

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

A NEWSLETTER FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE GRIEVING
FOR SOMEONE LOST TO SUICIDE

Let Go of the Past

- Let go... of guilt; it's okay to make the same mistakes again.
- Let go... of obsession; things seldom turn out the way you planned.
- Let go... of hate; it's a waste of love.
- Let go... of blaming others; you are responsible for your own destiny.
- Let go... of fantasies, so reality can come true.
- Let go... of self-pity; someone else may need you.
- Let go... of wanting; cherish what you have.
- Let go... of fear; it's a waste of faith.
- Let go... of despair; change comes from acceptance and forgiveness.
- Let go... of the past; the future is here—right now.

by Kathleen O'Brien



Photo courtesy of the "Summer Flower" blog
(summerflowermasti.blogspot.com).

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"Love Never Dies" Memorial Quilts

The "Love Never Dies" quilt project personalizes the phenomenon of suicide, demonstrating that suicide is not some abstract social phenomenon, but a legitimate public health crisis that affects many people within a given community. These quilts are routinely displayed at TSPN educational and awareness events all over Tennessee.

Anyone is welcome to contribute a quilt square, at no charge, no matter how long ago you lost someone.

More information is available at <http://tspn.org/quilt>. Any additional questions may be directed to Karyl Chastain Beal, chair of our Quilt Committee, at arlynsmom@bellsouth.net or (931) 388-9289.



To Those Who Call Me Brave

Deborah Greene lives in Superior, Colorado with her husband and three daughters. She lost her father, Lowell Herman, to suicide on April 20, 2015. She is a devoted advocate on issues of mental illness and suicide prevention/awareness and maintains her own blog, "Reflecting Out Loud" (<https://reflectingoutloud.net>) on these issues.

In March, Deborah contributed this essay to the Mighty (themighty.com) a site which collects user-submitted stories about their struggles and triumphs related to disability, disease, and mental illness.

People tell me that I am brave. I'm really not. They tell me that it takes courage to share my story, my loss with others. I don't know. For me, there is no other way to wear this new aspect of self that is forever ingrained in me. I am a survivor of suicide loss. I didn't ask for any of this and in truth, I would go back in an instant to the me that I was before: before my father's suicide, before I became a survivor, before life as I knew it was forever altered. But I can't.

Being a survivor feels like trying to fit into shoes that are two sizes too small or clothes that are 10 sizes too big. It's uncomfortable. It doesn't fit, and it most certainly doesn't feel right. I don't yet recognize this part of myself. Most days I don't really want to. But I know that I must slowly grow into this new moniker, because it is my truth.

Eleven months ago, my father took his life. I know he was ashamed of battling anxiety and depression and that he couldn't simply pull himself up and out of the depths of his despair. It made him feel weak. It made him afraid. And knowing that he died feeling this way is what breaks my heart the most, because he wasn't weak. He was fighting an illness. Only his illness carried with it the added weight of stigma, judgement and shame. And that weight only brought him deeper into that dark place from which he saw no escape.

No, I'm not brave. I'm just trying to figure out how to live with my loss. And I know that I can't wear it, I can't truly own this truth, if I try to hide it. Where it fits into my world and sense of self, I am still trying to figure out. But I know I will not layer it with shame. And I know I will not allow others to judge my father. And more than anything, I know I want this tragic imprint that is now a part of my family story, to matter. I won't cloak it in silence. I want to use it to shine a light on the issues of suicide and mental illness. I want it to humanize this loss so that people can see we were an ordinary family, and it happened to us. I want them to know my father in life, not to simply allow him to be defined by his death.

I am a survivor of suicide loss. I never thought that would be a part of my identity. But if I must wear it, I choose to do it honestly and without shame. I choose to wear my heart upon my sleeve, in all of its brokenness. I choose to be a truth-teller, even if some days I have only the strength to speak in a whisper. I choose to let my tears melt down the barriers that keep us from saying the word suicide. I choose not to let that word relegate me to grieve in isolation. I choose to give meaning to my father's death. Does that make me brave? I don't know. But whatever it makes me, I will own it with all of the courage I can muster.

**We must embrace pain and
burn it as fuel for our journey.**

**Kenji Miyazawa (1896-1933),
Japanese poet and children's author**

IT IS OFTEN THE MOST
IMPORTANT DAYS I FEEL
THE MOST ALONE IN MY
GRIEF . . . THE BIRTHDAYS
AND ANNIVERSARIES THAT
NO ONE ELSE REMEMBERS.

WWW.WHATSYOURGRIEF.COM

what's
your
grief?

For When You Want a Lullaby: An Essay on Loss

New Orleans-based singer/songwriter Kathryn Rose Wood contributed this essay to OK2TALK, a mental health blog maintained by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). You can hear the song she wrote for her brother Preston at OK2TALK (<http://bit.ly/1VHqiWD>) and hear more of her music via her homepage (<https://kathrynrosewood.bandpage.com>).

"You want a lullaby, but you cannot sing..."

The texts came at 6:10AM on a Thursday in late spring, before the sun had finished rising. Half asleep, I read: "Kathryn, call us back. Please, it's very important." There were several missed calls accompanying the text, voicemails confirming that my family urgently needed to talk to me. Such vague, imperative messages were atypical of my family. I dialed back, already paralyzed with dread and unease.

"Though you try, you don't feel a thing."

The line picked up, my mom speaking softly. "Kathryn...Preston died last night. The cops came to our door a few hours ago. He shot himself in the head... there was a letter. When can you come home?" In those moments, the world stopped and everything I'd ever known to be true was a lie. I often still wish I had not woken up that morning.

"Troubled, unable to soothe your tired eyes and your weary mood..."

Preston Douglas Wood was sibling number 6 in a family of 10 children. A middle child, he was easy going and sweet. He didn't seek attention, but didn't mind being recruited for teatime by his little sisters or trouble making by his older brothers. In fact, he kept his opinions and feelings to himself. When frustrated, hurt, or sad, he wouldn't say so. Instead, he'd clench his teeth and fists while tears welled in his eyes. He'd simply walk away—sometimes to his room, sometimes outside – but always alone.

"...I never knew this fragile side of you."

As Preston grew older, the tendency to keep negative emotions hidden only increased. In our rural Central Pennsylvania hometown, the "strong and silent" male typecast was favored. Men don't cry. Preston knew this and followed suit. Like many teens, Preston struggled with purpose and self worth. Rather than face these emotional challenges head on, Preston turned to another solution: alcohol. By the time he was a junior in high school, drinking was his primary—if not only—coping mechanism. And with each year, it worsened. All unbeknownst to our family.

"I love you, do you know?"

As Preston's oldest sister, I've spent countless hours thinking about him. I obsess over what I could have done differently, what I could have said, why I didn't recognize the gravity of his depression. After all, I am the oldest—I'm supposed to fix things. Sometimes I'm ashamed; I'm ashamed that despite several years helping others with mental health issues as a clinical music therapist, I couldn't help Preston. No amount of education or experience can ever change that.

"When you're breaking, slipping low..."

In the months since Preston's passing, I've reached a level of depression I could never have fathomed. Many know me to be optimistic and resilient, with a thirst for life; depression seemed so far from me. But as days turn into weeks turn into months, grief has given way to doubt, purposelessness, overwhelming sadness and anxiety. If what I feel is even a tenth of what Preston was feeling, I understand why he wanted to end his years of mental anguish and emotional pain. I only wish he would have asked for help, answered, "How are you?" honestly, or let his tears show just once, instead of choosing suicide.

"...filled with doubt, lost and angry..."

Three years ago, I started writing a song with chords and melody that came almost instantly to me. But no matter how much I wrote and re-wrote, I could not find the appropriate lyrics to complete it. It was the first time I was unable to finish a musical project in a lifetime of songwriting. So, I left it sitting in the corner of my mind, gathering cobwebs, reminding me of its incompleteness. On March 26th, 2015, this fragmented song not only finished itself, but also became a respite I never dreamed I would need.

"...I hope you find the peace that you need."

There is still so much I wish I could say to Preston, and yet, everything I would say has become everything I need to hear from someone else. Music has been my one true reprieve in life, and though it's sound has deafened since Preston passed, it is the only way I can begin to string together all the thoughts, feelings, and questions involved in grieving him. So after three years of sitting on that half-finished song, in the days following Preston's death "Lullaby" practically wrote itself. It is my letter to Preston, to my family, to myself...and to anyone else hurting, lost, hopeless and defeated. For the times when you want a lullaby, but you cannot sing.

My New Reality

Rachel Knecht submitted this essay to the SOS of Dane County (Wisconsin) newsletter in October of last year.

My name is Rachel, and I was born on May 28, 1993. I received my middle name from a caring, lively woman with a beautiful smile and a talent for making others laugh: my mother, Renee. She was truly one of a kind. Although I was unable to see it as a child, my mother struggled with bipolar disorder and had for many years prior to my birth.

On May 28, 2001, my mother, who loved me an unimaginable amount, died by suicide. On the day of my eighth birthday, I became a child survivor.

Up until that tragic day, I possessed the naivety and innocence of a well-loved child who had never experienced a loss. At times, I was aware that there was tension between my parents, but moments later I would be distracted by my loving family members who did all they could to protect me. At the beginning of "that" day, I was overwhelmed with excitement and anticipation for my birthday party at the local arcade. I was going to ride the go-karts with my mom and play mini-golf with my friends and grand-parents. When it was finally time for the party to start, all expected guests arrived, except for one—my mom. Without my knowledge, my family had made many attempts to contact her, as my birthday party was something she would not have missed.

After the party, my family expressed to me that my mother was sick which I quickly classified as physical, not considering mental illness. I immediately pulled out my gel pens and new matching notebook to write my mom a note telling her how much I loved her and how I hoped she felt better soon. I would eventually give this note to my mom at her wake, feeling immensely sad yet unable to cry, disoriented by my new reality. It was my father who discovered her that evening, and it was my father who told me "Mommy is with the angels now." I thought I understood. That night, my father lay with me as I sobbed until I could cry no more. I didn't ask why or how my mom had died because, at that point, all I could handle was the fact that she would be gone forever.

About a year after the death of my mother, my life had calmed down. I began the fourth grade at a new school where I had been accepted into the Talented and Gifted program. This was my chance to start anew and make my mom proud. Once settled in to my new routine, my father revealed the facts behind my mom's death. My remaining questions had been answered, but much uncertainty and confusion took their place. The one thing my family never let me be uncertain about, though, is the fact that my mom loved me an unimaginable amount. The day I was told my mom died by suicide changed the way I thought of my life, myself, and life in general. While I am unsure of whether this information would have been better disclosed right away, I have never felt any sort of anger or resentment towards my dad. In times such as these, the question of when and how to reveal the full reality of the situation is not clear—you just have to do the best you can. To this day my dad is my hero and I know that he did everything in his power to do what was best for me.

Now, at twenty-two years old, "child survivor" is still a part of my identity, but you probably wouldn't know this just by looking at me. I am a happy, compassionate, outgoing individual who cares deeply about those around me. This by no means suggests that I have "gotten over" my mother's suicide. I will always miss her and wish that she was able to see the person I have become. After fourteen years I am now able to see the way this tragedy has shaped me into the person I am and have come to love. Healing has been a gradual process spread out over many years. Even after I had accepted her death and wholeheartedly knew she loved me, I struggled with confidence and fear of abandonment. Honestly, while growing up was not always easy and breezy, I was strong and I got through it—I'm a survivor. My view of the world and life itself is strongly a result of my experiences. Without being present, my mom has taught me many things: how to be strong, how to be empathetic, and to not prejudge a person for often there's much beneath the surface that the outside world can't see. I have become a person of whom my mom would be proud. I love and miss you with all my heart, Mom.

If you would like to remember your loved one in "Out of the Shadows", please send your loved one's name, birth date, death date, your name, and your email address to tspn@tspn.org with the subject line "Remembrance."

"Out of the Shadows" 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 "OOS Submission".

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

Suicide Loss Survivors Needed for Academic Surveys



The University of Southern Mississippi is soliciting participants in an anonymous survey of survivors of suicide loss.

The survey asks about characteristics of the loved one who has died and some specific aspects of the person's death—specifically, factors present in the days leading up to the death and how the person obtained lethal means in the period immediately preceding their death. The goal is to learn from participants' perspectives and develop data on severely understudied issues related to suicide. The researchers envision this as a small first step in a larger set of future projects.

Participation in this study will take approximately 10-15 minutes. No compensation will be offered for participation.

The survey, along with a brief statement of purpose, is available at <http://bit.ly/1XpswLr>.

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Additionally, the University of Kentucky is seeking suicide loss survivors for a similar but unrelated survey.

This survey asks questions about the participant, the person who died, and the participant's experiences and perceptions of his or her contact with physicians after the loss.

The researchers intend to use the results to inform recommendations for physicians as they respond to bereaved individuals following a death.

The University of Kentucky study is available at <http://bit.ly/1X38CVN>.



## From a Daughter

Each day I try to understand  
Why you're not here to hold my hand  
You left with no hug and no goodbye  
And for that I only wish to know why.

You strived for goodness, love, and peace.  
But I never thought you soon would cease.  
You taught me about loving and growing.  
And you never stopped your love from flowing.

I never thought I could pay this cost  
For all the love and time we've lost.  
You and I were so wonderful together,  
And your love and life will live forever.

Thank you for your guidance and light.  
Your love in my hear will always burn bright.  
Your heart will always live in mine.  
I guess it can only get better in time.

by Shannon Brown

## Remembrances

Margaret Emma Finlayson Walton  
2/20/1881-7/2/1921

Benjamin Dewire  
7/2/1991-9/20/2008

Joshua Venable  
1/29/1976-7/2/2008

John Matthew "Matt" Brittingham  
3/30/1977-7/5/2006

Tony N. Dorris  
7/6/1967-7/25/2007

Donald Warren Barker  
6/16/1974-7/6/2007

Herman Hill  
7/11/1936-5/12/2015

Adrian Ira Mintz  
7/12/1975-2/26/2007

David Edward Irwin  
2/20/1950-7/12/2006

Brent Shawn Kimbro  
7/14/1961-9/17/2001

Jason Clark Flatt  
3/20/1981-7/16/1997

Philip Woodrow Robertson  
3/24/1969-7/18/1989

Dennis W. Barr, Jr.  
10/24/1952-7/18/2013

Thomas Waldon Snow  
7/19/1974-5/12/2005

Holly Diane Harris  
7/19/1982-10/21/2001

Billy Lee Williams  
10/3/1964-7/19/2012

Dr. Frank Fesmire  
7/21/1933-5/21/1977

Michael Wayne Tibbs  
7/21/1961-2/27/1991

John Christopher Poindexter  
7/22/1982-10/16/2010

Tiffany Ann Cantrell  
3/9/1981-7/22/2006

Tara Ann Swain  
7/22/1988-5/6/2007

Richard Edward Hatch  
12/28/1986-7/23/2009

Vickie Diane Kelley  
2/1/1954-7/24/2005

Adam David Maxon  
5/11/1981-7/24/2007

Rick Dewey  
7/25/1957-8/29/2011

Matthew Tyler Medley  
7/25/1992-6/8/2011

Tony N. Dorris  
7/6/1967-7/25/2007

Shannon Dale Biggs  
1/30/1983-7/28/2008

Matthew Stephen Burson  
4/8/1980-7/28/2011

Sonny Lee Higdon  
7/29/1977-6/3/2008

Gary Ratcliff  
8/3/1953-8/7/1979

Tito P. "Chucky" Lee  
9/20/1978-8/3/1998

Garrett Landon Edwards  
1/11/2002-8/3/2015

Arlyn Maria Beal  
1/25/1978-8/7/2006

Wayne Austin Pike  
8/8/1964-10/14/1991

Leon Ratcliff  
1/13/1926-8/9/1977

Allen Lanier King, Jr.  
8/11/1959-8/18/2005

David Wayne Henley  
8/20/1962-8/12/1988

Matthew Austin Seabolt  
1/28/1981-8/13/2009

Timothy Wallace Lehr  
8/14/1965-3/25/2008

Roy Hassel Bartlett  
9/29/1933-8/14/1997

Andrew McQueen Carroll  
4/18/1976-8/14/2010

Patrick Grohs  
10/15/1964-8/15/2011

Caryn Rowland  
10/1/1973-8/16/2010

Marianne Woodruff  
8/18/1932-3/12/2014

Allen Lanier King, Jr.  
8/11/1959-8/18/2005

Jeffrey Adam Presnell  
8/18/1989-4/27/2011

Scott Zingheim  
8/20/1962-3/31/2011

David Clifton Deveraux  
3/6/1965-8/20/2006

Shannon Ray Bryan  
9/13/1976-8/23/2003

Caleb Daniel Hall  
1/16/1986-8/23/2011

Christopher Hill Pévé  
8/24/1991-10/15/2010

Cindy Trotter Hollifield  
8/25/1958-11/4/2013

Charles (Chuck) F. O'Neil  
12/28/1940-8/28/2001

Michael Perry Smith  
10/21/1991-8/28/2012

Morgan Annette Prentice  
2/22/1995-8/28/2013

*Photo by Stephen J. Danko, courtesy of  
"Steve's Genealogy Blog" (<http://stephendanko.com>).*



## Grief Support & Survivors' Meetings

### West Tennessee

#### **Jackson**

Survivors of Suicide Loss  
Paula Terry ([pcterry64@yahoo.com](mailto:pcterry64@yahoo.com))  
(731) 609-8897

#### **Memphis**

Healing Hearts Suicide Grief Support Group  
Kerry Mitchell  
[momofamaje@yahoo.com](mailto:momofamaje@yahoo.com)  
(901) 743-4701

### Middle Tennessee

#### **Clarksville**

Survivors of Suicide Loss  
Veronica R. Conley  
[veronica.conley@centerstone.org](mailto:veronica.conley@centerstone.org)  
Debbie Mashburn  
[debbie.h.mashburn@gmail.com](mailto:debbie.h.mashburn@gmail.com)  
(478) 320-7973

#### **Columbia**

GRief After SuicideS (GRASS)  
Karyl Chastain Beal  
[karyl@columbia@cs.com](mailto:karyl@columbia@cs.com)  
(931) 388-9289  
[grief-after-suicide.com](http://grief-after-suicide.com)

#### **Cookeville**

"Journey" grief support groups  
(931) 525-2600  
[info@heartofthecumberland.org](mailto:info@heartofthecumberland.org)

#### **Franklin/ Murfreesboro/ Nashville**

Survivors of Suicide Loss  
(615) 244-7444 (24/7)

#### **Spring Hill**

Left Behind By Suicide  
Douglas Johnson  
[tennesseedj@bellsouth.net](mailto:tennesseedj@bellsouth.net)  
(615) 435-9621

### East Tennessee

#### **Chattanooga**

SITE (Suicide Isn't the End)  
Tonia Shadwick  
[wckdstepmom@comcast.net](mailto:wckdstepmom@comcast.net)  
(423) 834-1709

#### **Survivors of Suicide Loss**

Hilda Bevans  
[zueslittlebear@aol.com](mailto:zueslittlebear@aol.com)  
(423) 697-9432  
[www.suicideperspective.com](http://www.suicideperspective.com)

#### **Jefferson City**

ComPaSS  
Cynthia Lynn  
[clynn3118@gmail.com](mailto:clynn3118@gmail.com)  
(865) 680-3256

#### **Johnson City/Gray**

Tri-Cities Survivors of Suicide Loss  
Linda Harold [lindaphipps1973@gmail.com](mailto:lindaphipps1973@gmail.com)  
(423) 245-5608

#### **Knoxville**

Suicide Grievors Support Group  
Paula J. Alexander, LCSW, CGC  
[pj4031@tds.net](mailto:pj4031@tds.net)

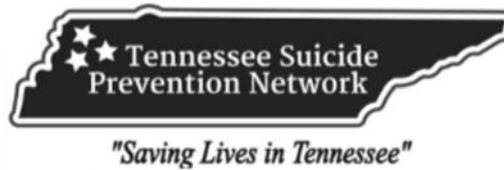
For more information on survivors' groups and for information on other survivors' groups outside Tennessee proper which have members from Tennessee (in other words, far eastern Tennessee and the Memphis area), please visit <http://tspn.org/for-survivors-of-suicide>.

## Need Help Right Now?

Losing a loved one to suicide is emotionally overwhelming. Survivors of suicide are at risk for attempting suicide because of the emotional upheaval they are experiencing. 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).





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).

## TSPN Regional Meetings

East Tennessee Region (monthly, 3rd Thursday, 12:15 PM)

Third Floor Conference Room, Cherokee Health Systems, 2018 Western Avenue, Knoxville, 37921

Memphis/Shelby County Region (monthly, 3rd Tuesday, 11:30 AM)

Memphis Crisis Centers Training Facility, 70 North Pauline, Memphis, 38105

Mid-Cumberland Region (monthly, 2nd Thursday, 9:30 AM)

TSPN central office, 446 Metroplex Drive, Suite A-224, Nashville, 37211 (unless otherwise announced)

Northeast Region (monthly, 4th Thursday, 9:00 AM)

Frontier Health, 1167 Spratlin Park Drive, Gray, 37615

Rural West (monthly, 3rd Wednesday, 10:30 AM)

Fifth Floor, West Tennessee Healthcare Building, 1804 Highway 45 Bypass, Jackson, 38305

South Central (monthly, 1st Wednesday, 11:00 AM)

Conference Room A, South Central Regional Health Office, 1216 Trotwood Avenue, Columbia, 38401

Southeast Region (monthly, 1st Thursday, 11:30 AM)

Mental Health Cooperative of Chattanooga, 801 North Holtzclaw Avenue, Suite 101, Chattanooga, 37404

Upper Cumberland Region (monthly, 4th Thursday, 9:00 AM)

Volunteer Behavioral Health, 1200 Willow Avenue, Cookeville, 38502

Blount County Mental Health Awareness and Suicide Prevention Alliance (monthly, 1st Friday, 12:00 PM)

Boys and Girls Club Meeting Room, Fort Craig Elementary School, 520 South Washington Street, Maryville, 37804

Giles County Suicide Prevention Task Force (quarterly, 3rd Monday, 1:30 PM)

Giles County Career Center, 125 South Cedar Lane, Pulaski, 38478

Behavioral Health and Suicide Prevention for Hickman-Perry Counties (monthly, 4th Friday, 1:30 PM)

Conference Room, St. Thomas Hickman Hospital, 135 East Swan Street, Centerville, 37033

Montgomery-Houston-Humphreys-Stewart Suicide Prevention Task Force (monthly, 3rd Friday, 9 AM)

Youth Villages, 651 Stowe Court, Clarksville, 37040

Rutherford County Suicide Prevention Coalition (monthly, 1st Tuesday, 5:15 PM)

TrustPoint Hospital, 1009 North Thompson Lane, Murfreesboro, 37129