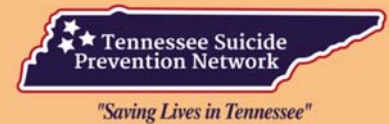


# can you hear me?

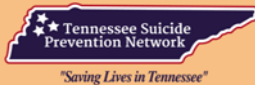


stories of people who have survived suicidal thoughts & attempts

october - november 2016

issue 19

In this issue:	
I've Been Down That Very Road, My Friend	3
Suicide Anonymous	5
Crisis Resources in Your Area	6
Need Help Right Now?	6



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).

## I No Longer Fear Suicide

*Jennifer Garing is an epidemiologist in Texas who works closely with her state's suicide prevention coordinator. She shared her story on "What Happens Now?", a blog for survivors of suicide attempts managed by the American Association of Suicidology (AAS). While the blog is now inactive, you can still read more stories like Jennifer's at [attemptsurvivors.com](http://attemptsurvivors.com).*

I was 13 the first time I tried to kill myself. Luckily, or unluckily, I lacked a certain sophistication with pharmaceuticals. I woke the next morning with a horrid hangover and the even more horrid realization that no one had noticed my attempt. It seemed ridiculous to point it out. After all, it wouldn't further my cause. I hadn't done it to gain attention. I was looking for an exit. So I quietly moved on, working most of my teen years in a chain drugstore and stifling my urge to purchase sleeping pills.



Sourced from Wallpaperspal.xyz.

It was in college that I was finally diagnosed with and treated for the depression that had rattled me for so many years. They carefully doled out my medication so that I wasn't able to overdose on it, but they just didn't understand. There is an etiquette to suicide. At least, for me there is. Using antidepressants to commit suicide is completely against that etiquette. Why would you use the means to your salvation to affect your demise? And why would you when there are so many other options? There is an etiquette to suicide. But they never believed me.

Perhaps because they knew what depression can do to a person. Depression is a life wrecker. It swings in and topples your life and leaves you buried in collateral damage and in absolutely no condition to clean it up. As you lay there in the darkness, you see nothing but darkness. There are no memories of past happiness, of love, of hope, of sunlight. Why would you think it would ever be any different? Suicide is the rational option. It is the glowing red exit sign. It's the one right in front of you. You have to listen, listen very hard, for that oh-so-quiet voice of reason that is buried somewhere in the rubble. The voice that says, "You can come back."

You'd think that it would get easier once you come to understand it. But it doesn't. Being suicidal almost becomes a steady state, and looking for lethal objects becomes like looking for an emergency exit \_ your just-in-case solution. Looking back, it's a terrifying way to live. I used to be able to devise a suicide plan with any three objects. Name them. It might not be quick and it might not be pretty, but I could do it. That's how far gone I was.

In my mid-30s, I was obsessed with carbon monoxide poisoning. Then I woke up one night to an ugly realization. I had already destroyed my own plan. For my very first new car, I had purchased a hybrid, a car that didn't idle.

## I No Longer Fear Suicide (continued)

Regardless of what my mind had planned for me, I fought to stay in control. But my mind always had some evil trick, some plan to send me off the rails. With each episode, it would have some new play that it would turn loose on me. During that episode in my mid-30s, I had one thought that nagged at me continuously. It was probably my fifth or sixth really bad life-shattering episode of depression. My mind bombarded me with questions. How many times are you going to have to claw your way out of this same hole? How much time are you going to have to spend picking up the pieces? How much do you have to lose? How much longer are you going to work your butt off climbing out? When do you get to say you've given it your best shot, but you're tired and you're done?

I finally voiced these thoughts to my therapist and he had one simple answer: "Not yet."

In my late 30s, my depression became treatment-resistant, and I sank into another episode. Although I had learned that you cannot control your mind, I had found that you can control your surroundings, your support system and your work situation. What could have been a life destroyer wasn't. I took leave from work, my mother and father came to help me out and my close friends and coworkers were somewhat prepared for the fallout.

I had lost a beloved great-aunt a decade earlier to Alzheimer's while I was finishing my masters thesis. Slowly, over a 20-year period, she slipped away and disintegrated until she became someone who bore no resemblance to her former self. A contorted vegetable, she could no longer feed herself, leave her bed or make any contact with another human being. I had quickly decided that that was the worst way to die. Not surprisingly, my mind was obsessed with the idea that I would spend the rest of my life dragging myself out of depressions until Alzheimer's took hold of my brain, losing the mind I had spent my whole life fighting to keep. The fear was nearly unbearable to live with, but I numbly fought back.

In the throes of a depression, your personality gets peeled away layer by layer until you are a mere ghost of yourself haunting your own life. You go through the motions, but they don't mean anything. I remember during this depression asking my mother if I had ever been happy, because I had no recollection of it. We sat there at my kitchen table, both wracking our brains for a solid memory of my happiness. Truth be told, my mother has the worst memory for these types of things, and I should have asked anyone else. But what we came up with was a piece of pure magic.

It was a Sunday afternoon when I had visited the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden and they had a butterfly exhibit in part of the conservatory. Late in the afternoon, I was alone in the exhibit. I remember sitting on a bench staring at the beautiful creatures fluttering around me and regaining, for the first time in years, that childhood sense of wonder—that feeling that anything is possible. And remembering those emotions, I could see beyond the darkness and hear that quietest of voices: "You can come back."

It helped that even in the depths of depression, I had myself anchored to the outside world, my parents, my sister, my nephews, my friends, my cat and my dog. By this point, I was bound and determined that this depression that had taken so much from me would not get the balance of my life, and I would not be an accomplice in my own demise.

I no longer fear suicide. There are things I feel unsafe around high open balconies, exposed beams, straight-edged razors—but I don't think it makes me less of a person to avoid such things. I know my limits. I don't think I would ever actually hurt myself; I just don't like how these things make me feel. It's kind of like the same unsafe, out-of-control feeling I get on roller coasters. I suppose some people like to feel like that, but I've felt out of control enough of my life. I don't need to put myself in those situations.

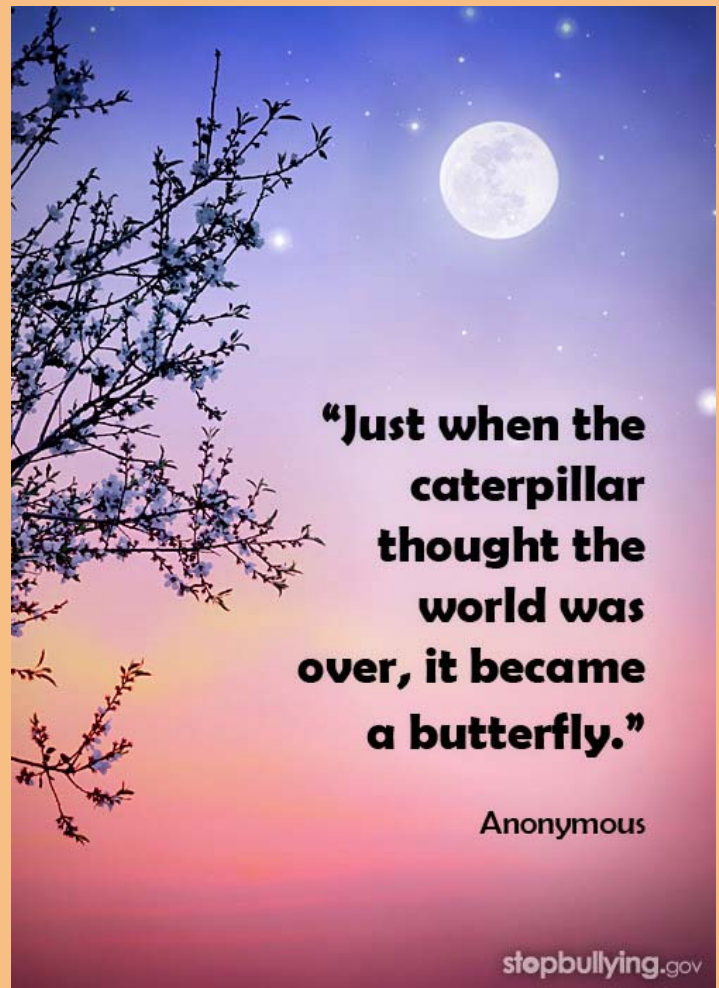
These days, I anchor myself to my surroundings. I hold tightly to the things I love. I keep reminders of those things that give me hope and remind me that the world is full of wonder and possibility. Because I know that there will be days when I need to be reminded of these facts. I will do everything in my power to prevent these days from happening, but I know they will come. The one thing I will always know for sure is that the only constant in life is change. No matter how bad things get, they will always get better, even if they have to get worse first. I cling to that.

## I've Been Down That Very Road, My Friend

*Gloria Gorss of Knoxville wrote this poem in celebration of her third year of survival following her suicide attempt. She has graciously permitted its inclusion in our publication.*

*You can read her personal account of her attempt and recovery, "The Search for the Perfect Nap", in the February-March 2015 edition of can you hear me?, available on the TSPN website.*

I've been down that very road you travel my friend  
That trail of despair, loneliness, and lined in gloom.  
A path full of shame and sorrow, a road with no end  
A road so, so dark even a ray of light is denied entry!  
I've been there, hovered, even overstayed my visit  
I've travelled a step beyond that point of no return.  
I stood on that very edge where the darkness dwells  
Yes, I've been there my friend, that footpath to Hell!  
I know fear as you draw close to the end of the road  
I took things even farther and stepped off that ledge.  
I made that last step down, plunged into the dark abyss  
The tumble down was like time suspended in motion!  
I never found what lie at the end of that dismal path  
My journey cut short by a light breaking the gloom.  
I found a detour instead, and a guide to lead the way  
It was God, directing traffic, he was waiting for me!  
He lifted me off that dark road of sorrow and doom  
Offered me solace, and a place for my weary head.  
I walk a road now, filled with lights and living colors  
I carry a compass, I follow a strong and Loving Guide!  
I know that dark road you are travelling my friend  
The fear in decisions you must face and confront.  
BUT -  
Look for signs of light and brightness from above  
Listen closely, you will hear God's voice calling you.  
He will stop traffic and lead you on a new foot path  
Follow his loving directions and travel a new road!



## Spotlight: Live Through This

During the month of September, the Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network observed Suicide Prevention Awareness Month with a series of educational and memorial events across the state. Many of these featured lived experience testimony—stories from people who had survived suicide attempts. As part of its involvement in the nationwide lived experience movement, TSPN encourages anyone who has struggled with a suicide attempt or suicidal ideation to tell their story publicly and privately, all in order to dispel the stigma surrounding suicide and mental health issues. By speaking out, you encourage others to seek help for themselves and others.

One option for doing this is Live Through This, an online photo and video collection set up by photographer Dese'Rae Stage (an attempt survivor and a graduate of East Tennessee State University) to document the experiences of people who have attempted suicide and found ways to survive.

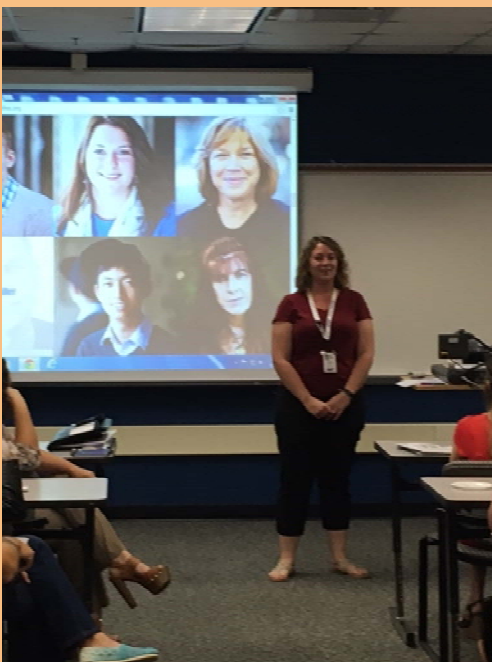


"The intention of Live Through This is to show that everyone is susceptible to depression and suicidal thoughts by sharing portraits and stories of real attempt survivors—people who look just like you," Stage explains in an FAQ section on the project website. "These feelings could affect your mom, your partner, or your brother, and the fear of talking about it can be a killer."

In March 2013, Stage began taking her project beyond her home in Brooklyn, traveling across the country to interview and photograph fellow survivors. The project was funded by a Kickstarter campaign that raised \$23,000. After communicating with would-be project participants via e-mail, she then sets up a visit for an interview and a photo shoot. The portraits and edited versions of the interviews are then added to the website.

"Eventually, I'd like to create a mobile exhibition that will serve as an educational tool for universities, organizations, and anyone else who might like to promote suicide awareness in a unique, relatable way. In the meantime, I am booking speaking engagements," Stage explains. "When all is said and done, I hope to have enough material for a book or film, but that's likely several years in the future."

More information about the project is available at the Live Through This website (<http://livethroughthis.org>).



At left: TSPN Middle Tennessee Regional Coordinator Samantha Nadler shares information about "Live Through This" (to which she contributed an interview) as part of a lived experience segment at "Saving Lives in Rural West Tennessee" a regional conference held in Jackson on September 1.

At right: Dese'Rae Stage (center), the originator of the "Live Through This" project, sits in front of some of the portraits included on the website. This photo originally accompanied an Associated Press article on the increasing prominence of attempt survivors in the suicide prevention movement (photo courtesy Mary Altaffer of the AP).



## 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 <a href="mailto:suicide.anonymous0811@gmail.com">suicide.anonymous0811@gmail.com</a> 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

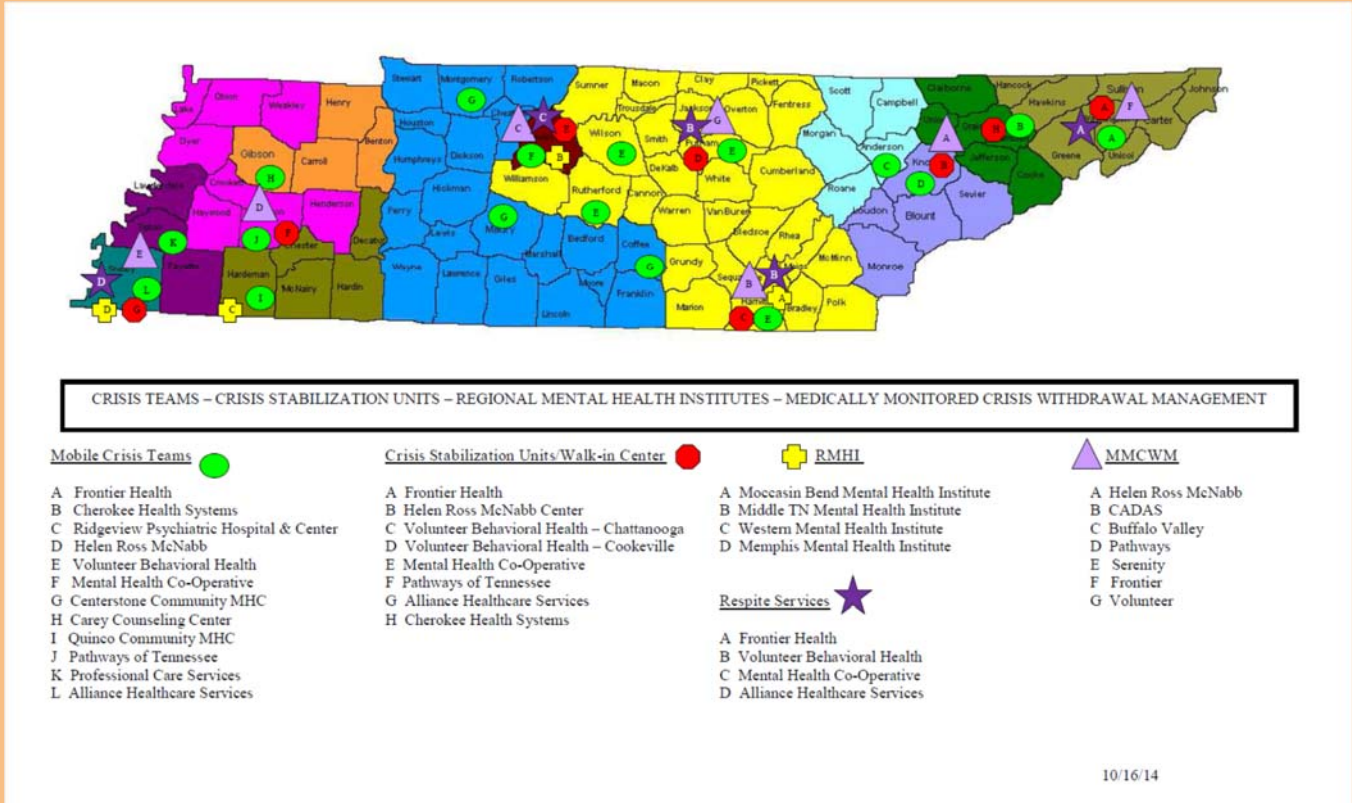
The SA website [suicideanonymous.net](http://suicideanonymous.net) features information on groups outside Tennessee with Skype/phone capability. The site also offers the full text of the *Little Book*, the guiding document of Suicide Anonymous, which discusses the problem of suicide addiction from the 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".

## 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).

