Survivors After Suicide (SAS) helps people resolve their grief and pain in their own personal way, and helps them move forward in their lives, positively and productively.

Emotional Heart Attack—
Remembering My Husband Tom Lind
By Karlyn Nelson

Tom—my better half, my loving husband, Theo’s amazing father—ended his life the day I started chemo for breast cancer. He was there for my first treatment, but he wasn’t here to celebrate my last. From the moment I was diagnosed, he said he’d be by my side every step of the way. He was my biggest supporter and the one I could always lean on. I just wish he had leaned on me in his last months, his last days. I wish he had asked for help—if not from me, from someone, anyone. Because the world was a better place with Tom in it, and I am struggling to find my way without him. It just doesn’t seem right that I conquered my disease but he couldn’t conquer his.

I am still trying to process a lifetime without the man who was my world. Tom loved hard, worked hard, did life hard. On the inside his heart was so, so big—maybe too big. He felt the highest of the highs, but unbeknownst to most, also felt the lowest of the lows. Ultimately, those lows are what took him from us. At his memorial service, our priest called it an emotional heart attack. And that’s what I’ve chosen to call it. Because the Tom I know, whom I loved so dearly, would not hurt us or leave us searching for answers. It could only be something so sudden as an emotional heart attack that would cause him to do this.

Depression doesn’t care that your smile is contagious. That you would do anything for your beautiful little family. That you’re killing it in a career you love with a client list a mile long. Or that you have a hundred people who would help take your pain away if they could. Depression doesn’t care what your life looks like on paper.

Tom’s depression came in fits and spurts and he didn’t like talking about it. He didn’t want to burden you with his problems but he’d be happy to take on yours. He would occasionally get help for his depression, but he’d always end treatment before the issues were really resolved. To him, depression was a weakness he refused to accept in himself. Because how could someone whose smile lit up a room be depressed? He just didn’t buy it.

He was the son of a surgeon, the oldest of four brothers, the friend you counted on, the partner you trusted, the father who provided. Tom’s life mission

(Continued on page 5)

Get Ready for the 21st Annual Alive & Running 5K Walk/Run!

Start building your teams and inviting family and friends to join you on Sunday, September 29, 2019 at the 21st Annual Alive & Running 5K Walk/Run for Suicide Prevention!

This inspirational, life-affirming event raises funds and awareness for Didi Hirsch’s Suicide Prevention Center. The proceeds help keep the 24/7 Crisis Line running, provide support at the scene of a suicide, bolster training for students and first responders, and fund support groups for people who have attempted suicide or are grieving a loss.

This year our featured speaker is Talinda Benington, wife of Linkin Park’s Chester Bennington, who died by suicide in 2017. Multicultural pop artist Alex Boye, recipient of the 2019 Erasing the Stigma Leadership Award, will perform for his second year in a row. Find more details and register or donate at www.aliveandrunning.org.
Rick’s Corner

It is 2019—sixteen years since my brother Ed’s suicide. What has Ed missed since 2003?

The high school graduation of both his granddaughters; the birth of more grandchildren and his great grandson; the death of our mother; the celebration of our father’s 95th birthday and many other experiences I wish he’d shared with us.

Ed has no memory of these events, no swelling of the heart with pride, no warming tears of joy or burning tears of sorrow. But I do. I remember for him through the rolling fog of grief.

I take comfort in talking to him at each of these events, asking for his opinion, sharing a laugh, then looking furtively around hoping no one has heard me talking to the clouds.

I hope the therapists reading this account don’t question my sanity. My conversations with Ed are wistful thinking, not psychosis.

Therein lies the change—moving from wishful to wistful, from wishing he were here to carrying him here with me, always.

To paraphrase a great Dusty Springfield song, “Wishin’ and hopin’ and thinkin’ and prayin’” can only take us so far.

Remembering and sharing keeps the memory of our loved ones alive.

Rick Mogil
Program Director
Didi Hirsch Suicide Bereavement Services

Resources for Survivors and Suicide Prevention

HELP LINES

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline/Didi Hirsch Suicide Crisis Line
24/7 English and Spanish
(800) 273-TALK or (800) 273-8255

Lifeline Crisis Chat/Didi Hirsch Crisis Chat
Lifeline Crisis Chat 24/7
www.crisischat.org
Didi Hirsch Crisis Chat 1pm-9:30 pm
daily www.didihirsch.org/chat

TEEN LINE:
Staffed by teens 6-10 pm; all other hours covered by the Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Center
(800) TLC-TEEN, (800) 852-8336 or (310) 855-HOPE

Korean Crisis Line
(877) 727-4747

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

RESOURCES

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

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

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

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
For families of people with mental illness.
National: (800) 950-6264
www.nami.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
www.samhsa.gov

Suicide Prevention Resource Center
(877) GET-SPRC or (877) 438-7772
www.sprc.org or www.sprc.org/thespark

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:
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O.C. (714) 547-0885

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Reprint Policy:
Nonprofit support organizations may reprint material from our newsletter.

More resources at www.didihirsch.org
My son, David Sliff, was 23 when he died by suicide December 31, 2017 after losing his battle with depression. David was an extraordinary young man, gifted in writing, playing music, and anything mathematical. He understood people with a depth and sensitivity that most of us never achieve in a lifetime. He tried fitting into a world that didn’t always welcome the sensitive souls with the same acceptance and kindness he showed others. David was studying to become a physicist. He wanted to help make the world a better place.

David wanted to live and tried desperately to get help. While working with a psychiatrist, he researched anti-depressant medications, applied to numerous clinical trials, studied the neurobiophysics of the brain, underwent brain studies, adhered to a strict diet and purchased expensive supplements that promised to increase his brain wellness. David knew he had a brain abnormality and was determined to find a medication that would give him stability and alleviate the emotional and physical pain his depression caused. When he couldn’t find the help he sought, David eventually turned to researching the least traumatic ways of taking his life.

I was acutely aware of my son’s depression and am an ICU nurse who has cared for many survivors of suicide and their families, I wasn’t able to save him. People say, “You did everything you could have”, but I will always wish I had done more. People have said it wasn’t my job to save him, but try telling that to any parent.

This is David’s story and, although he is no longer here to continue his journey of life, his family and friends now have the opportunity to continue living their lives in a way that honors David’s kindness toward others. My message today is about how our loss can lead to our own growth and survival.

Our stories, although different, share a common thread. Our loved ones died from a severe clinical depression and suffered both physically and emotionally. We all have lived through that tragic experience and understand what others do not. We have all asked ourselves, “How do we go on? Will we ever survive, get out of bed, laugh or love again? How do I even function or interact with others?”

We’ve heard “everyone grieves differently” a million times but one thing I have learned from experiencing such a profound personal loss is that I’m not alone. Not only am I not alone but we really do need each other for our own self-care and survival after suicide. The extraordinary bond that we as survivors have, and the understanding we can provide one another, is one of the greatest sources of strength I have experienced.

Strength
By Terry Jago

In the early days of my grief, a tear would well up in my eyes, a lump would form in my throat, but you would not know— I would hide it, And I am strong.

In the middle days of my grief, I would look ahead and see that wall that I attempted to go around as an ever-present reminder of a wall yet unscaled. Yet I did not attempt to scale it for the strong will survive And I am strong.

In the later days of my grief, I learned to climb over that wall— step by step— Remembering, crying, grieving and tears flowed steadily as I painstakingly went over, The way was long, but I did make it, For I am strong.

Near the resolution of my grief, a tear will well up in my eyes, a lump will form in my throat, but I will let that tear fall— and you will see it. Through it you will see that I still hurt and I care, For I am strong.

Reprinted from Comforting Friends
July/August, 2018 Vol XXI, Issue 7

David’s Story: A Mother’s Remembrance
By Kathy Welch
At Starbucks after a grueling Saturday morning workout, and likely facing a routine, solitary Saturday afternoon, I opened a friend’s post of the ‘Melancholy’ sculpture: My reaction was immediate. This sad, beautiful sculpture made my heart pound. Bittersweet, but it made me happy! I thought I never have to explain myself again. THIS is how I feel…And someone else on this planet understands. I felt much less alone.

Melancholie
JoAnn Hadfield

For Both of Us
By Sacha

As long as I can
I will look at this world
For both of us.
As long as I can
I will laugh with the birds,
I will sing with the flowers,
I will pray to the stars,
For both of us.
As long as I can
I will remember
How many things
On this earth
Were your joy.
And I will live
As well as you
Would want me to live
As long as I can.

Reprinted from Forever Remembered, Marcia Woodward & Dan Zadra, November 1977

Survivors Find Hope and Healing Making Art

In December of 2018, more than 60 children and adult survivors of suicide loss and attempts gathered in Ed Massey’s art studio in Redondo Beach to share their stories and paint the eye-catching three-story tall canvas that now adorns the exterior of Didi Hirsch’s new Suicide Prevention Center in Century City.

Pamela Kluft, Vice Chair of Didi Hirsch’s Board of Directors, generously sponsored this project to honor her sister, Beth Hess, who died by suicide in 2012. Didi Hirsch also partnered with Massey’s non-profit, Portraits of Hope, to create the public art piece.

Shortly after staff moved into the new 14,156 square foot center, Board member Melissa Rivers and suicide prevention advocate Ronda Rousey helped unveil the banner before a large crowd of survivors and camera crews. The uplifting floral artwork serves as a beautiful reminder to all who enter that hope and healing is possible after the loss of a loved one.
The Orange County office discussed the importance of allowing a safe space for Survivors to leave their mark after transitioning out of services. As a result, the Tree of Hope was established in 2019. Before departing, Survivors can take a leaf and personalize it with an inspirational message. Some Survivors may choose to write a hopeful word or quote. Others put the initials of their loved one. No matter what each Survivor chooses, the meaning of the tree is to instill hope and support, and to memorialize their loved one as well as their journey here with Didi Hirsch MHS. They pick a unique place on the Tree to place their leaf so that when they return or survivors who are seeking services come for the very first time, they are given a visual that they do not walk this path alone. As the message above the Tree of Hope reads: “There is Hope and there is Help”.

- OC Team

Emotional Heart Attack (Continued from cover)

was to make others happy and live up to their standards. Little did he know that his standards were so much higher than most. He felt so deeply. Things stayed with him. He would spend hours, nights, days, trying to solve problems to help others.

But now I’m wondering why. Why is depression still not fully talked about? Why do we often hide suicides? Why do we so quickly dismiss mental health issues? To me, it doesn’t make any sense. Because depression, like cancer, or diabetes or the color of your eyes, is not a choice you can control. Yet I’m being lauded as a warrior, a fighter, a survivor, because I have cancer—something that chose me. But my husband, who suffered from mental illness, sat in silence, in regret, often in loneliness. Many, like Tom, are afraid to reach out. Or share their story. Or seek deeper answers. And this breaks my heart.

I know my story of the amazing, funny, generous Tom Lind, is only one of many. No one should have to feel this pain, to seek answers to so many unanswered questions, or experience a life not lived to its fullest potential. No one should have to suffer in silence. We must erase the stigma attached to mental illness. We must recognize the signs. We must encourage mental health.

My husband Tom died by suicide on September 24, 2018 at the age of 41. We will always remember you and I will love you forever.
IN MEMORY OF

Lori and Lawrence Sroka-Hartley
Avant Artists
Daniella S. Ayala
Jane Levin Barber
Kelly Atlee
Crystal Li Cohen and
Andrew J. Cohen
Kita Curry
Jeff Eamer, MA
Idris and Sabrina Elba
John Englund
Andy Erman
Dr. Norman Farberow
Kimmy Hirsch Feinstein

Patrice Hirsch Feinstein
Lynn G. Feld
Charlotte and Jeremy Fletcher
Robert Flock
Linda and Marty Frank
Ruben J. Garcia
John Gasiencia
Jairo Guarnizo
Michael D. Hindman
Erik Hubbard
Diana Hufford
Masahito “Eddie” Ito
Clay Kaspukski
Pam Kluft
Kim Kowsky

Estanislaao Kreutzer
Ali Lafayette
Mary and Stan Lelewer
Nancy Levin
Carolyn Levitan
Janine and Henry Lichstein
Mckenna Grace Martin
Dawn and Andrew McIntosh
Christopher Mendoza
Barbara Miras
Keri Mossel
Madison Murphy-Sinclair
Laura Ornest
Andrew Pappalau
The Honorable Donald F. Pitts

IN HONOR OF

Doria Ragland
Florence Rosenbloom
Andrew Rubin
Nancy and Miles Rubin
Jilliene Schenkel
Lisa Schumacher
Miguel Serricchio
Leila Rouhi Shaffer
Barbie Shapiro
Andrew Erik Smith
Mr. and Mrs. Washington
Rebecca Zeitlin
Eileen and Robert Zigman

July 28, 2018 through June 27, 2019

UPCOMING EVENTS

21st Annual Alive & Running 5K Walk/Run
Sunday, September 29, 2019, 7:00-9:45 a.m.
aliveandrunning.org

International Survivors of a Suicide Loss Day
Saturday, November 23, 2019
Visit afsp.org for times and locations of events in Los Angeles, Ventura and Orange Counties

Survivors After Suicide Winter Potluck
Saturday, December 7, 2019, 6:00-8:30 p.m.
Veterans Memorial Park, Rotunda Room, 4117 Overland Avenue, Culver City
Continuing Alex’s Legacy
By Miguel Serricchio

For more than 3 years, I have tried to make sense of losing my son, Alex, to suicide. Not being very religious, when people tell me “God has bigger plans,” or there is a “larger meaning,” I struggle to comprehend it.

My entire life, I have always focused on the positive. This might sound like the opposite of what you would want to do after losing someone you love. Don’t get the wrong idea. The hole in my life and heart will never be filled. I hurt every day and this will never go away. But now, my goal is to remember Alex’s kind soul and how he always looked for ways to help others even when he wasn’t able to help himself.

After losing Alex, our family chose different ways to keep his legacy alive: I became a Big Brother for a year and now volunteer at Didi Hirsh as a peer facilitator, member of the Speakers’ Bureau, and advocate in the Hispanic community. My oldest son, Ignacio, and Alex’s best friend, is a huge advocate for Mental Health education and started a #GreenNailChallenge to help raise awareness. My daughter, Maru, a professor, LMFT & Art Therapist, has focused her career on mental health.

Since Alex left us, many parents have reached out to me, worried about their son or daughter. They want to talk, understand, and figure out how to deal with it. Recently a colleague asked if I would join her and her two daughters for dinner. She told me her 22-year-old was struggling and hoped that, by sharing my story, her daughter might be willing to open up.

During dinner, we talked about life and, half way through, I felt comfortable enough to tell Alex’s story, the path I was taking, and how I was dealing with it. We said our goodbyes and agreed to have dinner again soon. The following day, my colleague hugged and thanked me. She told me how my story had encouraged her oldest daughter, who had dropped out of college and was on a downward spiral, to talk about her suicidal thoughts and cutting herself.

Three months later, her daughter asked to meet with me. For over 2 hours, she told me her story: her difficulties as a pre-teen, the family dynamic, and how she was hiding everything because no one would listen without judgment. I listened, interjected a few comments here and there, but mainly just listened. She wanted to thank me.

After hearing Alex’s story, she decided to turn things around. She is back in college, just started a new job, is going to therapy, seeing a psychiatrist, and more importantly, is willing to share her struggles with her family. We agreed to meet as mentor-mentee at least monthly, or whenever she needs me. I think Alex would be proud.

Do You Know a Teenager Who Has Experienced the Death of Someone By Suicide?

Help us connect teens to an 8-week grief support group where they can talk with other teens about their shared experience. Meetings are in small groups, once a week, for 90-minute sessions where they’ll learn healthy stress-management tools and new and creative coping skills to help them deal with their loss. Here they’ll find emotional and therapeutic support from clinicians and other teens so they don’t feel isolated and alone. Teen support groups are part of the new Everychild Suicide Prevention Project.

For more information call 424-362-2911 or spccounseling@dididhirsch.org.
SAS Group Meetings

Everyone who has completed an eight-week Survivors After Suicide support group is invited to attend scheduled monthly meetings at any of the locations listed below. There is no charge.

Drop-In Groups

San Gabriel Valley
Meets the 3rd Saturday of each month, 10:00—11:30 a.m.
Meeting Dates: Aug 17, Sep 21, Oct 19, Nov 16, Dec 21

San Fernando Valley
Meets the 2nd Saturday of each month, 11:30 a.m.—1:00 p.m.
Meeting dates: Aug 10, Sep 14, Oct 12, Nov 9, Dec 14

Santa Ana—English and Spanish
Meets the 1st Wednesday of each month, 6:00—7:30 p.m.
Meeting dates: Aug 7, Sep 4, Oct 2, Nov 6, Dec 4

South Bay
Meets the 2nd Sunday of each month, 11:00 a.m.—12:30 p.m.
Meeting dates: Aug 11, Sep 8, Oct 13, Nov 10, Dec 8

West Los Angeles
Meets every Saturday morning from 10 a.m.—11:30 a.m.

Eight-Week Groups

Groups meet once a week for an hour and a half for eight consecutive weeks starting in February, June and October with locations in Sherman Oaks, Culver City, Redondo Beach, San Marino, Santa Ana and Newbury Park.

Please call to be placed in a group.
Los Angeles/Ventura counties: (424) 362-2912 or Orange County: (714) 547-0885

Sunday, September 29, 2019
7a.m.—9:45a.m.
West 88th Street and
La Tijera Boulevard near LAX
www.aliveandrunning.org