

can you hear me?



stories of people who have survived suicide attempts

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Hope: A Four-Letter Word

I'm not going to start out by introducing myself. I'm saving that part for the end. I've never done this before but I feel the need to share my story; as if, someone out there needs to hear it and know that they aren't alone in this fight. Yes, fight. I know how much of a struggle it is and how some days it's a victory just to crawl out of bed. So, here it is. This is my story.

There's a lot to it, so I'll start at the first part that I remember. My mother began seeing this man when I was roughly five years old. He didn't want me around so I stayed with my grandma and aunt for a while. I remember my mom coming to my play at the church and I was so happy to see her. I wanted to go home with her. I wanted to be with her. She was my mother. I got to talk to her and I remember feeling so happy. Then, I begged her to let me go home with her. She told me I couldn't, put me in the back of my grandma's car, fastened me in my seatbelt, shut the door and walked away. I know I cried, hard. How could my mom leave me? Did she not love me?

Fast forward a few years and I wish she would have never taken me home. She lived with an abusive man and eventually married him. She stayed for ten years which meant that I stayed as well. He almost killed her. He busted her eardrum. They fought and it was so loud. My younger step-brother would have nightmares and end up sleeping on my floor. We were all each other had. As the years went on, the abuse just got worse. He beat my brother with a shoe because he couldn't spell a word correctly and when I yelled to stop, he threatened me and my mom did nothing. We were spanked with dog collars, belts, leather shoes, whatever they could get their hands on.

I prayed to God every night to deliver us from that evil but He never did. As time went on, I began to resent God. I had all of these emotions running through me and I didn't know what to do. No one believed me when I talked about what was going on. The people that knew did nothing. Maybe, it was because they didn't want to believe. My mom started to act like him the more she was around him, even slapped me across the face one morning when I smarted off to her. It was the first time she'd hit me.



By Mike Medaglia, sourced from his website "Meditations Illustrated" (meditationsillustrated.tumblr.com).

See more of Medaglia's work on the promotional website for his new book *One Year Wiser*, due out this fall (<http://oneyearwiser.com/>) as well as his personal website (<http://mikemedaglia.com>).



TSPN works across the state to eliminate the stigma of suicide and educate communities about the warning signs of suicide, with the ultimate goal of reducing suicide rates in the state of Tennessee.

TSPN's continued success is due in large part to volunteers willing to donate their time and energy.

If you would like to volunteer with TSPN, please call (615) 297-1077 or e-mail tspn@tspn.org.

Hope: A Four-Letter Word (continued)

Growing up, in school, I got bullied a lot. I didn't have the nicest clothes and shoes, we couldn't afford it. I was a little heavy set and terrible at math. For this reason, the other children thought it was so funny to give me a hard time. One kid pushed me into a filling cabinet and I had to apologize to him. Funny how that works, right?

I started public school in the sixth grade where I made a group of friends who weren't really friends at all. I can't tell you how many times they put the knife in my back and pulled it out. People are cruel. The world is a cruel place.

I started to self-harm. I needed an outlet, an escape. Every time I drug the blade across my skin, I didn't worry about how people hated me, the mean things they said and what was going on outside of my bedroom door. All I was focused on was this pain. It got to the point where I had to do more to feel that high again because it had started to wear off. It was getting bad, I knew that. I couldn't stop.

No one knew. I didn't tell anyone. I wore long sleeves or bracelets all the time. No one ever saw. I was alone and no one cared. After all, didn't everyone agree that I was fat, ugly and worthless? Maybe, they were right. In eighth grade, my circle of friends had made its way to one. I was alone and I had no one to talk to. Everyone disliked me. Rumors were spread and people believed them.

"Expect to have hope rekindled. Expect your prayers to be answered in wondrous ways. The dry seasons in life do not last. The spring rains will come again."

Sarah Ban Breathnach

My home life hadn't improved. It had only gotten worse. I started cutting in different places, needing to feel something again. That's when I stopped eating. For almost two weeks, I ate nothing. Then, one day during class, I started feeling really sick. I asked to go to the bathroom and then headed down the left side of the hallway. The last thing I remember seeing is a boy leaning up against the water fountain to get a drink. The next thing I heard was teachers yelling. There was blood and puke all on the floor. I couldn't stand up. I couldn't remember anything but my mom's phone number. I was on the right side of the hallway.

The ambulance had to come and get me and I passed out two more times. They had to give me a sedative to keep me calm because I was freaking out. They thought my brain was swelling and they almost knew I was going to have stitches. But, I turned out to be okay. The cut was long from hitting the lockers but not deep. My brain was fine. I was fine.

After that, I started eating again but I didn't stop cutting. It wasn't until about a year later after my mom had left my step-dad that she noticed. She threatened to send me to a mental institution and I didn't want that so I stopped. But, I relapsed a few times and my skin still burns with the desire. A year and a half clean and I still itch to self-harm at times. It became an addiction like any other and it will haunt me for the rest of my life, but I know that I am stronger than that now. I know that I am worth more than that now.

I started highschool at age 14. It was rough. I was looking for some meaning, some purpose. I wanted attention and love. I started looking for it in the wrong places. I started to sneak out and I struggled horribly with sexual immorality. I was a mean person. I was cold and closed off. I just wanted love and all I found was heart ache.

My period was late. A week and a half late. So, I told him and he thought I was just making it up. I took a pregnancy test in a laundromat bathroom, by myself, while he got high in the vehicle outside. I felt so useless, so horrible. Who had I become? I was relieved to see the one line show up, letting me know I wasn't pregnant. My life could have turned out a lot differently. A few weeks later, when he was confronted about it, he denied even knowing me.

High school was terrible. The bullying got worse. Even though my school denied that it didn't happen, it did. I was on the bowling team and there was not one night that I did not come home crying. I had stopped cutting but it was all too much and I started again. They said and did awful things. Weren't we supposed to be friends? I made a new group of friends and they were great, at first. Then, one of the girls started throwing me under the bus and started spreading rumors. She made my life hell. I hated who I

Hope: A Four-Letter Word (continued)

was, what I looked like. All I could see in myself were her words and everyone else's: fat, ugly, gross, whore, unwanted, better off dead.

In the middle of my math class, one of her friends screamed at me and called me a whore and then stormed out of the room. I started crying and I wasn't even sure why. What had I done to deserve that? What had I ever done to deserve any of it? My life was over. All I wanted was to die.

I went home, upset. I shut myself up in my room and pulled out the scissors I always used. I cut deeper and longer than I ever had. I bled more than I ever had and I freaked out. I was so terrified. That could have been the end. In that moment, I realized that all my problems were fixable. Not one single one of them could I not overcome. I realized I wasn't ready to die. I just wanted to be saved. But, I couldn't pray to God. I'd been angry at him for years. I needed a miracle and that was exactly what I got.

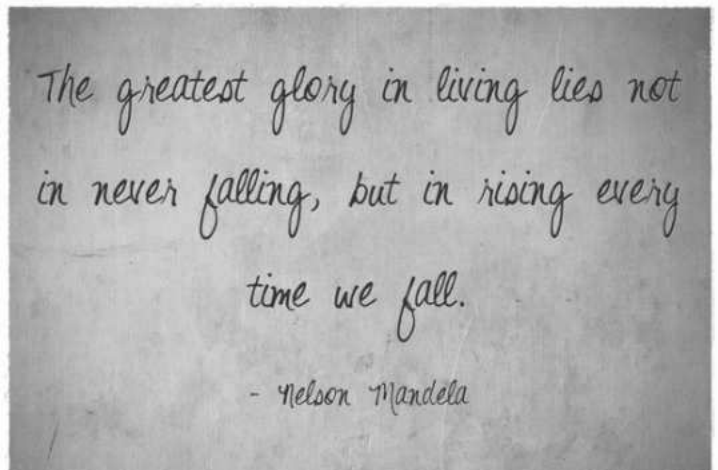
Flash forward to the summer before my senior year. There was a mission trip to Petion-ville, Haiti and on June 21, 2014, my life changed forever. I left my mom at the airport in Nashville and traveled to another country with a group of people that I had never met before in my life, with the exception of the two other teenagers from my church. I wasn't sure why I went. I just knew that I needed to go. I was still angry with God and, believe me, I was not in any position to be going and witnessing to anyone.

We spent nine days in Haiti. Nine days was all it took to change my life forever. On the fourth day, we were able to go to the church and start working. I'm not a good painter, so I headed up the VBS and worked solely with the children. None of their parents were around, except for this one boy. I had given him a coloring book and I watched as he colored everywhere on the page and around it. As I was watching him, our translator came up to me and said, "He's blind." These few words absolutely floored me. I had to sit down. Suddenly, I felt so ashamed of who I had been. Here was this boy, no older than ten that could not see, yet he knew the Bible stories almost better than we did and he sang and praised God as if he had sight. I started to cry as I watched him. It was then a little boy in a red shirt touched my knee. He looked concerned as he asked, "You okay?" I shook my head yes, he smiled at me, hopped up in my lap and told me that it was all going to be okay. His name was Kirby and he altered my life forever.

Kirby was happy the whole time we were there, dancing and singing with us. He even taught us some Creole. His older sister Ketza begged me to teach her a song in English and once she had learned it, she made me learn a song in Creole. When I finally learned it, all of the children sang it with us and it touched my heart. They all touched my heart. They taught us things and we taught them things.

On the second day at the church, we had made puppets and I noticed that the blind boy was there again. Upon seeing him, Kable and I made his and we gave it to him. This woman started screaming at us in Creole and we just looked at her, not understanding what she was saying. Absolu saw it and translated for us. She was telling us that he was blind. I had Absolu tell her that we knew, but we wanted to make him one anyway so that he wasn't left out. The tears filled her eyes as she hugged us and told us thank you. As she told us his story, I couldn't help but cry. He had gotten sick and they didn't have the money to take him to the doctor. He slowly started to lose his sight. One morning, he woke up and could no longer see. Once again, I felt a wave of shame come over me. We were there to teach them and, yet, the children taught us so much more.

We had devotionals every night. They were about being courageous and bold in new places. Then, this girl talked on her night and there wasn't a dry eye around. She talked about how her mom had died of cancer and she didn't want to come on the trip but since she's been there, she's felt more at peace than ever before. Her words sunk deep into me that night. I prayed a long



Sourced from Mental Health Resource (mentalhealthresource.tumblr.com), a project of PsyWeb.com.

Hope: A Four-Letter Word (continued)

prayer, for the first time in a long time. The days we'd spent there before I could feel God all around and I was thankful for that.

The next night was my devotional. I hadn't read it. I had just picked it out of a devotional book and wrote it down for my night. I didn't think I was going to make it through my time without crying. It was all about how God leads us up the mountain and shows us all the beauty of the world, but then we have to come back down. The road is bumpy and tough. We have hard times. We stumble and fall. However, He is always there to pick us back up and help us reach the bottom. It was about how His plans are for a reason and, no matter what we endure, He has a purpose for each one. As I finished, I had to tell my story. It just came out and I don't even know why. The preacher that took us said, "I'm telling you guys, you're here for a reason."

That night, after prayer, I felt more at ease than I ever had. I had a peace come over me like never before and I suddenly wasn't angry anymore. I finally understood why I had to go through why I did. I would not have been sitting in that room if I hadn't been through what I had. Suddenly, I was grateful for everything that happened to me, the good and the bad. Haiti changed my life and I've been a better person since returning home.

My name is Cassandra Morgan. I am seventeen years old. I graduated high school this past December with eight-teen college credits completed. When I walk the line at graduation this May, I will have one year of college completed. I was a victim, but now I am a survivor. I went through a lot and, some days, I can still feel the weight of my scars. I remember everything that happened in my past, the things that I had control over and the things that I didn't. I'm still living. I survived. I never thought I would make it through high school, but I finished and I finished early with a 3.6 GPA. Whoever said high school is the best years of your life lied. They weren't the best years of my life. That only means that the best years haven't happened yet. I went from a girl who prayed for death at night to a girl who is praying for more days. I have dreams that are turning into reality. So many good things have been happening and I am so thankful to be able to tell you my story.

I know what it's like to be alone and cold. I know what it's like to feel like the world would be better off without me. I also know that the world would not stop if I did not exist. The sun would still shine, the Earth would still spin, but lives would be affected in ways I could never imagine. There is air in my lungs and it is a screaming invitation for better things. There are far better things ahead than anything I've left behind and I am so ready for better days.



At left: Cassandra Morgan.

At right: A photo for
Cassandra and Kirby from
the former's mission trip to
Haiti.



Suicide Anonymous

Suicide Anonymous (SA) is a self-help program based on the model of Alcoholics Anonymous. It provides a safe environment for people to share their struggles with suicide and to develop strategies for recovery from suicidal preoccupation and behavior.

Suicidal people do not have safe places to talk honestly about their struggles with suicide. The stigma towards suicide pervades every segment of our society, including religious organizations and even the mental health field. SA, therefore, exists to offer a support system for survivors, to make a distinction between the suicide attempt and the person involved, to cast off the societal stigma that too often plagues the survivor, and to develop strategies for mutual support and healing.

During each meeting, a chairperson presents topics and members share their experiences or simply listen. Members also provide updates about how they are dealing with their suicidal impulses. Talking openly about suicide with people who understand the problem lessens the shame and stigma, combats isolation, and shows that it is safe to reach out for support in a crisis. In sharing their stories, members overcome the shame and stigma of a life of struggle with suicide. Meanwhile, listeners identify with the story or break through denial of the extent of their own struggles.

New participants pick experienced members to guide them through the Twelve Steps model. They also exchange phone numbers with group members as a resource for crises between meetings. Members learn to reach out to fellow members for support in a suicidal crisis. They also get to experience the other end of a suicide crisis.

Members also select bottom-line behaviors for themselves. These are component behaviors of suicidality like hoarding pills, suicidal fantasies, compulsively driving through cemeteries, etc.. Members commit to stop bottom-line behaviors one day at a time, and these behaviors may change with progress in recovery.



| Meeting times in Tennessee | Skype /phone available |
|--|---|
| Every Sunday, 6:30 PM Central / 7:30 PM Eastern Room 223, Hope Presbyterian Church 8500 Walnut Grove Road Cordova, TN 38018 | Yes (e-mail suicide.anonymous0811@gmail.com one hour prior to meeting start) |
| Every Thursday, 5:30 PM Central / 6:30 PM Eastern Psychological Trauma & Wellness Center 5158 Stage Road, Suite 120 Memphis, TN 38134 | No |
| Third Tuesday, 6 PM Central / 7 PM Eastern Room 111, Cornerstone of Recovery 4726 Alcoa Highway Louisville, TN 37777 | No |

The SA website suicideanonymous.net features information on groups outside Tennessee with Skype/phone capability. The site also offers the full text of the *Little Book*, the guiding document of Suicide Anonymous, which discusses the problem of suicide addiction from the viewpoint of the person affected.

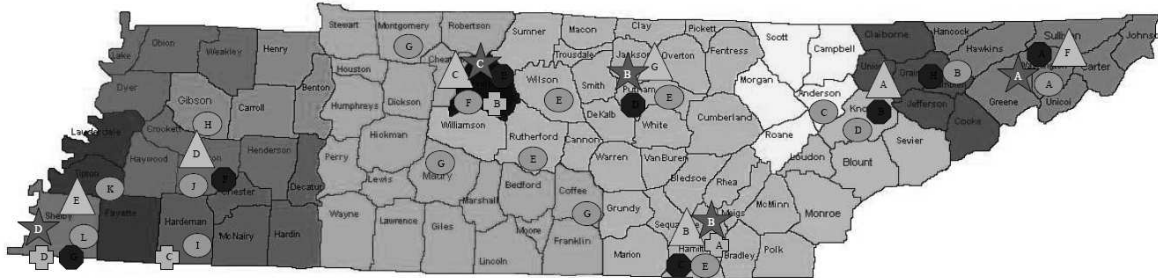
Interested parties may also contact the group directly at info@suicideanonymous.net or (901) 654-7673.

"can you hear me?" wants your articles, poetry, prose, and artwork for the next issue and the ones to come. We'll also need suggestions and recommendations on how we can make it better.

If there's a piece you want to submit to the newsletter, send it to tspn@tspn.org with the subject line "CYMH Submission".

Feedback and suggestions can also be sent to this address with the subject line "CYHM Feedback".

Crisis Resources in Your Area



CRISIS TEAMS – CRISIS STABILIZATION UNITS – REGIONAL MENTAL HEALTH INSTITUTES – MEDICALLY MONITORED CRISIS WITHDRAWAL MANAGEMENT

Mobile Crisis Teams

- A Frontier Health
- B Cherokee Health Systems
- C Ridgeview Psychiatric Hospital & Center
- D Helen Ross McNabb
- E Volunteer Behavioral Health
- F Mental Health Co-Operative
- G Centerstone Community MHC
- H Carey Counseling Center
- I Quinco Community MHC
- J Pathways of Tennessee
- K Professional Care Services
- L Alliance Healthcare Services

Crisis Stabilization Units/Walk-in Center

- A Frontier Health
- B Helen Ross McNabb Center
- C Volunteer Behavioral Health – Chattanooga
- D Volunteer Behavioral Health – Cookeville
- E Mental Health Co-Operative
- F Pathways of Tennessee
- G Alliance Healthcare Services
- H Cherokee Health Systems

RMHI

- A Moccasin Bend Mental Health Institute
- B Middle TN Mental Health Institute
- C Western Mental Health Institute
- D Memphis Mental Health Institute

MMCWM

- A Helen Ross McNabb
- B CADAS
- C Buffalo Valley
- D Pathways
- E Serenity
- F Frontier
- G Volunteer

Respite Services

- A Frontier Health
- B Volunteer Behavioral Health
- C Mental Health Co-Operative
- D Alliance Healthcare Services

10/16/14

This map of crisis response teams and facilities is provided to TSPN courtesy of Melissa Sparks, Director of the Office of Crisis Services and Suicide Prevention within the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse's Division of Mental Health Services. More information about these facilities is available from Ms. Sparks at (615) 253-4641 or melissa.sparks@tn.gov.

Need Help Right Now?

Feelings of hopelessness, feeling trapped, feeling like a burden to others, increased alcohol or drug consumption, sleeping too little or too much, and withdrawing or feeling isolated from others are signs that you or a loved one may need help now.

If you or a loved one are feeling suicidal, please seek help immediately. Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK or visit www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org.