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 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.

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...
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 Mogil has been program director of Didi Hirsch’s Suicide Bereavement Services since 2007.
Our Grieving Selves

By Susan Auerbach

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

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 Christmas time – 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 KYPH 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.
   I know you’re still 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
Anne Hall
Michael D. Hindman
Barbara Hornichter
Cheryl R. Kaiser
Jack Kelly
Kim Kowsky
Carolyn Levitan
Janine Lichstein
Logic
Marilyn Nobori
Martin Novak
Andrew Orenstein
Laura Ornest and the Ornest-Leslie Family
Harrison Ornest-Leslie
Lisa Petrazzolo
Andrew Rubin
Nancy Rubin
Dr. Kristine Santoro
Jilliene Schenkel
Christine Schlientz
Lisa Schumacher
Greg Steinbeck
Joseph Tajaran
Mike and Ann Taylor
Benjamin Oliver Vasquez
Jennie Wyatt-Coste
Eileen and Robert Zigman

IN MEMORY OF

Jennifer Abramson
Jeremy Theriault Adler
Susan Anderson
Matthew Awbrey
Fraidoon Azima
Adam Baldarrama
Amit Bendavid
Sammy Bloom
Erik Brown
Daniel Cabrera
Stuart Carroll
Jennifer Eileen Daclan
Christine Daniels
Kevin Delange
Hunter Travis Dixon
Rodrigo Emiliano Dixon
Josh Erman
Greg Escalante
Et
Alex Fiederer
Juan Carlos ‘JC’ Flores
Guillermo
John Hadden
John Hall
Kate Hamilton
James Henry
Jose Roberto Iraheta
Laverne and Manuel Jacobs
Jerry
Kath
Tabi Katouzi
Jessica Keelen
Elliott Kolesnik
Annalisa Krol’s Brother
Noah Langholz
Jay Lederman
Stan Lelewer
Pepe Leon
Erica Lewis
Jean-Paul Garcia Lewis
Daniel Lichstein
Jeff Long
Neil R. Longo
Charles Lugo
Johnny Lynch
Amir Manssor
Antonio Martinez
David Modjallal
Etta Mogil
Gemmel Moore
Kylee Niels
Linda Marie Odens
Margaret Ou
Mike Penner
Shari Jane Potter
Michael Quigley
Tammy Raasch
Rebecca Marie Robinson
Julie Romain
Jack Ruder
Jason D. Ruprecht
Tina Salem
Sarah Schatt
Brett Schmitt
Kurtis Sherman
Steve Singer
Bradley Sonnenberg
Janet E. Steinberg
Sara D. Stutz
Robert Sumser
Brandon T
Brandon Toh
Adrian Urbino
Barbara Valk
Lynn Walker
Matthew Werber
Paul Woodrow
Jordan Rose Worman
Jennifer Nohelani Worrell
Aaron Yanagisawa
Joseph Yousem
Alex Zambory

May 10, 2017 through February 20, 2018
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.

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.

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

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. You can also purchase tickets or Tribute Journal ads at www.erasingthestigma.org.

Erasing the Stigma Leadership Awards

The 2017 International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day 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; 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.

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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

- **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

- **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

- **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