

# Survivors After Suicide

Your Path Toward Healing  
Erasing the Stigma – Suicide is Preventable

A Program of Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services Spring 2018

## A Silver Lining

By Sharon Wells

Our friendship began where many do, in the ladies room.

It was Fall 2007, week three of the eight-week *Survivors After Suicide* (SAS) group at Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services in Culver City. The 90-minute sessions were filled with grief, anguish, many tissues and many, many more tears. We would go to the meetings and then silently and sadly go our separate ways feeling broken beyond repair, trying to process our feelings about loved ones choosing to end their lives.

I was there because a year earlier, my baby brother Jerry decided he had enough of his pain in this lifetime. Julie was there because her husband had decided the same thing seven months earlier. During a break when just the two of us were in the ladies room, I asked Julie if she'd like to go to lunch after the meeting. I thought having "debriefing" time before going back to everyday life could be helpful. She declined and I understood; but a few seconds later she changed her mind and agreed.

As we'd hoped, talking outside the SAS group about what we were going through and things that had nothing to do with suicide helped make the transition back to "normal" life a little easier. The following week, we told the entire group about it and invited anyone who was



*Sharon Wells remembers her brother Jerry and the healing bonds of friendship.*

interested to join us. We had a couple takers including Hayley, the youngest member of the group, who had lost her older brother just two months earlier, shortly after she had graduated from college. The Saturday lunches continued for the remainder of the group and became our decompression time between the anguish of the session room and the attempt to go on with our lives for the rest of the weekend and beyond.

Last October was the ten-year anniversary of our meeting. During that time, Julie, Hayley and I deepened our friendship, supported one another through other life tragedies and

continued to meet to share a meal and catch up with one another on a fairly regular basis. We have few people in our lives that we can talk with about our losses the way we talk with each other. Others have been supportive but can't come close to having the understanding that comes with experiencing the suicide of a loved one and going through the support group together. I know that 11 years after the death of my brother, I can talk about him with them and if tears or anger appear, I'll never be judged, and more importantly to me, he'll never be judged. Throughout our journey, we've come to terms with the likely fact that the pain will revisit us throughout our lives, yet we've also learned to survive and even thrive. Julie met and married a wonderful man and they have traveled the world together. Hayley is engaged to her longtime love and is thriving in her career. I bought my first house and started crossing places I've wanted to visit off my bucket list.

I'm grateful to Didi Hirsch for the service they provided us and continue to provide to others. It was instrumental to our healing. I'm especially grateful that the support group brought Julie, Hayley and me together, not just to comfort one another during the darkest time of our lives but to facilitate a bond that will never be broken.



*Christopher Min Jun: New Bilingual Training & Outreach Coordinator*

## Helping Erase Stigma in Korean Community

By Randy Levin-Cohen

PyeongChang, Korea, the remote and ruggedly beautiful host city of the recent 2018 Winter Olympic Games, has introduced millions of people around the world to the towering granite mountains and the tough proud people of South Korea. What this high-voltage international spectacle never revealed, is the fact that South Korea has one of the highest suicide rates in the world. Not surprising in a society that would rather die than suffer humiliation when honor is at stake.

This traditional view carries over to Korean-American families where mental illness means losing face. Because the stigma in Korean culture brands the entire family, not just the individual, Koreans are less

*(Continued on page 4)*



## Rick's Corner

Ow!

Sometimes a snippet of a song lyric smacks me upside the head. The lyrics

in total may not have any significance or connection to suicide loss but occasionally a chorus or phrase can.

For instance this phrase from "Angels On The Moon" by Thriving Ivory, 2008 evokes a prayerful wish:

*Don't wake me 'cause I'm dreaming  
Of angels on the moon  
Where everyone you know  
Never leaves too soon*

How often have we cried "why'd you leave me so soon, I wasn't ready to let you go, I can't do this alone" or any of the words expressing our deepest fears and pain? Or, how do we describe to others the hole in our hearts that has been ripped open by the suicide of someone close to us?

Jewel's song "The Shape of You", 2015 provides one possible description of our loss:

*There's a hole in my heart and I'll carry it wherever I go  
Like a treasure that travels with me down every road  
There's this longing lonesome ending kind of bitter, kind of sweet  
There's a hole in my heart in the shape of you.*

Sometimes we look for comfort in our music and sometimes we find peace. But I hope we can also find a voice to express how it feels to be empty yet have the courage to move forward. Or how we have found the tears of joy commingling with the tears of our loss.

Reach for a higher octave whenever you can.

Peace and Love,

*Rick*

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:**

(800) 273-TALK or (800) 273-8255  
Chat 12:30 pm – 9:30 pm daily at  
[www.didihirsch.org/chat](http://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](http://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:**

Eleven sites in L.A. and Orange Counties  
L.A. County (888) 807-7250  
O.C. (714) 547-0885. [www.didihirsch.org](http://www.didihirsch.org)

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

[www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org)

#### **American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)**

(888) 333-2280 [www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)

#### **National Alliance for the Mentally Ill**

For families of people with mental illness  
National: (800) 950-6264  
[www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

#### **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**

[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

#### **Suicide Prevention Resource Center**

(877) GET-SPRC or (877) 438-7772  
[www.sprc.org](http://www.sprc.org) or [www.sprc.org/thepark](http://www.sprc.org/thepark)

### NEWSLETTER

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

#### **SAS Program Numbers:**

LA/Ventura: (310) 895-2326  
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**Editorial Board:** Lois Bloom;  
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Rick Mogil; Patricia Speelman

#### **Reprint Policy:**

Nonprofit support organizations may reprint material from our newsletter.

More resources at [www.didihirsch.org](http://www.didihirsch.org)

# Our Grieving Selves

By Susan Auerbach



Susan Auerbach with her son Noah

At a *Survivors After Suicide* drop-in support group, a young woman who had just lost her brother was distraught seeing how other survivors were still upset many years after their loss. "Does it ever stop?" she cried. "We're not always like this," a more experienced group member assured her. "This is where we bring our grieving selves because we know we'll be heard and understood."

Our grieving selves – a whole new self for many survivors – must shed one skin and grow into another. We're no longer who we were. We don't know how to present ourselves to others with this stricken face, heavy gait, or unpredictable weepiness. How to walk the mourner's path out in the world when everyone else still plies their regular route? We may need to hole up for a while as we get our bearings. Eventually, we learn where we can bring our grieving selves and when it's best to leave them at home.

For months after losing my 21-year-old son, Noah, to suicide, I was inseparable from my grieving self. I couldn't help unburdening myself in every social situation, making sure people knew that I needed to talk about this unspeakable thing. Everything was a trigger – the CPR instructions on the wall at the gym (why couldn't I save my child?), the "sustainable" label on Noah's notebooks made of recycled paper (why wasn't Noah sustainable?). I felt I had to voice my grief or burst. I was lucky to have people around me who could listen and support groups where my grieving self was expected and embraced, where I could freely speak my pain and Noah's name.

Eventually, I found that I was more than my grieving self. I could make it through hours or days without a painful reminder, recover more quickly from crying spells, and focus my mind on other things. I noticed it when one of my husband's colleagues knocked at the door one day, face serious, arms out to give a silent hug to a mourning mother. I happened to be laughing about something as I came to the door, before I saw his face. I gave him a brief hug as if meeting at the office holiday party. The moment was jarring for both of us. I was usually grateful when people acknowledged my loss in the depth of their gaze and the strength of their hug or handshake. But at that moment, I wasn't thinking of Noah or

needing support. Ten months after the suicide, I wasn't always grieving, and that both surprised and confused me.

Today, four and a half years after the suicide, I'm convinced that it's all the intentional mourning I did in the first two years – giving full voice to my grief, trying to make sense of what happened, writing about it endlessly in my journal and in a blog and memoir – that has helped me move through it. By immersing myself in grief at its most intense, I could begin to emerge from its grip and integrate my grieving self with the rest of my life.

To my fellow survivors: May you find welcome and comfort for your grieving selves.

Adapted from Susan Auerbach's *I'll Write Your Name on Every Beach: A Mother's Quest for Comfort, Courage and Clarity After Suicide Loss*.

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## Ten Years After a Son's Death: A Metaphor

By Lorna Boyd



For Evan

I am a small puppy and my breath is sweet as only puppy-breath is. I am happy and full of fun and energy, and why not? There is this wonderful boy who loves me, I mean cuddles and plays with me, and laughs when I wriggle and bark. He feeds me both real food and delicious treats. We run and swim together, and he takes me with him everywhere he goes.

Then one day, he's gone. I can't find him anywhere. He'd left before but he always came back. Not this time. I look for him every day but it seems he's really gone for good. Someone else feeds me, and others play with me. But it's not the same. They smell different. And I don't sleep with them.

I finally stopped expecting him to come home, stopped wondering where he went. Or why. But I still think about him, remembering all of the fun we had. It's Christmastime – there's a tree and packages, and I remember how he used to let me help him tear that crinkly paper off and rip it all up. I remember new furry toys that he squeaked for me. And I got to taste yummy food right from the table after he put on my new collar and said what a good dog I was. I can picture his bright eyes and happy smile whenever he called my name.

This year, I lie by the fire and rest. I'm getting to be old now, and my memory isn't so great. But I can still smell him – every once in a while I catch his scent on a breeze, or in a musty corner of his old bedroom. I guess I'll always have his smell in my nose. Till the day I die.

# Remembering 2017 Alive & Running

At the 5K Walk/Run for Suicide Prevention on September 24, 2017, 2,000 people came together in support and solidarity, to remember their loved ones and share their grief. Over \$382,700 was raised.



## Christopher Min Jun... (Continued from cover)

likely than other nationalities to seek professional help for mental health concerns.

Christopher Min Jun, Didi Hirsch's new Bilingual Training and Outreach Coordinator for Los Angeles' Korean Community, is determined to change this mindset and share a message of hope. Working with a highly supportive team that includes his boss, Patricia Speelman, Hana Kim, and Sandy Rodriguez, his primary focus is on building awareness of the services Didi Hirsch provides and demonstrating their strong commitment to the Korean-American community.

Chae-myun, the Korean word for family pride or honor, is at the heart of why Korean Americans must shift their understanding of mental illness in order to erase this ingrained stigma. With that in mind, Christopher's goal is to challenge Korean Americans to change their perception of mental illness – specifically depression. Says Christopher, "I know some parents are dealing with their teenager's depression and they are ashamed to talk about it. But what's more important: your Chae-myun or your precious child's life?"

Born in South Korea, the only son to an affluent traditional family, Christopher lived a privileged life until his father's untimely death. Seeking a better life for her only child, Christopher's mother immigrated with him to America. The transition from being a spoiled "king" in his household, to an outsider

struggling to learn the language and culture, was extremely difficult and humbling. He was bullied and alone.

Christopher points out "there is a happy ending" and eventually those who had teased him became his best friends. Says Christopher, "those horrible experiences in high school taught me a beautiful lesson in life. If you learn to embrace one another in spite of your differences, you'll get to see how beautiful all humans in all cultures are."

As a Korean, Christopher's uncharacteristic ability to speak openly and empathetically to those who are suffering stems from his own personal experience. While working as a youth counselor at Asian Counseling Services in Tacoma, Washington, he suffered the loss of his best friend by suicide. Although his friend was never a patient, the pain of losing someone he cared about so deeply drove him to quit counseling. Christopher noted, "I think this was the first time I felt I had failed in my life and I was miserable. I couldn't escape the fact that I worked as a counselor and yet had no idea how much my friend was struggling with his life. Even now when I think about it, I get teary eyed."

Prior to joining Didi Hirsch, Christopher was a radio personality at one of the largest Korean radio stations in Los Angeles. His music sets were dominated by hip-hop, K-pop, and American pop that appealed to his young

listeners. Having a large following enabled him to use his influence to speak out about mental health issues. After the recent K-pop superstar Jong Hyun's suicide, Min Jun was invited as a guest on one of the most popular radio shows to discuss the tragedy.

Every Saturday, Christopher still hosts an early morning program on 1230AM KYPA where he often talks about depression and the need to erase the stigma of mental illness. His immersion in media has also given him the resources to get an in-depth article on Didi Hirsch published in Korea Daily – the largest Korean circulation newspaper in Los Angeles.

Los Angeles has the biggest Korean population outside Korea with approximately 300,000 people, and Christopher acknowledges that it will take a great deal of time and patience to help the Korean community change. "Even with the most successful marketing campaign, it will take time for Koreans to talk to strangers about their life struggles – they don't even talk about it with their best friends," says Christopher.

Despite the challenges ahead, Christopher feels empowered to bring positive change to his community. Like Chloe Kim, the 17-year-old first generation Korean-American snowboarder and 2018 Winter Olympic gold medalist, he is helping to redefine what Chae-myun, pride and honor, mean. They, along with other young Korean trailblazers, are creating a new paradigm of possibilities.

## All We Have Is The Memories

By Miguel Serricchio

You gave us so much, in such a short time.  
It saddens me, it saddens us all,  
Knowing that you won't grow up to be old.  
That hurt and that sadness that comes with it all.  
You motivated those that needed it the most,  
You welcomed everyone into your life, and into your heart,  
No questions asked, you loved people for who they were,  
You made everyone feel so special.

All we have is the memories  
Even now, that you're no longer with us,  
You are making a difference.  
You continue to drive us, make a difference in our lives.  
You've brought us together, closer than we've ever been before.

All we have is the memories  
It's your legacy and passion that drives us forward.  
We want to be better.  
Everything we do has your mark.  
Helping someone in need,  
Accepting people for who they are,

Oh those memories will never go away  
Creating awareness where much is needed, all in your name.  
You're still with us, your spirit lives on,  
I know you're watching over us,  
I know you're still there for us when we need you,  
I finally understand! All those memories, that's what we have,  
that's what will keep us flowing.

## Introducing Sarah Wilkey



Sarah Wilkey, the newest member of our Orange County Survivor Support Services, joined Didi Hirsch in September 2017. She is a UCLA alum and second-year graduate student in the Master of Science in Counseling, Marriage and Family Therapy Program at California State University, Long Beach. In addition to working as a Marriage and Family Therapist Trainee where she

provides individual and family therapy to children, adolescents, and adults who have survived the loss of a loved one to suicide, Sarah is also co-facilitating the *Survivors After Suicide* support group and hopes to have the opportunity to co-facilitate the *Survivors Of A Suicide Attempt* support group in the near future.

Sarah is a former TrevorChat Counselor for The Trevor Project and Front Desk Volunteer for the LGBT Center Orange County. Her experience as a trainee has ignited her passion for providing suicide postvention counseling and working with the issues of grief and loss. Says Sarah, "I consider it a huge honor to share in my clients' stories and walk with each one on their path to healing." She hopes to continue providing counseling and advocacy services to individuals affected by suicide beyond her traineeship. "I feel so fortunate to do the work that I do for Didi Hirsch, and am very proud to be considered a new member of the family!"

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Erasing the Stigma Leadership Awards

Thursday, April 26, 6-9:30 p.m.  
Beverly Hilton Hotel  
9876 Wilshire Blvd., Beverly Hills

### Survivors After Suicide Summer Potluck

Saturday, June 2, 2018, 12:00-3:30 p.m.  
Veterans Memorial Park – Multipurpose Room  
4117 Overland Ave., Culver City

### Alive and Running 10K 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  
Time and place TBD

## IN HONOR OF

Dr. Myrna Blaufarb  
Crystal Li Cohen and Andrew J.Cohen  
Kita Curry  
Dr. Norman Farberow  
Mady and Larry Fechner  
Patrice Feinstein  
Charlotte Fletcher  
Marty Frank  
Nina Gutin  
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Janine Lichstein  
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Laura Ornest and the Ornest-Leslie Family  
Harrison Ornest-Leslie  
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Greg Steinbeck  
Joseph Tajaran  
Mike and Ann Taylor  
Benjamin Oliver Vasquez  
Jennie Wyatt-Coste  
Eileen and Robert Zigman

## IN MEMORY OF

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Barbara Valk  
Lynn Walker  
Matthew Werber  
Paul Woodrow  
Jordan Rose Worman  
Jennifer Nohelani Worrell  
Aaron Yanagisawa  
Joseph Yousem  
Alex Zambory

# Erasing the Stigma Leadership Awards



The 2018 Erasing the Stigma Leadership Awards honorees are Oliver Platt, Rick Springfield, Joe Barksdale and Cynthia Germanotta

Saving lives since 1958, Didi Hirsch's Suicide Prevention Center will take center stage at this year's Erasing the Stigma Leadership Awards at the Beverly Hilton Hotel on Thursday, April 26.

The 22nd annual event honors courageous men and women who have helped erase the stigma of mental illness. Funds raised support Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services, which provides children, teens and adults with mental health, substance use and suicide prevention services.

This year's honorees include actor **Oliver Platt**, whose portrayal of an Emergency Room psychiatrist on NBC's Chicago Med inspires people with mental illness to feel more comfortable seeking treatment; actor, author and Grammy Award-winning singer, songwriter and musician

**Rick Springfield**, who talks about his experience with suicidal depression to raise awareness and hope; NFL's Los Angeles Chargers offensive tackle **Joe Barksdale**, who shares his experience with depression and suicidal thoughts to encourage others to seek help; and **Born This Way Foundation Co-Founder Cynthia Germanotta**, who created the organization with her daughter, Lady Gaga, to empower youth and advocate against bullying and teen suicide.

Tickets are \$400 each; sponsorships begin at \$1,500. For more information, call (310) 659-5517 or email [DidiHirsch@eventsbyone.com](mailto:DidiHirsch@eventsbyone.com). You can also purchase tickets or Tribute Journal ads at [www.erasingthestigma.org](http://www.erasingthestigma.org).

## SAS at the 2018 Post Rose Parade

The 2018 Post Rose Parade theme was "Making A Difference". Seeing the opportunity to give back and help promote Didi Hirsch's Mental Health Services, an SAS member on the Post Parade Committee invited Didi Hirsch to participate. Setting up our "Stop Suicide" table, we gave out over 800 crisis hotline bracelets.



SAS at 2018 Post Rose Parade event.

## Winter SAS Potluck

On Saturday, December 2nd, a group of 55 survivors joined together to break bread and discuss the event's theme: "Our Journey Through Grief." When someone we care about dies by suicide, our grief can feel all-consuming. Our path can seem uncertain and lonely and we may feel overwhelmed with sadness, guilt, and anger. Speakers talked about their challenges, how they moved forward, and the people who helped them on their path.

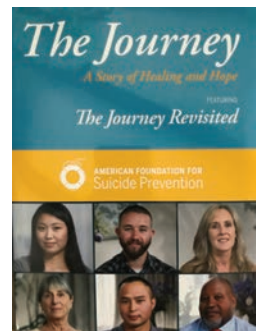
# The 2017 International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day



One day a year, people around the world who are affected by suicide loss gather together at events in their local communities for comfort, support, information, and empowerment.

On November 18, 2017, participants in International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day came together to gain understanding and share stories of healing and hope. This event, jointly sponsored by Didi Hirsch Mental

Health Services and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, took place at Venice Church and featured a screening of *The Journey: A Story of Healing and Hope*, an AFSP-produced documentary that traces the grief and healing journey of a diverse group of loss survivors who navigate the aftermath of their loved one's suicide to find meaning, and even joy.





4760 South Sepulveda Boulevard  
Culver City, California 90230

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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: March 28, April 25, May 23, June 27

#### Santa Ana

Meets the 1st Wednesday of each month, 6:00 – 7:30 p.m.  
Meeting dates: March 7, April 4, May 2, June 6

#### San Fernando Valley

Meets the 2nd Saturday of each month, 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.  
Meeting dates: March 10, April 14, May 12, June 9

#### South Bay

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

#### 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 May, August, 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**