for the police.

The rest was a blur. I remember several cop cars and fire trucks pulling up in the street and my neighbors standing in their front yards. I remember neighbors trying to console me, relatives arriving...I lost any semblance of time. I couldn’t believe what Lanny did in one brief moment. He had ended his life and changed mine forever. I remember saying that I had hid the gun, but hadn’t checked it in awhile. I should have put it in a new hiding place. Why didn’t I check on it? How could I not have checked on it? A detective reassured me that Lanny would have gotten another one anyway, because he had made his decision. Then I remember a line of firemen, six or seven, I don’t remember how many. Each one came up to me, shook my hand and told me how sorry they were. I will never, ever forget that moment. After the coroner had left with Lanny’s body, the police and firemen and everyone else had left except my brother and sister-in-law, I went back outside into the garage. The carpet was gone. All traces of blood were gone. I looked in the trash can for the carpet. It wasn’t there. I learned the next day from my neighbor that the firemen had cleaned everything in the garage and obviously had taken the carpet with them. They did this so that I wouldn’t have to; so that I wouldn’t have to look at that pool of blood again. I looked throughout the garage for a note. I looked in the garden, because Lanny had talked about our garden that day on the phone. No note anywhere. The only things that were left, Lanny’s watch and glasses that had tiny speckles of blood, were on the counter top in the kitchen, where the firemen, police or someone had placed them...

I never thanked the firemen for what they did for me. I’d like to do that now somehow. Although a simple thank you seems woefully inadequate, I don’t want to wait any longer to do at least that. I realize that some of these firemen are at different locations, but maybe there is some way to contact them. I’m not sure. Anyway, I want to thank them from the bottom of my heart for their incredible acts of kindness. I will never, ever forget them. After going through an 8-week survivor support group, for people who have lost someone to suicide, at Didi Hirsch Mental Health Center, I was determined to educate myself about Lanny’s suicide. I’ve learned about the chemical changes that take place in the brain with different kinds of mental illnesses, including severe, clinical depression, which was the case with Lanny. I learned how genetics can be a risk factor. I knew that Lanny’s dad had been an alcoholic, but I didn’t find out until years later that his father obviously had taken the carpet with them. I learned that one of Lanny’s sisters had been taking anti-depressants most of her adult life. Because of the stigma, he didn’t want anyone to know just how depressed he was. After 2 years, he finally agreed to get help. We both saw a psychologist and several psychiatrists and got on medications. Lanny tried and tried a long list of different meds that either eventually didn’t work or had terrible side effects. I personally think that if we hadn’t waited 2 years before we got help, the meds would have been more effective. The longer you wait to treat a disease, whether it’s your brain, your heart or any other organ, the more difficult it will be to treat. As a last resort, we investigated Electro Convulsive Therapy (ECT). After checking into Cedar Sinai’s psychiatric ward, Lanny said he couldn’t go through with the treatment. His worst nightmare was being locked up in a psychiatric ward and never getting out. “Except”, he said, “this isn’t a nightmare...it’s really happening” I know now that Lanny gave up hope at that point. He didn’t think that there was any medication or anything that could help him. That was the end of January 2001. Three months later he ended the psychic pain and hopelessness that he lived with 24/7...he ended his life.

The only thing that made any sense to me was to help others in crisis, the way I had been helped. So for the last 6 years, I’ve been volunteering at the Didi Hirsch Mental Health Center in Culver City, by co-facilitating support groups and doing phone counseling for people who have lost loved ones to suicide and are waiting to get into a support group. I more recently was trained to be a Suicide Response Team (SRT) member, who works with Mayor Villarigosa’s Crisis Response Team (CRT). However, we only go to police calls involving suicides. Because we’ve had the same experience of losing someone to suicide, we try to help the survivors any way we can and leave brochures about counseling and support groups at Didi Hirsch. I have to give back; if not me, then who?

Again my heartfelt thanks to all of you and especially to those who helped me deal with that horrific day, April 23rd, 2001, the day of Lanny’s suicide.

Sincerely,

Mary Halligan
In addition to raising awareness, Alive and Running raised much needed funds to support Didi Hirsch’s suicide prevention programs. Overall, nearly 1000 walker and runners raised over $135,000. This year, there were fifteen teams that each raised over $1,000, and a total of 53 teams raised $85,500! Funds will be used to support the 24-hour crisis line, survivor programs, and suicide prevention outreach in our community.

Every year, the tragedy of suicide creates some 6,000 new survivors in Los Angeles County alone: parents, siblings, spouses, children, and others who have had someone close to them die by suicide. For many, this was a special day to honor and remember those lost to suicide. Many runners had t-shirts emblazoned with pictures of loved ones and there were memorial quilts and banners with pictures and names of those who died by suicide. Survivors shared personal stories to let other survivors know that they are not alone and many individuals who, when accepting their medals, said they were running to erase the stigma of suicide.

Apart from the race, there were other activities as well. This year as in years past, participants and spectators were able to enjoy the rhythmic sounds of the Japanese Chikara Daiko Drum Group. This ancient tradition, known as both taiko and daiko, goes back many centuries. Large drums were used to scare the enemy on battlefields and were incorporated into court music and religious rites. As a special treat, participants and spectators were able to view a SWAT vehicle and a FBI Mobile Command Center – one of only three in the country.
Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services thanks the following sponsors for their support: Beacon Capital Partners; Fletcher Family Foundation; Miles Electric Vehicles; Quadriga Art; Todd Rubin; Joel Edstrom and Margaret Adams; the Van Konynenburg Family; those who memorialized Sallye Clair; Boone, Bridges, Mueller, O’Keefe & Nichols; CSULB Project Ocean; Kita S. Curry, Ph.D. and Peter Curry; Linda and Martin Frank; Carlos L. Garcia in honor of Sixto B. Garcia, Mimi and Carlos Garcia; Mr. and Mrs. Richard E. Geller; those who memorialized Daniel Lichstein; Jolie and Jon Jashni; Vera M. Jashni, Stan and Mary Lelewer; Janine and Henry Lichstein, Means Knaus Partners, Ogilvy & Mather; Mary and Jeffrey Sherman, those who memorialized Warren Douglas Kolodny; Howard M. Loeb; Mr. and Mrs. Michael Wierwille; the Bruckner Family, Friday Morning Book Club, Greulich Family Trust, Julianne Grossman, the Woodrow Family; and Cheri Renfroe Yousem.

A very special thank you goes to our wonderful volunteers and runners, especially race committee chairs Janine Lichstein and Todd Rubin and the race committee, who helped make this year’s event such a great success.
We take a moment to list those names that are in our memories and those whom we wish to honor in a remembrance.

**SUICIDE PREVENTION CENTER SURVIVORS AFTER SUICIDE**

**IN MEMORY OF**
- Fritz Smars from Julien James Bozung
- Claire Garritano from Frank De Simone
- Edward W. Ford, Jr. from Angela Ford
- Roger D. Creighton from Louise A. Pilati
- Scott Lindsey from Fredda Ellis
- Laura Roanne Cole from Barbara and Melvin Cole
- Robert Tynda from Robert Montgomery
- Aiko Nobori from Erika Rothenberg

**IN HONOR OF**
- John and Kelly Jolley, Jim Jolley and Julie Jalelian from Kelli and Rick Delaney

**ALIVE AND RUNNING 2009**

**IN MEMORY OF**
- Sallye Clair from John Clair
- Jacqi LeBlanc from Martha Barber
- Daniel Lichstein from Richard and Jennifer Geller
- Kyle Kubachka from Deanna Price
- Marty Jaconi from Vera Jashni, Ed.D.
- Warren Douglas Kolodny from Cynthia Kolodny
- Jeff and Chris Pikul from Deborah Pikul Zent
- Jacqi LeBlanc from Rebekah Child
- Deanna Knott from Christy Vargas
- Wei-ping Wang from Ellen Ji
- Wei-ping Wang from Chuanshu Ji
- Wei-ping Wang from Kevin Ji
- Gary (Lefty) Leth from Annalisa Krol
- Kyle Kubachka from April, Keith, Ryan, Brent and Kevin Kubachka
- Moon Lady Aginna from Sandra Cheng
- Camelia Holder from Vanessa Holder
- Geoffrey Grahn from Bryon Hutchens
- Douglas Roman Segura from Tamar Igoyan
- Aiko Nobori from Linda and Dean Nobori
- Robert Sumser from Augela Sumser
- Kenneth Williams from Debbie Williams
- Warren Kolodny from Samuel P. Ross
Johnny Lynch from Stanley Boganey
Alfred Conrad from Jacob F. Conrad
Peter Jones, Dr. Joe Noel, Dr. Andrea Oberstone, Danelle Cox,
Bobby Bagby, Jimmy Bagby, Robert Curry
from Kita Curry, Ph.D. and Peter Curry
Stephen Lelewer from Mary and Stanley D. Lelewer
Scott Anderson from Bill and Linda Straky
Paul Woodrow from Laurie Woodrow
Paul Woodrow from Nina Woodrow
Paul Woodrow from Randi Woodrow
Geoffrey Grahn from Barbara Grahn
Mary Kay Bergman from Carolyn Eddy Anders
Dana Siegel from Noreen and Alan Baum
John Carpenter from Cynthia and Thomas Bryan
Kyle Kubachka from Duy Thu Phan
John Berreyes from Ingrid Scott Berreyes
Lanny McCommon from Mary Halligan
Marc Henry Millstein from Eric Millstein, M.D.
Sasha Simpson from Kelly Wedbush
Dellion Dezube Hufford from Elaine Yim
Jordan M. Farkas from Pamela and Jordan Farkas, M.D.
Janie Gage Phear from Nancy Phear
Sasha Simpson from Tina Brady
Nor Goloman from Lynn Goldman Silbert
Christopher Ziesmer from Mary Kate Denny Ziesmer
Michael A. Moffitt from Karla Lysdal-Moffitt
Sonja Johnson from Robert Johnson
Jonathan Furie from Kim Kowsky
Randall Christian from Darryl Christian
Ben Dravis from Mary Dravis-Parrish
Janie Phear from Kate Jackson
Daniel Lichstein from Janet Jacobs
Donald Bishop and Richard Sebel from Barbara Bishop
Taylor Brutzman from Cindy and Denis Karpeles
Laura Roanne Cole from Barbara and Melvin Cole
Kyle from Jason Pringle
Dell from Ryan Provencher
Kyle from Sasha Rastegari
Stephen Dennis from Nora Dennis
Michele Amelia Smith from Pamela Rayburn
Johnny Lynch from Marie Lynch
Johnny Lynch from Lynda Drysdale
Bill Shadrick from Nancy Shadrick
Jacqi LeBlanc from Cindy Mantor
Keenan J. Esparza from Linda Melendez
Diego Fernando Tapias from Juan Carlos Tapias
Mike from Catalina Rodriguez
Paul Sharples from Madeline and Robert Sharples
Andrew William Rodin from Patricia Brienzo
Benny Barberis from Sandra Siedenburg
Ken Stranger from Jill Stranger
Kyle Kubachka from Annmarie Verano
Michelle Wakamoto from Randall Wakamoto
Stephen Lelewer from Audrey and Charles Warren
Matt Werber from Katharine Werber
Garland Williams from Jeanne Williams
Ben Dravis from Jason Dravis
Daniel Lichstein from Janine and Henry Lichstein
Kevin A. Jackson from Anthony Jackson
Dan Cope from Andy Mackenzie
Dan J. Cope from Patricia and Will Mackenzie
Loved ones of Didi Hirsch Board Members and Staff, lost to suicide
from John P. McGann, Sr.
Holly Reed from Angela and Brian Miller
Aiko Nobori from Steve Uyemura
Joe Rosa from Claudia Rosa-Bienenfeld
Brian Franklin Rose from Dale K. Rose
Noel Parrish from Emilia C. Parrish
Sasha from Lisa Schaub
Adam Siegel from Cecil Willard

IN HONOR OF
Debbie Pikul Zent from Corina molte
Charlotte and Jeremy Fletcher from Mary and Jeff Sherman, M.D.
Stephen Lelewer from Donald Mellman, M.D.
James Darrell Braden from Suzie Edwards
Charity Jones from Jay Jones
Lanny from William Taylor III
Ben Dravis and Tom Brockish from Timothy Brockish
Dell from Chase Polan
Sophy Kann from Becky De Marie
Jim and Mikki Loveman from James Loveman
Rebekah Child from Heather Child
Justin Boyle from George Thierjung
April said, “Seeing Stan, who had also lost his son, was an inspiration that I might be ok one day.”

April was so grateful for the support that she received from SAS that she wanted to help others who have been touched by suicide. She decided to form a team for Alive and Running. She recruited over 50 family members and friends for her team, but she didn’t stop there. She also decided to approach some of her professors at the School of Nursing at California State University in Long Beach (CSULB) to enlist their help in encouraging students to join her team. Her professors were very supportive and some even offered class credit to students who got involved. The result was a team of 191 people, $5,810 raised, and an award for the largest team at Alive and Running 2009!

April was pleased with the success of her team, but states that she experienced many conflicting emotions on the day of the race. She was proud of all of the people who had come out to support her family and she was happy to be able to help the Survivors After Suicide program. But at the same time, she didn’t want to be there. The reason she was there was because she had lost Kyle and she just wanted her son back. “It was an award I never wanted to win,” April said fighting back tears. Everyone at Didi Hirsch is forever grateful to April and countless other survivors who, even amidst their loss and grief, find the courage help others whose lives are touched by suicide. It’s not surprising that the staff at CSULB were supportive of April’s efforts. In September 2008, California State University Long Beach received a Garrett Lee Smith grant for Suicide Prevention efforts on campus. This grant led to the formation of Project OCEAN (On-Campus Emergency Assistance Network). The goal of Project OCEAN is to prevent suicide by promoting a campus climate that reduces the stigma of mental health issues and encourages help seeking behaviors when needed.

Throughout the year, a wonderful relationship has emerged between the Suicide Prevention Center and Project Ocean. In May, 2009 Shari Sinwelski, Director of Program Development at SPC, joined the Project Ocean Advisory Board. In July, Carolyn O’Keefe, Program Coordinator for Project Ocean, attended the ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) workshop sponsored by SPC. Project Ocean reciprocated by allowing Shari to attend their QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) Suicide Prevention Training for Trainers in September. In addition, Project Ocean made a generous $1,000 donation to SPC as a Bronze Medal sponsor for Alive and Running!

We wish to thank Project Ocean, April Kubachka, and The Nursing Program at CSULB, for their support of SPC and SAS and for promoting a campus environment that supports open discussion of mental health issues.

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**Sweet Relief**

By April Kubachka

Note: I tried to write this poem from my son Kyle's perspective from a compilation of notes I found of his, including his suicide note. He was only 19 years old when he used a gun to end his life all alone in a hotel room.

**Kyle Kubachka RIP 11/22/08**

Cold steel in my hand
Sweet relief inside the chamber
Do I have the courage to send myself to Heaven?
As I lie here alone and wonder

Can I survive this world?
Am I going crazy?
Should I pursue girls?
Have I lost all ambition or am I just being lazy?

I wish that I could share
This burden that lies within
I long for a place that’s warm without a care
A place where I can fit in

I feel like tears would pour out of my eyes
If I tried to explain
So don’t even think of blaming yourself
Because that time never came

I am loved and will be missed
I know this to be true
But I just can’t stop myself
What am I to do?

Life is very strange and difficult
But on the other side it’s easy
I want release from the unrelenting pain
I feel

This has to be done ASAP

So my loved ones
The clock strikes three
It’s time for me to soar
I hope you can all go on happy without me

---

The SAS Program surrounds us with
Shelter, a place of refuge from stigma and ignorance;
Understanding, from those who have walked this path;
Caring, love and concern from fellow travelers;
Foundation, a basis of knowledge, acceptance, finding equilibrium, and ways to pay it forward;
And Hope, that there is life beyond this tragedy.

Remember, the SAS Monthly Drop-In Groups provide continued community
It is time to say goodbye....

It has been two years since I stepped into the SAS Newsletter editor position. Then the hope was that the newsletter would be an opportunity to “share your experience and share in other’s experiences” and to help you stay connected to this special survivor community. I feel honored to have been part of this goal and thank Lyn Morris, Rick Mogil, Joanne Uy and Monty Lawton and the many survivors who shared their stories. My journey has been enriched by this experience.

I am not going far as I’ll stay involved in the SAS groups, Alive & Running and venture into crisis line and outreach. It has been pleasure to serve as editor.

Thank you.

Marilyn
Nobori.

Once Upon a Time, continued from page 1

I saw my brother become an angry lost soul. I had no power over his destiny. He missed his father so very much and I was the only one listening. But I was just his little sister and no matter how protective I was I could not replace our father. I wanted to.

Once upon a time, decisions were made that set a life in motion. Unattended sorrow caused so much pain that my brother required numbing. Comfortably numb, my brother withdrew into a history of grief. His dreams of success and greatness where overtaken by destructive emotions and thoughts of death. Death, he imagined would release him from his overwhelming pain. I was there. I took the gun away. Seeing me reminded him of his love. And for a short while his psychache went into remission.

Once upon a time, and far away an echo resounded, an almost unheard, “I Love You.” Narrowing his vision and seeing only his pain, my brother forgot to listen. “I am here, I love you. I am your little sister. I have never left you. Please see me, hear me, know me. Wayne, Wayne, Wayne. I love you Wayne.”

There is no Wayne.

He hanged himself, the ultimate suffocation. Life had been squeezing the breath out of him for decades. He tied the knot and took the drop and wriggled waiting for his last breath. There were no goodbyes. No, I love you too.

Once upon a time, and a long time ago I knew life was perfect. Now, forever after, the question remains: Life is never perfect, or is it?
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.

**Monthly Drop-In Groups**

**San Gabriel Valley:** San Marino United Church of Christ, 2560 Huntington Dr., San Marino. Meetings are held in the Choir Room the last Wednesday of each month from 7:00 - 8:30 p.m. Meeting dates: Jun 30, Jul 28, Aug 25, Sep 29.

**San Fernando Valley:** Sherman Oaks Hospital, 4929 Van Nuys Blvd., Sherman Oaks. Meeting are in the Doctor’s Dinning Room on the 2nd Saturday of each month from 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. Meeting dates: Jun 12, Jul 10, Aug 14, Sep 11.

**South Bay:** To be announced.

**West LA:** Didi Hirsch Culver-Palms Center: 11133 Washington Blvd., Culver City. Meets on the 3rd Wednesday of each month from 7:00 - 8:30 p.m. Meeting dates: Jun 16, Jul 21, Aug 18, Sep 15.

**Eight-Week Groups**

For 2010, our eight-week support groups for those who have lost loved ones to suicide will take place on the following schedule:

- **Group 2:** Late June
- **Group 3:** Mid-August
- **Group 4:** Late 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 Gabriel and Montrose. To be placed into a group, please call Rick Mogil at (310) 895-2326.