

Comforting Friends

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A NATIONAL OUTREACH & SUPPORT ORGANIZATION
FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY A SUICIDE DEATH

2022

JUNE



FLOWER OF JUNE

In early June the world of leaf and blade and flowers explodes, and every sunset is different.
~ John Steinbeck

The flower pictured above is the flower of June, the honeysuckle.

Honeysuckle flowers can be found in shades of white, pink, yellow, and red, but the symbolism doesn't change much regardless of the bloom's colors.

What do honeysuckle flowers symbolize?

In its plainest form, the honeysuckle is a symbol of pure happiness. In addition, it conveys messages of sweetness and affection, thanks to the sweet smelling aroma it gives off.

At its heaviest interpretation, the honeysuckle represents the flames of love, and the tenderness for love that has been lost.

In addition, honeysuckle flowers are commonly planted near the home to evoke feelings of nostalgia and honor those who have gone before you or draw happiness and positive energy into your life.

Sources: [britannica.com/plant/honeysuckle/](https://www.britannica.com/plant/honeysuckle/); [gardenofedenflowershop.com/blogs/](https://www.gardenofedenflowershop.com/blogs/); <https://www.petalrepublic.com/honeysuckle-flower/>

June: I love the month of June for all the bounty of fresh flowers, fruits, vegetables and long summer days. I consider working in my yard to be my very own "garden therapy." The fresh air, chirping of birds and the quiet of nature is refreshing for me. The following excerpt may be helpful for you as we journey together.

Founder of www.tinybuddha.com, Lori Deschene, shares: *"Whatever you're feeling, be good to yourself. If you feel lost, be patient with yourself while you find your way. If you feel scared, be gentle with yourself while you find the strength to face your fear. If you feel hurt, be kind to yourself while you grieve and slowly heal. You can't bully yourself into clarity, courage, or peace, and you can't rush self-discovery or transformation. Some things simply take time, so take the pressure off and give yourself space to grow."*



Gratefully,

Marilyn Koenig
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Wishing you a gentle June.

GROUP MEETINGS

Go to our website, click on **Upcoming > Meetings**. Find your virtual meeting date and time, click on **"Register."** On this same page, you can also check for updates regarding in-person meetings.

VIRTUAL MEETINGS:

Second Monday

June 13 @ 3pm PT / 6pm ET

Third Wednesday

June 15 @ 4pm PT / 7pm ET

Fourth Wednesday

June 22 @ 7pm PT / 10pm ET

Grieving Moms Groups (2)

#1 Thursday, June 2 @ 6:30pm PT / 9:30pm ET

#2 Thursday, June 23 @ 3pm PT / 6pm ET

Grieving Spouse & Partner

Thursday, June 9 @ 6pm PT / 9pm ET

IN-PERSON MEETINGS:

Due to health protocol, please call to confirm meetings. 916-392-0664 or 800-646-7322

Cameron Park, CA

Tuesday, June 14 @ 6:30pm

Faith Episcopal Church

2200 Country Club Dr., Cameron Park, CA

Carmichael, CA

Tuesday, June 21 @ 7pm

Carmichael Presbyterian Church

5645 Marconi Ave., Sacramento, CA

Jackson, CA

Tuesday, June 7 @ 3:30pm

Sierra Wind Wellness & Recovery Center

10354 Argonaut Lane, Jackson, CA

Lincoln, CA

Thursday, June 9 @ 6pm

Lincoln Public Library

485 Twelve Bridges Drive, Lincoln, CA

Modesto, CA

Monday, June 20 @ 7pm

The Bridge Covenant Church (Riverbank)

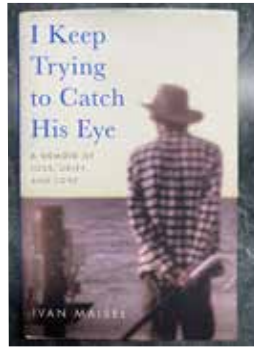
2201 Morrill Road, Riverbank, CA

Legacy Survivors, UT

Wednesday, June 8 @ 6pm MST

Location TBD

i keep trying to catch his eye



As we drove back to the house, as I stared out the window at the Rochester tundra, it dawned on me what was eating at me. I don't like keeping secrets.

Losing Max was burden enough. I didn't want the secret of how he died to weigh on me as well. The last thing I wanted to do was have to keep track of which members of our families knew what. That sounded like unnecessary work, not to mention the emotional issues that would bloom as our extended family discovered that some knew all and all knew only some.

Meg didn't feel any differently. She just needed some time. But I didn't have the patience to wait. I didn't want to return to the house and for one more second keep what we knew from our families. It was hard enough for me to carry my end of a conversation as it was. As everyone walked into the house and started shedding winter layers, I pulled Meg aside. "I can't do this," I said. "I can't not tell them what we know."

We told our girls, and then we gathered everyone in the living room. I stood in the middle, surrounded by the people who love us more dearly than anyone else, who raced to what felt like the coldest place on earth (on that day, the low in Rochester was 1 degree) because we needed them. I stuffed my hands in my back pockets. When I began to speak, I kept my eyes focused on the ground. If I had looked at anyone, I would have choked up. And I said to our families what became the foundational tenet of my grieving.

"We have never been ashamed of Max," I said. "And we're not going to start now. This is what we found out today." So I laid out the framework of what the detective told us. By not being secretive, we didn't add to our considerable burden. By not being secretive, we didn't act as if Max's death deserved secrecy. The first rule of stigma is that it's a badge of something to which you don't want to be attached.

By not being secretive, if someone thought Max's death was shameful, or if someone didn't want to participate in a conversation about Max, that would be their burden. I hope that's not inconsiderate. I don't mean it that way. To this day, I don't broadcast how my son died. I don't shy away from it either. I am willing to answer questions about Max simply and matter-of-factly. You asked about my children, Max remains one of my children. Not only for my own peace of mind, but for the greater good. The fact is, mental illness needs sunlight. Suicide makes people uncomfortable. Only recently has it begun to emerge as a topic spoken only after pulling someone aside, and then in a whisper. But I will talk about it. I am not ashamed of it. We as a family need to talk about it for reasons of catharsis. We as a society need to talk about it, very simply, to save lives. Not just the lives of those considering it but the quality of lives of those whom suicide leaves behind.

Source: *I Keep Trying To Catch His Eye - A memoir of loss, grief, and love* by Ivan Maisel. Excerpts printed with permission.

what is postvention?

by Barbara Rubel, MA, BCETS, DAAETS

Postvention refers to the act of helping those affected by a suicide. Whereas the goal of prevention is to stop people from becoming suicidal, and the goal of intervention is to reduce the likelihood of suicide by individuals who are deemed suicidal, postvention mitigates the harmful effects of suicide.

The goal of postvention is to assist suicide loss survivors in recovering and avoiding harmful health outcomes after a death by suicide. Postvention brings suicide prevention and intervention full circle by including all those who need support. Postvention for families, school systems, and communities helps individuals bereaved by suicide process their grief and decreases the likelihood of “imitative suicidal behavior” (World Health Organization, 2014)

Source: Excerpt from *But I Didn't Say Goodbye, Helping Families After A Suicide* by Barbara Rubel. Watch our webinar with Barbara here: [friendsforsurvival.org/webinars](https://www.friendsforsurvival.org/webinars)



**Keep your face to the sunshine and
you cannot see the shadow. It's what
sunflowers do. ~ Helen Keller**



one brutally cold night in chicago

by Carole Sharwarko

"Twelve good years," I tell myself. "At least I had 12 good years with my dad." Some people don't get any. But when I think of the things I shared with my father, I inevitably come to all the occasions he missed – my college graduation, all the family parties, even helping me and his siblings through his parents' deaths. All of this was stolen from him and stripped from me by his suicide.

Most people are surprised by suicide. I can't decide whether they're the lucky ones. Before my dad's demise, I first was forced to watch him deteriorate under the weight of depression and alcoholism. Constantly I waited for that phone call, the one telling me I had to plan a funeral.

On January 17, 2003, at 11:30 p.m., the phone rang. It was my mom, divorced from my dad for more than 20 years, calling to tell me that my uncle found my father, Robert Sharwarko, dead in his home. It was one of those particularly brutal winter nights in Chicago, but soon my howls overcame those of the wind.

I'm no longer ashamed to say that relief overcame my grief at that moment. Months of suffering ended for him that night. But my own turmoil simply changed. No longer did I have to endure his downward spiral. Soon enough, however, the relief was replaced by guilt, heartache and so much anger.

I have never been angrier with anyone else in my life than I was with my dad. After those 12 good years he inexplicably set down the serenity of sobriety and once again picked up a bottle. What followed was a whirlwind of confusion and the realization that I never again would have a normal conversation with my dad.

During this time, I was completing my bachelor's degree. Kids sometimes lose track of their parents, instead focusing their tools on building an independent life. Before I knew it, my dad again had become a full-blown drunk.

He and I talked about his relapse, and I urged him to get help. He said he would. I know now that he already had given up on himself, though I don't know why. After almost destroying himself once, he clawed back up to have a good life. A lab technician and safety director for a paint company, my dad was successful and well liked. He had a beautiful home and was intensely proud of me and my brother, Sam.

When no one heard from my father after several weeks, a group of family took a trip to his house. My mom and

I met three aunts and two uncles, and we steeled ourselves for what we might find inside.

After continuous days of consuming nothing but alcohol, he was on the brink of death. He could barely stand. We called an ambulance, and once at the hospital, my dad slept for nearly a week. While a tube fed him intravenously, the terribly insensitive doctor explained that the alcohol literally had eaten holes in the frontal lobe of his brain. The result was almost total short-term memory loss, reduction of inhibitions and a general disorientation. "Dad" as I knew him was a deeply thoughtful person. Now he could barely keep a thought in his head.

For the next year, my father's new residence was a despicable nursing home. I wish I could have put him in a nicer place. I wish I could have taken him in. I've thought about it, and I could not have done either of those things. He needed constant supervision, 24-hour care. If only money didn't dictate the level of care people receive in our country.

Just before Christmas in 2002, the nursing home got a new social worker. Having fought with the previous staff member over the lackadaisical approach to securing Medicare for my dad, I hoped this new woman would be more attentive. Her energy was admirable, but she made a big mistake. My dad fed her a line, and she fell for it. They convinced one another my dad could go home and live on his own. "Don't do this," I said to her over the phone. "He'll start drinking again."

Perhaps it was her naivete, but she didn't believe me. I knew my dad was convincing. Even in his impaired state, his intelligence still allowed him to tell a realistic tale. She released my dad. He returned to his home with no outside support set up, with nothing to do but drink. Within a month, he was dead.

After most deaths, but especially after suicide, the survivors often feel a tremendous amount of guilt. They feel remorse for what could have been, things they should have said or actions they failed to take. Now, three years later, I feel I am only moving through the typical stages of grief. Now that the shock, guilt, and anger have subsided, I'm left to mourn. It seemed the process took too long, but grief is so unique. No one can tell you how, or how long, to do it.

Little things – a song, a TV show, an idea – make me long for my father. I valued his perspective on life. Often when I was having an issue, something I was

forced to figure out, I would ask advice from my mother, then my father, and then split the difference. It was a good system. It was our system.

My dad's impetuosity and dreamy nature were both the best and worst things about his personality. He lived to stray beyond the beaten path. In his 20's, he traveled across the country with my mom in a van. Later, he took me on driving trips to archeological sites and historical points of interest, always taking the back roads to get where he was going.

The best nights were when boring TV watching turned into spontaneous trips to downtown Chicago, to walk Navy Pier, listen to some jazz or just drive around and watch people laughing under the city lights.

Music was an ever-present fixture of those trips. My dad was a jazz nut. The complicated, moody music suited him, and I used it as a token to honor him at the Out of Darkness Overnight Walk, AFSP's 20-mile walk for suicide awareness. I trained for the walk for weeks, appealing to family and friends for their emotional and financial support. A co-worker helped me organize an ice cream sundae fundraiser. What's more, as I was raising money, I found people really understood what they were supporting. So often we pass one another in hallways with only a nod. But that day, everyone knew who I was, and why I was there.

Several people told me how suicide had impacted their lives. A common thread among their comments was a lack of communication. Society sweeps suicide under a big rug of denial. Friends and co-workers hailed me for my openness. My personality and my penchant as a writer makes honesty come naturally for me. I tell people when they ask, "My dad died by suicide." I am positive that this sense of frankness can change attitudes.

At the Out of the Darkness Walk, I did not have to say anything. My presence, and the beads around my neck showed that I lost a father and uncle (my dad's brother) to suicide. Three-quarters of the way through, it was time to light luminarias. We wrote messages on white paper bags, lit a candle inside and set them along the lakefront. The sight was so overwhelming. Hundreds of lights twinkled for loved ones lost.

On my bag I wrote, "For the love of jazz and fried chicken. I miss you Dad." It is part of my effort to remember my father, to recognize the way he died, to keep my own light burning and to encourage that light in others.

Carole Sharwarko is a journalist and author whose debut novel "Eat Lightning" is available at www.carolesharwarko.com. This article originally appeared in "Lifesavers" and is reprinted with the author's permission.

out of the darkness

Many people's introduction to AFSP comes through the Out of the Darkness Walks, taking place in cities nationwide. In the Community, Campus and Overnight Walks, those affected by suicide – and those who support them – raise awareness and much-needed funds, strongly sending the message that no one is alone.

The Out of the Darkness movement began in 2004. These events give people the courage to open up about their own connections to the cause, and a platform to create a culture that's smarter about mental health. Friends, family members, neighbors and coworkers walk side-by-side, supporting each other and in memory of those loved ones lost.

Learn more about AFSP's Out of the Darkness Walks in your area here:
<https://supporting.afsp.org/>



Carole, Bob and brother Sam in 1997

Friends for Survival, Inc.
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*Comforting
Friends*