

Survivors After Suicide

Your Path Toward Healing
Erasing the Stigma – Suicide is Preventable

A Program of Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services May 2015

Mom's Joie de Vivre Shines Through Grandchildren

By David Colgan

JUST OVER A YEAR AGO, my mom, Pattie, died by suicide as a result of her battle with depression. It didn't make sense in the context of what was largely a happy, loving and outgoing life, but it happened anyway.

I say "died by suicide" and not "committed suicide" because the language of death that comes from mental illness is fraught with overtones of blame. There's no benefit in distributing fault to victims. A brain gets hurt and sick like any other part of the body and it should be given the care and sympathy that any other injury or sickness would receive.

No one chooses to be clinically depressed. Casting blame on sufferers is the equivalent of shunning someone for a broken leg or cancer. We should actively challenge the stigmas that exist because of our own human imperfections and the legacy of failed attempts to explain things we don't understand. Stigmas hinder efforts to treat mental illness and prevent future deaths by suicide.

I can't travel back in time to prevent Mom's death, so I'll fight the un-fightable by joining efforts to prevent suicide and improve mental healthcare in my community and the world. Hopefully, I can help prevent this from happening to other families.

I'll look at memories as my emotional constitution allows, but I humbly request that my



family and friends join me in the here-and-now to create a better future – one filled with care and understanding, not pain and judgment. See a therapist if you're feeling down, and do it with pride. Even if you aren't feeling down, why not get a tune-up? Take care of your mind with at least the same vigilance as you do your Toyota. Just as importantly, learn the signs of mental illness. Listen and love people who are showing those signs and try not to blame them. Sometimes people can't help how they feel or behave, and faulting them for it only gets in the way of making things better.

Mom's passing left a massive void in my life and the lives of my family members. We look for her wherever we can find her – in the wind, the moon and the stars. We all grieve in our own ways, and none is right or wrong as long as it helps. Sometimes an odd feather might fall at my feet or some other basic disturbance will interrupt me when I think of her. Is that her? I don't know, and it doesn't matter that much to me. What does matter is that she's still in my heart and thoughts. What will always hurt is her absence from my life.

But, in many ways, she's not absent from my life at all. Like all people, she echoes through the lives she touched and the family and friends she left behind. She has two brilliant granddaughters that are currently getting the strong love that she passed to her children, and I can see clearly that they are happy kids. They, in turn, share their joie de vivre with everyone they encounter, just like Mom did. This is how I will fill the void of her absence – with real life. I'll keep her in my thoughts and feelings until the pain is replaced by the love she left behind.

David Colgan is a deputy in charge of justice and transportation for Los Angeles County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl (Third District).



Are Suicide Survivors Allowed to Celebrate Life?

By Joel Druckman

I RECENTLY ATTENDED a funeral and memorial service for a dear friend who died of a massive heart attack at the age of 65. Despite the suddenness of my friend's death, his funeral was a celebration of his life, and this got me thinking after I left the service.

As survivors, we don't get the chance to celebrate very often. We're so consumed with all the questions of "why?"

Facing desperation and getting through these desperate times – many of us have done that. But the ones we loved and lost to suicide didn't. They couldn't see, or didn't want to see, that their leaving wasn't

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Rick's Corner

I have been a science fiction aficionado for over 50 years – that's right, I'm a senior and proud of it!. Asimov, Heinlein, Burroughs (Edgar Rice not William S., although I did get confused

by *The Naked Lunch*), Simak, Leinster and a host of other science fiction visionaries provided endless hours of escape from a world in which my teen self struggled with thoughts of being inadequate and unworthy to one where I battled the most heinous villains alongside Flash Gordon and John Carter, developed psychohistory with Hari Seldon, and learned to grok with Valentine Michael Smith.

Right now you're probably thinking, "Where the heck is he going with this?"

Parallel universes (or is it universi?)!

Without going into multiverse conceptions of the universe or cosmology (not that I understand any of it), one theory of physics states that there are multiple universes in which we are living very different lives.

Imagine!

A universe where Ed is still alive!

Or, perish the thought, one in which someone else we love has died by suicide.

This is all in the realm of science speculation and fiction.

Our loved ones are not here in the now but their non-corporeal essence remains. It permeates our minds, our hearts and is a part of anyone who knew them. We may never have the answers to the why but we know the whom. Keep them close. Smile when you say their name. Remember their quirkiness. Celebrate their lives as best you can. It's not easy being us, as survivors. When we share our pain, try to share the love as well.

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
(310) 390-8896 • 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.

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Reprint Policy:

Nonprofit support organizations may
reprint material from our newsletter.

More resources at www.didihirsch.org

Ceiling in the Floor powerfully illuminates how relationships evolve — even after death

By Jayne Skeff



Presented by Lineage Dance and choreographed by Hilary Thomas, *Ceiling in the Floor* was dedicated to and inspired by Brandon Toh, who died by suicide in 2012. Hilary, who is Artistic Director of Lineage Performing Arts Center, donated a portion of the proceeds of each performance to Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Center, where Brandon worked as a crisis counselor for several years.

AT ITS CORE, the story behind this compelling production began over 20 years ago when two students met by chance and began their journey of friendship that would evolve through their passion for music, dance and life itself. Today, that relationship continues its unbounded journey even though only one remains. Hilary Thomas and Brandon Toh were the two real-life performers in their deep, real-life friendship. Brandon died by suicide in March of 2012. Hilary choreographed a powerful dance production to Brandon's music to create *Ceiling in the Floor*, which explores the dark, melancholy loneliness of suicide.

Through the riveting movement of dance, spoken words and lyrics combined with Brandon's soulful raw music, the uneasy subject of suicide is laid bare allowing a deeper connection and sense of freedom to grow. Hilary says the production is both inspired by and dedicated to Brandon, her friend and soulmate.

For those of us at the Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Center, Brandon holds a significant place in all of our hearts. Diagnosed with bipolar disorder in 1996, Brandon spent the next 16 years battling his own thoughts of suicide. By dedicating and engaging his own life to help others, he became an unstoppable force at the Suicide Prevention Center. For over 10 years Brandon worked the overnight shifts at the Crisis Line, training other volunteers and creating a risk model computer application that has been adopted by centers around the country. He was avidly engaged in the research of suicide prevention, and attended and presented at numerous conferences.

"Brandon saved hundreds, and I mean hundreds, of lives through his work at the Crisis Line," says Rick Mogil, program director of Didi Hirsch's Suicide Prevention and Bereavement Services. "He was amazing."

In this issue of the SAS Newsletter, the notion of celebrating life has been mentioned several times. *Ceiling in the Floor*, a dynamic arts experience, is also a celebration of life using music, dance and lyrics to show how lives and relationships continue to evolve even after death. It's the true story of two local Pasadena artists who journeyed together through one's quiet struggle with depression and suicide.

The final performance of *Ceiling in the Floor* at the Lineage Performing Arts Center in Pasadena is May 10.

Upcoming Events

Survivors After Suicide Summer Potluck

Saturday, August 1 2015, 12:30-3pm
Veterans Memorial Park – Rotunda Rm
4117 Overland Ave., Culver City

17th Annual Alive and Running Walk/Run for Suicide Prevention

September 27, 2015
La Tijera Parkway, Culver City
aliveandrunning.org

AFSP International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day

November 21, 2015

Survivors After Suicide Winter Potluck

Saturday, December 5 2015, 6–8pm
Veterans Memorial Park – Rotunda Rm
4117 Overland Ave., Culver City

Celebrating Our Amazing Partners in Empowering People of all Cultures

By Sandra Yi, MFTI

SINCE THE START of our suicide Survivor Support Services (SSS) program in Orange County, one of our main goals included being able to reach various cultures in multiple languages. We have had the rewarding opportunity to partner with these amazing agencies in Orange County where suicide community outreach and suicide bereavement support groups and counseling are provided and available to the Arab-Muslim-American, Korean, and Vietnamese communities.

This is a long overdue introduction and a BIG thank you to the dedication and hard work that each of these agencies and their staff have provided. We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to each of the agency leaders and identified SSS direct care providers including: Nahla Kayali and Sana Seed from Access California Services, Ellen Ahn and Helen Ahn from Korean Community Services, and Tricia Thao Nguyen and Desiree Nguyen from Vietnamese Community of Orange County. In addition, there are devoted staff members from each agency that assist with various aspects of our program and Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services truly appreciates all that they do.



A c c e s s
California
Services is
a culturally
oriented,
community-
b a s e d
organization

dedicated to empowering the Arab- and Muslim-American communities by enhancing their quality of life and increasing their self-determination through direct services, referrals and enrollment in community and government assistance programs (accesscal.org).



Sana Saeed, SSS direct care provider, is a Marriage and Family Therapist Trainee at Access California Services. She provides counseling services in a linguistically and

culturally sensitive setting, offering counseling in Urdu, Hindi, and Spanish. She is ASIST trained, and provides counseling and support to community members who are thinking about suicide and have lost a loved one to suicide. Sana stated, "working at Access California Services, alongside Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services has been rewarding, as it has provided the opportunity to raise awareness to populations who may not have the resources or information they need when facing challenges in their lives. It has been empowering and inspiring work to be a part of the movement to reduce the stigma of suicide in our communities."



**KOREAN
COMMUNITY
SERVICES**

The mission of Korean Community Services is to assist and empower Korean American individuals, families, and the greater immigrant community. This mission is achieved through the promotion of projects and programs that provide culturally and professionally competent human services to unserved and underserved Korean Americans. KCS believes that healthier individuals and communities results from a combination of outreach, treatment, and prevention efforts (kcsinc.org).



Helen Ahn, SSS direct care provider, is the program director of the Mental Health and Counseling Department at Korean Community Services. She is a registered art therapist as well as MFTI. She provides therapy and case management services to children and Transition Age Youth with mental illness, and their families. She also has provided individual/group support services to people who lost their loved one to suicide, and has worked in order to decrease the stigma of suicide in the Korean community. She has experienced the healing process through survivor support services as she is also a suicide survivor who lost her father.



The mission of Vietnamese Community of Orange County is to provide comprehensive – health, human, and economic development – supporting services

to become active participants in mainstream society through the empowerment and capacity enhancement of each citizen (thevncoc.org).



Desiree Nguyen, SSS direct care provider, joined VNCOC in 2010 after accumulating valuable experience working for numerous grass root community agencies. Desiree

was born and raised in Vietnam, and she obtained her Master of Social Work from California State University of Long Beach. After Desiree obtained her social work degree, she discovered a need in the Vietnamese community for greater awareness of available mental health services. To address this need, Desiree accepted the opportunity with SSS to facilitate suicide survivor support groups, survivor individual and family counseling, and outreach. Desiree is fluent in English and Vietnamese. She believes in providing evidence-based practices as well as community-based practices. Currently, Desiree is pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy degree at Alliant International University in clinical psychology.

Holiday Potluck Alighted by 1,000 Cranes

By Jayne Skeff

PERHAPS THERE WEREN'T QUITE 1,000 cranes aloft but, on Saturday, December 6th, the Teen Center at Veteran's Memorial Park in Culver City came alive with hundreds of beautiful origami cranes. Gracing the tables and filling the room, these beautiful creations inspired survivors through their symbols of healing, hope and peace.

In ancient Japan, the crane was believed to live a thousand years and folklore states that if you fold one origami crane for each of these years, your prayers will be answered. Now, in the 21st century, these paper cranes have become a significant symbol for survivors after suicide worldwide.

At the holiday potluck, survivors were given their own origami crane with an attached blank note on which they could write their own special message to the person missing in their lives. They then tied their cranes to the bare branches of a tree on the table. With cranes of hope, healing and peace hanging from the branches, each tree seemed to come alive.

The whimsical colors and floating paper birds added just the right ambience to the gathering.



The holiday potluck allows our special family of survivors to come together to celebrate the holidays and each other while remembering loved ones lost to suicide.



Above: "Our holiday potluck is a gathering for celebration and remembrance," says Rick Mogil, program director for Didi Hirsch's Suicide Bereavement Services. From left to right: Suicide Prevention volunteer Ester Ybarra Bryant, Suicide Prevention Center Director Robert Stohr, Rick Mogil and Didi Hirsch Senior Vice President of Clinical Operations Lyn Morris.

Right: Survivors were given their own origami cranes with blank notes so they could write special messages to those missing from their lives.

Left: A tree laden with colorful origami cranes became the centerpieces for each table, contributing a spirit of life and hope to the holiday potluck.



IN MEMORY OF

Rachel Pringle In Memory of Jeremy Adler
Alex and Woody
Juliet Allup In Memory of Jesus Allup
Larry Ames
Mary Kay Bergman
Janis M. Carter
Josh Erman
The Fakourfar Family In Memory of Reza Fakourfar
Beth Fried
Marco Garcia
Arnold "Bud" Goodine
Holly Hamill
Beth Hess
Ray Hluska In Memory of Liza Hluska
Monique Franklin In Memory of Mark Hurlimann
Michael Killian
Noah Langholz
Stanley D. Lelewer
Daniel Lichstein
Paula Luna In Memory of Rachel Luna
Luis Luna In Memory of Rachel Luna
Malik
Amir Manssor
Matthew McAfee
William Irving McConahey
Christopher Myers
Jerry Panzer
Andrea Baxter In Memory of Meilan Pena
Tony Ross
Michael Simon In Memory of Lynne Miller Simon
Michael Weinstock
Austin Wells
Qing Xu
Alex Zambory

IN HONOR OF

Julia Asher Donham
Leslie Salas In Honor of Jose Luis Hernandez
Pam Kluff
Courtney Kiitsuki In Honor of Simon Koechl
Kirk Lee
Henry and Janine Lichstein
Glenda Meyer In Honor of Glenn Meyer
Michael Weinstock

November 1, 2014 through April 1, 2015

SAS Summer Potluck: *Music for the Grieving Soul*

Saturday, August 1, 2015 • 12:30 pm – 3 pm
Veteran's Memorial Park – Rotunda Room
4117 Overland Blvd., Culver City

We'd love to have you share music that has moved you or helped you on your grief journey.

We invite you to send in 1 song or short instrumental selection for possible inclusion in this music presentation.

The committee will choose a selection of songs submitted and may need to limit each song to 3-4 minutes.

To submit a song, please email the lyrics and music (as an MP3 attachment) to Sauerbach2063@sbcglobal.net with the subject line: SAS Potluck Music.

The deadline to submit your music is June 1, 2015.

Thanks so much! Your participation is very important to us!

Rick Mogil
Program Director
Suicide Bereavement Services

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a solution for us. Maybe it was for them, but not for us.

We relive our tragedy daily, coping with a departure that leaves us empty for years and years and creates a void that may never be filled.

Our loved one's pain may have ended, but we are left with the pain of unanswered questions, as well as guilt, anger and regret.

We move on, but at a far slower pace. It's hard to lose someone suddenly. But those of us who lost someone to suicide don't get to celebrate their lives in the same way. We survived and are surviving but saying goodbye to someone who died by suicide is different for us survivors. Very different.

Celebrating the lives of those we lost, either through the natural progression of life or through suicide, can distract us from the pain we feel, if even for just a few hours. It can also be an opportunity to celebrate our own life and to remember the role they played in our life which made them so special to us and their loss so significant.

Joel Druckman is a suicide survivor and active participant in the Survivor After Suicide Group Meetings and SAS gatherings.



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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, 7:30 – 9:00 p.m.
Meeting dates: May 27, June 24, July 22, Aug. 26.

Santa Ana

Meets the 1st Wednesday of each month, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.
Meeting dates: May 6, June 3, July 1, Aug. 5.

San Fernando Valley

Meets the 2nd Saturday of each month, 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Meeting dates: May 9, June 13, July 11, Aug. 8.

South Bay

Meets the 2nd Sunday of each month, 11:00 am – 12:30 p.m.
Meeting dates: May 10, June 14, July 12, Aug. 9.

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 and Santa Ana.

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