Episode 17 SBS Survivors of Blue Suicide Thomas Forbes EOW June 6, 2011

Welcome back. This is Jen Lee, the creator and host of I Need Blue. If this is your first time joining us, we are happy you are here. If you would like to hear other stories, or you have a story to submit, visit www.ineedblue.net Please note I Need Blue does contain stories which feature graphic content and could be triggering. Please seek help if needed. Remember, you always come first.

Today's episode touches upon a topic we haven't discussed before. Death by suicide is sudden sometimes violent, and usually unexpected. I have two guests with me today. Leslie is the surviving spouse of Thomas Forbes EOW June, 6 2011, Groton City Police Department.

Also here today is Laurie Putnam, who is the co-founder and director of services and outreach for Survivors of Blue Suicide Foundation. Check out Survivorsofbluesuicide.org for more information. Also, on www.ineedblue.net under the “Get Help “tab, you will find their information. T

Thank you, ladies, for being here today. Your story will shed some light on what it's like being the survivor of this tragedy, a tragedy which tends to end with several unanswered questions. In addition, through your sharing of information, we will learn the SBS mission, resources and how it is impacting the LE law enforcement community. Welcome ladies, it is my privilege to host you as my guest today.

Laurie

The story starts with Concerns of Police Survivors, which is a nonprofit organization that supports families and coworkers of officers killed in the line of duty. I started working there in 2009. I left there as the Director of Chapter and Survivor Support. Through my 10 years, I had hands on contact with law enforcement agencies, survivors, where I was sometimes the first point of contact. I was the resource to get them in touch with our chapters, the information about C.O.P.S. and any resources they can get. I would often get calls from suicide survivors asking what is available for us?

There are several definitions to line of duty death. C.O.P.S. doesn't make that definition. They go off 4 other entities and law enforcement suicide is not in that definition of end of duty death. It was heartbreaking every time to try to find them resources. Even a FB group. My Director of Operations at the time, Shelley Jones, is a retired Columbia police department Assistant Chief and she had a suicide and a line of duty death in her agency throughout her career. She approached C.O.P.S. and said, can we start a separate organization modeled after C.O.P.S., but for law enforcement suicide? The C.O.P.S. national board voted unanimously to let us start this organization. I joined her. It was a mission that called to me throughout the years, so I had no hesitation to start this.

We started Survivors of Blue Suicide in 2020, with a founding committee, and the ability to offer tons of resources. we sat down for a mission statement, and we wanted people to know instantly what we do.

***We foster hope, by uniting survivors of law enforcement suicide, to support one another and honor our fallen heroes. That is truly our mission as survivors, surviving families and coworkers.***

Leslie

I can tell you SBS has been a lifeline. I'm going 11 years out from my husband taking his life. I don't know how SBS found me. I was asked to join about a year ago. I didn't know how much I needed it until I started to become a part of it. I am forever grateful to both Laurie and Shelly. They really live their mission statement for me and other survivors. There are not enough words to thank them.

Jen

Leslie, can you share with us a little about your relationship with your husband? He was more than just a police officer and more than just a husband.

Leslie

It always surprises me that my heart starts beating so rapidly when I start to share the story. It’s not from nerves. I think the body just holds on to all these feelings which day to day we're not even aware of. When I start to say his name, my heart gets so filled with memories and love.

We met in college, and I was in a very serious relationship with someone else, but he was extremely determined. He saw me on campus and decided he was going to marry me, is the story he told everyone. I wasn't interested at first, but he was extremely persistent, but not in a weird way rather a very loving way. He didn't take no for an answer. We met and within about two months, we were engaged, much to my families aghast.

We were married my junior year of college, and he was just graduating and got on the police department. Our whole marriage was being part of a police family. He was extremely accomplished. As a police officer he did so many outstanding things for the community.

He had a difficult childhood. He had anxieties related to his upbringing, and mine was a little different in that I come from a very large Sicilian family. He found a lot of comfort in that aspect of my family. He was always searching for those roots, the feeling of family, which I could offer to him. I also grew up with a mom that battled mental illness. So, we both had suffered somewhat of a little bit of hurt.

We were great together. We were married 31 years. It was a marriage; it was a real marriage. Everything wasn't always perfect. We fought, we made up, and were dedicated to each other. We have two daughters. The oldest was born in 1983 and at that point we had been married 4 years. My younger daughter was born three years later in 1986. All they knew was, Dad was a police officer.

We often spent a lot of time at the police department, because it was their way to have dinner with their dad. The girls would be in school and he’s working second or third shift, oftentimes, we would meet him if he had time, or it was a break. The youngest one would ask, “does dad have any customers? “Meaning was their anyone in jail that day. We have all those stories, and fond memories of being a very strong, police family in a unit. Within our small community, I was a teacher, I still am a teacher. He was the police officer. We were very dedicated and well known in our community. We felt like we were living the dream of both our passions through our jobs and our family together. We were a very typical, strong loving group, the four of us.

Jen

If he had to describe his role and his passion, when it came to being a law enforcement officer, what do you think he would say?

Leslie

In the beginning, there was a lot of excitement. He didn't want to miss out on anything. He always wanted to be involved, as young police officers often are. As time went on, and he moved up the ranks, he had more and more on his shoulders as he became in charge of others. There would be times he would come home and be quite wound up, but not want to share. There would be other times he would be open, and we would share.

I would always get the phone call first. I'm coming home, and I look worse than it was. Maybe he had blood on his uniform. He would prepare me and let me know he was ok and headed home. Those moments I would know about, and could probe more, but there were other times where I knew things were bothering him. He wasn't always that open and sharing and it builds up after time, years, and years, of those small incidents of being in law enforcement and just never knowing what awaits you.

He moved up the rank, and finally he was Lieutenant, which in their department made him second in charge. At times, he was the acting Chief. He really took on that responsibility of trying to protect all his officers, and that played heavy on him. There was political stress that I could see happening in our community too. It also made it difficult for Tom, so I could see this anxiety and stress come home with him. He wouldn’t always share, but I could see it there. He was in law enforcement for 31 years when he died by suicide.

Jen

Did he have anyone underneath him who was killed in the line of duty?

Leslie

Yes. Somewhat early in his career, an officer was killed while he was out directing traffic and a car hit him. He was a close friend. Also, Tom had some incidences where my husband and his Chief were held hostage. They were able to have that end successfully for everybody. I think they're celebrated when something like that happens; it becomes public and celebrated. They might publicly be acknowledged in the newspaper or an award. All of that is wonderful, but underneath the emotions are still there which they must go through. Any of those incidents, such as being held hostage, can happen to every person that puts on a uniform and walks out the door every day. It’s just part of their job that they take on.

Jen

I can’t imagine the things our police officers and first responders see on a day-to-day basis.

Leslie

For my husband, the stress of never knowing, started to affect him at the end of his career, as he was thinking of leaving. He was close to retirement. I started to see more anxiety and stress with him at that time. My typical reaction was, “come on, you've got this. We've done this for 31 years. Look at the things you have gotten through. You got this! Just hang on, you only have 6 weeks to go.”

 I didn’t understand how severe his anxiety and depression were those last couple of weeks. Suicide is often sudden, unexpected, and violent and that's my story. It was probably two weeks or three weeks of severe anxiety and sleeplessness. It was very sudden; like he was doing okay, and suddenly, he wasn't doing okay.

Jen

Did he seek out help?

 Leslie

At the time, he was acting Chief. He was prescribed sleep medication, but his fear was he might sleep thru a call at 2am. There were always calls at 2a.m. For him it was this balance of how I help myself mentally and physically and still do my job? He didn't want to take time off.

Jen

Was there therapy along with the sleeping pill?

Leslie

He started to see someone for post-traumatic stress disorder, another treated him for his sleeplessness, and another prescribed an antidepressant. It was like a train wreck at the end and possibly medication he was taking made his anxiety or suicidal thoughts worse.

Jen

As the spouse watching your husband go through this, did you ever feel helpless?

Leslie

There are a lot of times throughout our marriage, I felt helpless. I felt I didn't know who to reach out to especially while Tom was a police officer. It was important for him to be seen as someone who had strength and was strong, and not really let your emotions take over.

He first became a police officer in 1980 or 1981. At that time, the stigma of “you don't let your emotions get the better of you”, as a husband, as a father, and as a friend. He was the one we all depended upon. He was strong, he seemed fearless. If we needed anything, he was our go to person.

At the department, his role was the same. Many of his officers went to him that were struggling and he did a lot of the counseling and got them help. People in the fire department also turned to Tom as their go to person. He had a gift for listening, for being strong, and knowing what direction to help people. He had been very successful in helping others, but he couldn't help himself, which is sad.

I didn't know to help him. I honestly did not know we were at that point where he was considering suicide. It's hard for me to think it was a plan. In my heart, in my mind, I think it was this impromptu, suddenly thought that he couldn't take back on the morning he died by suicide.

That morning he made his lunch; I was going for a run and then going right to school. It was a beautiful morning. He gave me a kiss and we had plans to meet up afterwards. I remember I said, “call your doctor.” The last couple of nights while he was sleeping, he was having a lot of physical reactions, muscle jerks, and I could tell whatever medication he was on was acting weird in his body. He said, “Yep, first thing I'll do.”

I went for a run then went off to school. He went to his office. By 7:20a.m., he had died by suicide. He went into his office, into his closet, and he used his gun. My heart breaks in those moments, where he was alone and made that decision. The pain he must have been in to do that. That's what breaks my heart. I had sent him a text saying, “it's so beautiful out here this morning.” He would, at times, run with me at a local state park called Bluff Point. I was surprised when I didn't get a text back. Now I know why.

Jen

When did you get the phone call?

Leslie

I didn’t get a phone call.

I was in my classroom teaching and completely naive to anything. I love teaching and besides being with my own children, and my husband, my students were my family as well. My principal came in and said, “you have to come with me a minute.” We were walking down the hall and he said, “this is as bad as it gets.” Inside I thought, “Oh, my God, they're firing me. What the heck did I do?” Parents complain. In my own mind, I'm thinking, who did I fail? I must be getting fired when I heard those words. It never crossed my mind this was about my husband or my kids.

He took me to a back room. I could see his Chief in the corner, but he wouldn't make eye contact with me. One of our good friends, who's a police officer was there with his wife and a priest. I knew and said, “Oh my god, he had a heart attack?” They said, no. I said, “Oh, car accident?” I started making this list of what happened.

Then I asked, “Is he alive?” They said “no” and told me what happened. At that moment, I don't remember much. I remember thinking, I got to get to my kids. One was in North Carolina; one was in Maine. They told me news trucks were already there. My thought was to get to my own daughters before they hear it on Facebook, or publicly.

I believe the officer's wife, whom I'm very close with, drove me home. My sister met me at the. house: someone knew to get me support. I made a plan in my head; this is what we're doing. My daughter was married at the time, and I need to get in touch with her husband and tell him to go home so when I call, she has somebody to support her. I must get in touch with Lauren's boyfriend and get her out of college class in North Carolina to make sure she has somebody with her. We also had a grandson who was 2.

What was somewhat difficult is our neighbors who are best friends with Tom, came over. They brought their priest or pastor; it wasn't a church that I went to. He started to talk to me and asked me if I wanted to share any of my sins. At the time, I asked, “can you please leave?” I don't know what direction he was coming from, but, at that moment, I felt that was not where I wanted to go. I felt it was kind of insensitive. They left.

We got my daughter's home which was my goal at that time. Your body protects you during times like this when it was just too much trauma for me to digest it. My daughters were extremely close to Tom and my thought was protecting my daughters. If you talk to any parent who has had to share news with their child that their father died by suicide, it is probably the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my life. Sharing the news and the sound of their grief is something you never forget. As a mom, it was tough.

Jen

Were you able to tell them in person? Or did you have to tell them over the phone?

Leslie

I had to tell them over the phone. It was already going public with the news outlets outside my house. I couldn't wait for them to travel home to hear it. They had to hear it for me first.

Jen

How did you deal with the press?

Leslie

There was an officer who is now retired along with his wife who were very protective of me. He was phenomenal. He came to the house and stood guard. He never gave anyone the right to interview me. I never talked to anybody and kind of shut down in my home until the wake and funeral. We didn't leave and kind of hunkered down within the house, which was comforting because it was the space we had created for our family and our daughters. I felt the safest there.

Jen

Was there conversation with whomever found your husband and how were they were dealing with it?

Leslie

The officer who was at our home found Tom. They've all retired within a year after this happened. It affects everyone and it has lasting effects. It’s so hard to even put into words. I knew there was suffering going on at the police department. Honestly, I think they felt anger.

I never felt anger with my husband. I only felt sadness that he felt so sad that this was a decision he thought he had to take. But some of the people who worked with him felt anger that he would do that, that he would do that to me or to our daughters.

I think for a lot of people in the community in this, this is probably very common to, if it can happen to Tom and Leslie and Gina and Lauren, t can happen to anyone. That’s the scary thing. I think it makes people want to have answers right away and the truth is with that type of suicide, there aren't answers. He didn't leave a note. He never expressed verbally to me or anyone else that I'm aware of. It was very sudden to many people, the police department, my family, his friends. It was all trauma, and it was all that sudden shock that everyone was experiencing.

Jen

You don’t get the answers. They are left unanswered. That must be hard.

Leslie

I've learned to accept it and it becomes a fabric of your story, a story I never thought I would be living. There were so many years after Tom died, that I'd stop and see myself in the mirror and not recognize the person staring back. In my mind, we were going to grow old together. Our kids were becoming independent, and this was going to be our time to really enjoy life.

I never saw myself as a widow at 51, or not having Tom in my life. You must adjust that story. But I've learned to come to peace with “I don’t know the reason except that he, in my mind, was in so much pain. It was his only way that he could make himself feel better at that moment.”

My compassion goes to my husband, because I can tell you, he loves me. I know he did. He would never want to hurt me. He loved my daughters, and they were very close. He felt loved by me ad he felt loved by his daughters. Something changed in him that was sudden.

Jen

How did you comfort your daughters?

Leslie

I got a lot of therapy for myself, first. I learned they must grieve; I can't grieve for them. As a mom, you want to take their grief away and I couldn't. So, I had to give them the space and acknowledge that this is hell and we're going to go through it. We're going to go through it together, and I'm there for them but I couldn't grieve for them.

There were times as a mom, I would suck up my grief to be there as they were having a bad moment. I also needed to give them that space to scream, to get it out. Unless you've been through that kind of trauma, it's different from everything I've read. I have lost other people in my life to cancer, old age or different illnesses so I have experienced losses in my life. This one is different, and I think death by suicide is different for grievers which is why the word “survivor” comes in. I can't put into words or even share the grief and the pain, but you must go through it. My goal was to allow my daughters to go through it and not make them feel like they had to suck it up and be strong.

It's still a journey. It's been 11 years for me, and I feel proud of where I am today. Death by suicide can fragment families however my daughters and I, are still extremely close. Now I am both grandmother and grandfather to those grandbabies we now have. I got up and I went to work every day. I paid the bills and I'm continuing a life even though we went through this trauma and the loss of my husband.

Jen

I think your story will provide some direction, hope and inspiration for other families that have gone through it. It happens way too often. I can't thank you enough for sharing your story which needs to be told.

How did you deal with people who say how can I help you? What do you need?

Leslie

Everyone’s grief journey is different. For me, I am blessed to have two sisters that I'm extremely close to. I have three very good friends. I felt like they made this circle around me. They didn't let me fall and if I fell, one person picked me back up. I had a friend who called me every single day on the phone for about a year. Those things matter tremendously. You don't realize it while you're going through it. I realized how blessed I was to have my family and friends that didn't ask me a lot of questions and didn't make judgments. They allowed me to be how I needed to be at that time.

If someone said, “What do you need? I'm here to help you.” I would have said, “I have no idea.” A neighbor came every Monday morning to put the garbage out to be collected. When you're just getting out of bed and barely functioning, those little things which someone does without asking, hugely matter. A lot of people brought food, but to be honest, it was nicer to have somebody come and plow me out, without asking. We’re running to the grocery store, what can I get you? I was very blessed that my sister lived in my neighborhood. She always came to the house with dinner every night for about a year. She just made sure there was food in the house. Many people, after the second or third week, get tired of doing that. The people who were there for me are still there for me. I would never want any other family to experience this ever. But asking that question, you won't get an answer, however just taking it upon yourself to do it, means a lot.

Jen

That’s great advice.

Leslie

After a while, I think people get tired of listening and you don't want to bore people with your story. As a survivor, it's like I always have this pain and I don't always want to bring it up and be part of the conversation, unless somebody asks me, and I feel comfortable sharing.

There's comfort in being able to share and talk about your loved one, about good memories and not just focused on how they died, but who they were as they lived. If someone can be an excellent listener and just let the surviving spouses or children express those feelings, is very helpful.

That's what SBS does. We get to share in our meetings. Sometimes we get to lead the conversations other times they will have professionals share information about grief and Blue suicide, which is huge. There's a there's a very strong feeling. I felt very alone when Tom first died. Especially after a couple of months when the world goes back, and you're still left with the trauma that you're living with.

 I didn't feel like I belonged anywhere. It was hard to be in school and I was able to take some time off. I think I was my best though when I was in the classroom. When I was with my friends, I wasn't ready to be happy yet. And when I was out in the world, I wasn't ready to be that free person where if you bump into someone, you have conversation. I didn't feel like anyone understood what I was going through. That was a hard situation to share or expect other people to understand. I felt very, very alone, I just didn't feel like I fit in anywhere, even with family members. Being part of the SBS, you're with other people who tragically have lost a spouse or a child or a loved one, and have had similar situations to what I've experienced, even though we all grieve in different ways. There's comfort in knowing that I can say to someone, “I'm listening and though I don't understand fully your experience, what I've lived through.”

Jen

There are many people who feel alone and can relate to your story. I’m thankful Laurie is here, and she was able to provide a support system and group for you.

Leslie

Especially with being part of a police family, my situation was a big change in we didn't have a lot of involvement with the police department after Tom's funeral. So, you go from being part of what you feel is an extended family to being very alone, very separate. There were a few members whom we are still friends but most of them, they're battling their own pain, and they're working through their own trauma. There was a huge separation, which is another loss.

If your loved one dies in the line of duty, the community comes together and celebrates that person's life. There’s the police Memorial in Washington DC and the Connecticut State Police also have a memorial. There is a mass every year, at a church in Norwich, for law enforcement. But yours not part of it and that makes it difficult. There are lovely people who reached out to make Tom part of that mass. He's honored, but not in the same way. The officers come in and may be carrying a flag, and from it is hanging their officer's name. Tom's name is only mentioned in the pamphlet which people get. He was being honored, but it was obvious the difference of how his death by suicide was different from if you're killed in the line of duty. That's a painful feeling because if you read about Tom's career, and what he did for his department and community, he's amazing. He was so accomplished. He put his life on the line every day for everyone.

SBS has a memorial for officers who died by suicide, and they honor them. That's huge. I cannot wait to take my daughter's.

Laurie

I'm completely in awe of Leslie. I'm completely in awe of every survivor that has lost someone in the law enforcement profession to suicide. They are the strongest people I know. They are loving, they're caring and their pain and what they have gone through, continue to help people. I see it every time we meet that someone is sharing to someone else who just experienced this within months.

These survivors needed a Blue family. To many agencies don't treat them with the respect after the loss. It’s suicide. It's awkward. Society makes it awkward. There's this stigma surrounding it that no one wants to say this word and heaven forbid somebody, talk about it. Society is uncomfortable with death anyway. It becomes kind of awkward, but we want to change that narrative with agencies to understand that giving them a funeral, giving them honor by the life that they lived, the dedication that they made to their community, to their job, and to their department is okay. Give them the honor and let's celebrate the life they lived, and not how they died.

We're going to keep saying that as many times as we can, as an organization, because it's okay. It's not going to cause more suicides to have a nice funeral and honor an officer that has given their life, their dedication, and their career to their community. That is a message we are putting out there. We do have resources, we do work with agencies, and people are opening to talking about this. Agencies are reaching out saying, “okay, what can we do? Is there a policy?” People are starting to talk, and we are going to talk about this as often as we can.

Leslie

I am seeing change in the police departments. I can share that since I've joined this group, I'm finally able to share my story easier out in public. I talk more about it. The school district where I work, many of our security guards are now retired police officers. The other day, a security guard said, “we hear you are retiring.” Which is true. I said, “and you know, I'm starting to talk more about Tom's suicide and getting the word out.” One of them came over and gave me the biggest hug. It's like a relief for them, that I'm finally okay enough to say, let's talk about this. Let's get the word out. I could tell by that hug; he was so grateful.

I was at the high school and the Chief of Police was there. I said, “I'm going to be doing a podcast. I'd really like to start getting Tom's story out there.” He knew my husband. He said, “thank you. That's amazing. Come in and talk to the department.” I'm starting to see a change in people where they are talking about it more and they want me to talk about it.

There was a lot of pain when Tom died and I think, maybe out of respect, they didn't want to upset me. I'm able to talk about it now and they're like, right there going, “let's do this. Good for you. How can we support you to keep going?

Laurie

Tom became a police officer back in 1980. There was a huge mentality back then of buck up, move on, go to the call, buck up, get it done, move on, go and move on. Now in 2021 mental health is becoming acceptable. Agencies are talking about it. New York City's talking about it. Los Angeles is talking about it. Louisiana is talking about it. People are putting things out there, that mental health is okay to talk about. It's okay not to be okay. You will hear that so many times being acceptable. Then you have great resources out there for law enforcement to call outside of their agency and outside of their EAP’s because it's being talked about it's becoming more acceptable to talk about mental health in 2021.

Leslie

When Tom died in 2011, there was nothing. It was just me and I would seek out help. Some professionals don't have a lot of knowledge and at times it wasn't helpful, it was almost hurtful. For me, it wasn't until I became part of this group, that I realized I had been living with so much guilt. I kept shoving it down to get through the day. One of the healthiest things for me in being part of Survivors of Blue Suicide is the guilt started to go away a little bit when I saw other people have experienced this. I was carrying around so much like, what did I do wrong? I was his wife; how could I not see this? The truth is, it’s common.

When I hear the stories of parents who have lost their law enforcement children, it breaks my heart. Sometimes there's nothing you can do and I'm understanding that. I stopped asking myself, how did you not see this? Because every morning, I seemed to wake up, it was the same thing. How did you not see this coming? It wasn't a nightmare; It's real? This group, Survivors of Blue Suicide, it's changed me. It's changed me.

Laurie

Honestly, what you say brings me to tears. It is why we started this. These survivors need a home, they need the resources, the friendships, the love, they need their blue family. Shelley and I everyday come to work, sit down, and it's all about survivors. What can we do? What are the resources? What can we provide? Getting the name out there, finding survivors like Leslie 10 years, 11 years out, there's still something for you in this organization. There is still something for you 20 years later, there's still something to talk about and that’s being a survivor.

We started this organization when COVID began so we started with zoom groups. The second Tuesday of every month, we have an educational session. We have a member of our wellness support staff, speak about a topic and they're giving tools for the toolbox. They're giving resources to survivors to take away. They’re hard topics but they're needed. Tonight, we're talking “the empty chair”. There is an empty chair, how to get through that with the holidays approaching. “Let's just talk”, is an open forum, still facilitated, but it's the survivors time to say, “You know what, it's Wednesday, (or a random day of the month) and I'm having a hard time.”

It's their time to be able to share whatever's going on in their life. It’s not facilitated because the survivors lean on each other, they help each other. They're the first ones that pipe up and that's what is needed. That's the biggest thing that they can have is another survivor. It's not us, certainly not about us. It's about them helping each other. I see faces which I saw a year ago and I see the same faces today and they're completely different. I know it's because they have this group, they have other survivors.

 They need that togetherness that; “I've been through what you've been through”. We include every family member to say here our resources, utilize them. It's not just spouses to spouses. It's not just parents to parents, it's everyone to everyone. We do split off the groups to let spouses have time and parents have time.

In 2022, as the foundation has grown, the groups have gotten bigger; adult children, siblings, coworkers, to try to give them an opportunity to talk because that's where the change is, it's all in them. They're the strongest humans that I know. I'm in awe of them every single day. If you wake up and you’re a survivor, you breathe in and out, you're starting the day. If you feel it coming, feel it, because that's how you grow. This grief is never going to go away. Leslie is never going to forget, Tom. You never get past grief. When people ask, Are you over it? Why aren't you past it? It's every day, it's every day for the rest of your life.

Leslie

The group is validation and it’s huge for survivors. It's huge. It's that acknowledgement, the empathy, the compassion, the validation. And that's exactly what SBS is.

Laurie

On Facebook, we’re Survivors of Blue Suicide. Our zoom sessions are for survivors. It’s on our website under the virtual calendar. They sign up with us. **So, if you're a survivor of law** **enforcement suicide, either active or retired you are invited.** It's our website: [www.survivorsofbluesuicide.org](http://www.survivorsofbluesuicide.org). To get information, there's a I am a survivor form they can fill out and you will start getting information on our monthly virtual sessions, our in-person programming, and about our annual national conference. We started the conference this year, had a memorial wall made. Right now, it's a traveling wall. We put the officers’ names of any person that attended like family member or founding committee or board members. We stood up at that conference and said, “We're going to promise you today that we're going to find a home for this memorial. We're going to find a physical place in a city that's accessible, not only to survivors but the community to honor these officers.” So, we did have our first conference in San Antonio and we're looking where to go to in 2022. In the meantime, we will keep searching for its home.

Thank you to Leslie for being so open and being amazing and being somebody, I admire and who gives me energy to do this job. To serve you all is an honor. It's the biggest honor of my life. Thank you.

Leslie

The truth is, sadly, if you look at me, I look like any other 62 year old woman living her life. If it can be my story, tragically, it can be anyone's story. It's important to get the word out to make suicide not have that stigma and to help our law enforcement people. They need to be able to get the help, the support, and the love they need, so it doesn't come down to a choice, like my husband felt he had to make. We need to continue to support Survivors of Blue Suicide. Thank you to the work that Laurie, Shelley, and you by having this podcast are doing. Just so grateful. Thank you.

[www.survivorsofbluesuicide.org](http://www.survivorsofbluesuicide.org)