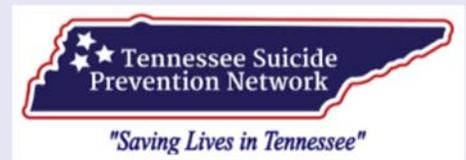


# can you hear me?



stories of people who have survived suicide attempts

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## From Suicide to Success

*George Bell is a British-born writer and mental health advocate who, in addition to his work for the Huffington Post, maintains his own blog at [livingmentallywell.org](http://livingmentallywell.org). He posted this introduction to Huffington Post readers on February 4.*



Photo of George Bell courtesy of his personal website ([www.georgebell.co](http://www.georgebell.co)).

I was told last week I was going to be a blogger for the *Huffington Post* and naturally I was ecstatic. It is one of the world's most read news sources and for many it is one of the coveted trophies of writing, the creme de la creme of blogging achievements.

However, this isn't the only reason I suddenly felt a twang of success. Yes it was flattering to know that my work was appreciated, at least by someone other than my parents. Yes it felt great to know that it has the potential to be viewed by millions of people. But this is trumped by the fact that while I don't really remember the date, it was roughly a year ago that I had given up on life, unable to think about anything else other than suicide.

My mental health issues had left me crippled and I'd fallen so far down I couldn't see any way back up. I was convinced that my life was over and all my dreams of success gone. Now I find myself travelling the world, seeing things I didn't even know existed, and being acknowledged for my work on one of the best platforms possible. To go from the former to the latter has brought with it a satisfying feeling of success.

The stories that inspire me the most are from people who have been through difficult circumstances and go on to achieve success. People like Walt Disney who was fired from his writing job after being told he wasn't creative enough, Oprah Winfrey who was told she'd never be any good on television or Winston Churchill who wasn't regarded as a fit leader pre-WW2. All of these people overcame hardships, or doubts, or struggles in some way and changed the course of history.

Now I don't claim to be changing the course of history but for me I've changed the course of my own personal history. We are constantly writing the new pages and chapters of our book of life everyday with every decision we make and a year ago I had a choice; to write "The End" and close that book, or to carry on and make that book worth reading, even if it was only for myself. Obviously I chose the latter and it was the best decision I've ever made. I overcame my own personal hardships, doubts and struggles to achieve things that I wanted to achieve. For some, being published on a worthwhile blog is something they have neither the passion nor interest in, but for me it marks another milestone in my long but fulfilling journey of recovery.

The point I'm trying to make is that it's never too late to pick yourself back up and strive to achieve those goals that you've always desired, whatever they may be. So maybe you don't have any interest in getting published on the *Huffington Post*, but maybe you've always wanted to write a book, record a song or even fly to the moon (aim big).

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](mailto:tspn@tspn.org).

## From Suicide to Success (continued)

Trauma, struggle and doubt stripped away my drive, my passion and all the things that made me tick. Suddenly my goals seemed unattainable and my passions pointless. All those wondrous plans I'd set out for my life seemed to evaporate before my eyes a year ago. I planned to do great things, as all humans do, but it seemed my chance at making a difference was over.

But that period has taught me that giving up and giving in isn't an inevitability, it's a choice, always. People go through the most terrible things only to go on and achieve the most phenomenal feats. Often, it is the fact that they have been through these struggles, known the dark times and sometimes stared death in the face that has given them the drive to achieve the things that they really wanted to.

Being successful and having suicidal thoughts are not two contradictory statements. Indeed the latter can end up creating the former. Successful people go through tough times. In fact, tough times make successful people. What do Winston Churchill, Steve Jobs, Abraham Lincoln, J.K. Rowling, Bill Gates, Buzz Aldrin and Gwyneth Paltrow all have in common? They all suffer or suffered from a mental health issue and have achieved brilliant, different and sometimes unbelievable things.

The biggest thing my struggle has taught me is that anything really is possible, especially recovery. I'm still amazed I was able to come back from the brink because honestly, nothing was going right for me. I had nothing and no-one to fall back on, not really. But now that I'm recovered, I see that the last two years were just a small blip in my life and that struggle is only temporary.

To go from suicide to success, or at least what I see as a personal success for me, still makes me feel like I'm living a bit of a dream. All those cliché sayings of "the grass is greener on the other side", "there's light at the end of the tunnel" and "time heals all things" do ring true. Clichés are frowned upon and discarded, but they are clichés because they are used often, and they are used often because they are often true.

## I Am Worth Living For

*Linda Meyer is the founder of The Support Place, a wellness center based in Tom's River, New Jersey. She posted this essay on What Happens Now?, a blog for the lived experience community developed by the American Association of Suicidology (no longer updating but still available at [attemptsurvivors.com](http://attemptsurvivors.com)).*

*Here, Linda discusses the concept of Wellness Recovery Action Plans (WRAPs), which people with mental illness can use to create a network of strategies and supporters they can use to guard against relapses or breakdowns. More information about WRAPs is available on PsychCentral.com (<http://psychcentral.com/library/id239.html>).*

There was a time in my mid-forties when my depression became so bad that the only way I thought I could feel better was to just die. I suppose it was a way of controlling the uncontrollable when every emotion and every physical pain left me feeling hopeless. It was very hard for someone like me, who had a lot of hope and was very much in control of my life. I was happily married, raising our seven children, and beginning to work outside the home.

Until I discovered WRAP, I didn't have the self-awareness to begin to control what I was experiencing. My suicide attempts left me floundering in a world with no tools and too many people controlling me. This led to 27 hospitalizations, and I began to understand that being controlled was exactly what I was trying to avoid.



## I Am Worth Living For (continued)

My awareness from WRAP gave me what I needed to help myself. A new awareness of my triggers allowed me to peel them apart like an onion to reveal the many layers I needed to become aware of to avoid depression and thoughts of suicide.

The hypersensitivity I experienced from being controlled gave me insight that there must be a reason for my hypersensitive reactions to everything else. Through the help of my psychiatrist and the creation of my crisis plan, I was able to go back to my childhood where it all started, with traumatic events that I had repressed most of my life.

I keep asking myself, what is it that is triggering me? Each time I identify it, I peel another layer and begin to reveal more triggers such as certain voices, attitudes, ignorance, someone not following rules, people being taken advantage of or me feeling vulnerable. I realize these triggers affect many parts of my life even if the original trigger is not there.

A recent triggering event was witnessing a police brutality incident where a man almost died. Testifying in court brought up memories of my childhood experiences. When I was 9 years old, I was in the same courtroom testifying against my perpetrator and feeling vulnerable from being taken advantage of by boys and men. That early experience answered many questions I had asked myself, like why I always beat the boys up, why I became so competitive in sports and enjoyed beating them there, and why I struggled with male teachers.

Triggers led to a buildup of hypersensitivity and not knowing what to do about it. The depression got heavier and deeper until I constantly lived in a state of suicidal thoughts. Taking my own life was the only way I felt I could regain control of it. I realized that the controlling treatment from people who tried to help me was only making those depressed feelings worse.

I now have immediate action plans and continued action plans, which are very different. For instance, an immediate action plan if someone isn't using their blinker while driving might be for me to yell "BOZO!" shake my head, and take a deep breath. I feel it, acknowledge it and then I am OK.

If a single trigger is compounded by other triggers in one day, and I begin to feel more angry, depressed or suicidal, I reach into my continued action plans. I listen to music, go to the movies, go shopping or even go play pinball, which helped in my childhood years and can soothe the little girl in me.

Unfortunately, there have been times when some of my wellness tools have not worked. I become more stressed and begin to dissociate, sometimes for days. So instead of worrying my family and being unsafe, my WRAP allows me to reach into some of my more extensive action plans. For instance, my husband knows to drop everything to drive me around and divert my attention any way he can while trying to help me stay safe.



TSPN Middle Tennessee Regional Coordinator Samantha Nadler (at far right) facilitated a course in the "suicide to Hope" curriculum at the TSPN central office in Nashville on March 1.

This single-day course provides clinicians and other professional caregivers with the tools and skills they need to work with people recently at risk of and currently safe from suicide, working with the client to help them achieve recovery and personal growth. More information is available on the TSPN website (<http://tspn.org/s2h>).

## I Am Worth Living For (continued)

During this time, my family is alerted that Mom is not well. The family becomes not only my support but each other's support as well. Their awareness is as important as mine. They learn how my WRAP keeps me safe, and they learn how important it is to help each other.

I have learned to use my home as a place of respite. Someone "babysits" me rather than my going to a hospital only to become more traumatized by doctors who don't know me and to be given medication I don't want. WRAP helped me recognize this, and it is amazing how I have felt comforted by something that was once an intense trigger, my own home.

My family is aware of when I am depressed, as they know my "Early Warning Signs" and "When Things Are Breaking Down" parts of my WRAP. My family assists and supports me with my action plans, even if it means watching me eat my favorite Chinese food for days on end. It is so much better to avoid the traumatic past experiences of getting a call from the police, or having the police come to my home to take me to the hospital.

I have found incredible self-awareness in being able to peel apart a trigger in order to understand logically why it is a trigger and what it truly reveals. Now I challenge all my triggers that were once firecrackers until they are duds.

No more hospitalizations, no psychiatric medications. My transformation continues each day as I come to understand that I am my own best supporter, and that I am worth living for.

IT'S NEVER  
OVERREACTING  
TO ASK FOR  
WHAT YOU  
WANT  
&  
NEED.

*Amy Poehler*

*bedsider.org*

Forgive yourself for not knowing what you  
didn't know before you learned it.

~~~

Maya Angelou

## 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<br>Room 223, Hope Presbyterian Church<br>8500 Walnut Grove Road<br>Cordova, TN 38018           | Yes (e-mail<br><a href="mailto:suicide.anonymous0811@gmail.com">suicide.anonymous0811@gmail.com</a><br>one hour prior to meeting start) |
| Every Thursday, 5:30 PM Central / 6:30 PM Eastern<br>Psychological Trauma & Wellness Center<br>5158 Stage Road, Suite 120<br>Memphis, TN 38134 | No                                                                                                                                      |
| Third Tuesday, 6 PM Central / 7 PM Eastern<br>Room 111, Cornerstone of Recovery<br>4726 Alcoa Highway<br>Louisville, TN 37777                  | No                                                                                                                                      |

The SA website [suicideanonymous.net](http://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.

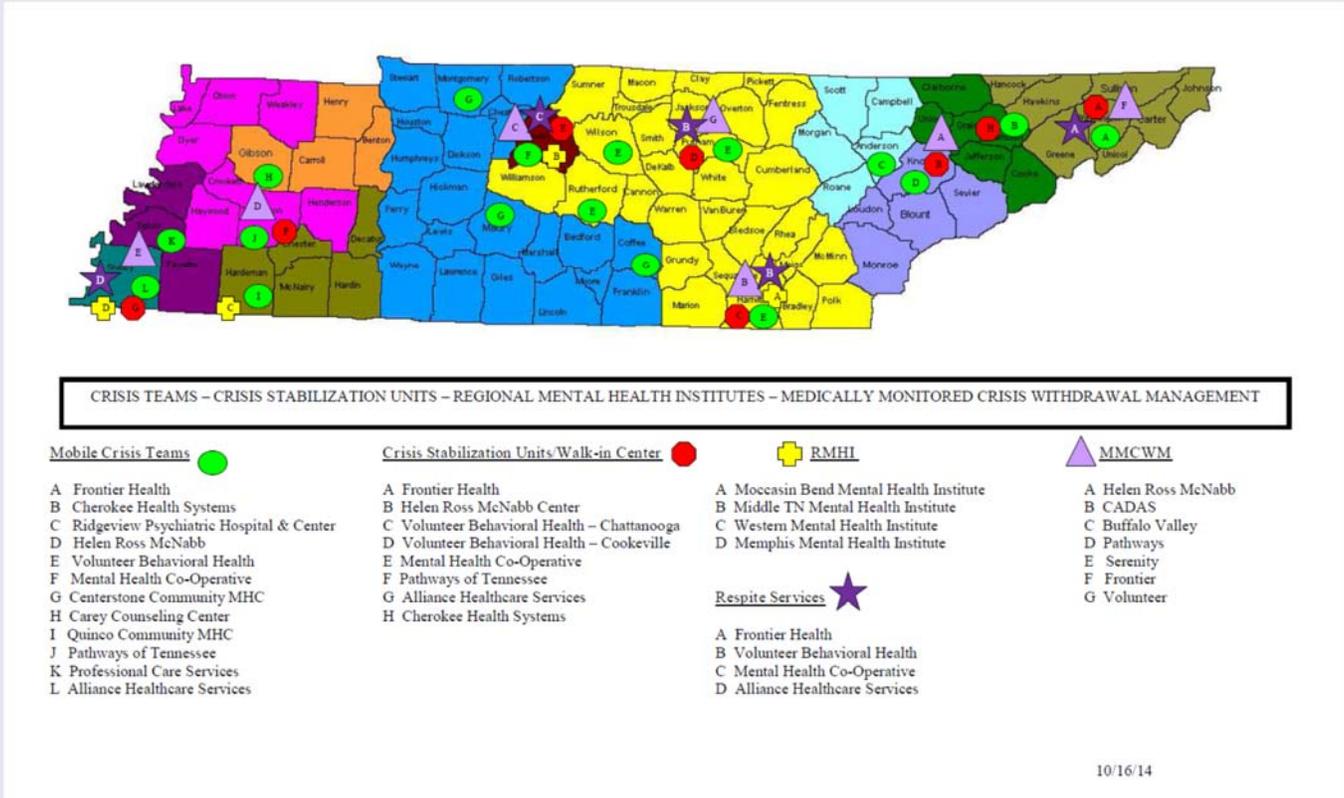
Interested parties may also contact the group directly at [info@suicideanonymous.net](mailto:info@suicideanonymous.net) or (901) 654-7673.

"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](mailto: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



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](mailto: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](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

