

Comforting Friends

Published by Friends for Survival, Inc.

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

2020

AUGUST



YOUR PICTURES

by Author Unknown

I sometimes talk to your pictures
When no one else is around.
They listen patiently to my ramblings
They smile and never make a sound.

There's one picture in particular
Your eyes right in my line of sight
The smile on your face reflects the joy
On one of the happiest days of your life.

That picture has been my
whipping post
Many heavy conversations in the
past six years
It's witnessed the gamut of my
emotions
It's seen me laugh, it's seen
countless tears.

There have even been some times
When that picture almost seemed
to smirk
After I sincerely apologized
For all the times I was a jerk.

Of all the pictures that we have of you
It would be impossible to pick just one
There's just something about
your smile
I didn't see it until you were gone.

So many things you never got to do
Your time ran out before your
dreams came true
I'll look into your eyes and talk to
that picture
I'll see you again someday. I miss you.

August: So many changes in our daily lives and yet the grief remains. We have also had to make some changes, but our commitment to providing peer grief support remains. Conducting Zoom support meetings was and is a new experience for us and your involvement is priceless. We value your suggestions and comments. Be sure to check our website, Friendsforsurvival.org, for meeting updates.

We are working on a new service called "Caring Friends." This focused phone support program will be available to grieving persons who may benefit by receiving additional encouragement and support on a regular basis. If you would like the opportunity to be a volunteer for this program, please call our office, 916-392-0664, to get more information and an application form.



Support

NO. CALIFORNIA SUPPORT GROUPS

Until further notice, all support group meetings are virtual.

Go to our website, click on **Support Resources, Meetings.** Find your meeting date and time, click on **"Register."**

PUBLIC MEETINGS: Second Monday

August 10 @ 7pm

Third Tuesday

August 18 @ 7pm

Fourth Wednesday

August 26 @ 7pm

PRIVATE CHAPTER MEETINGS:

Legacy Survivors Utah
Tuesday, 8/12 @ 6pm MST (5pm PST)

Modesto

Monday, 8/17 @ 7pm – 8:30pm

WEBINARS:

More information and register at:
friendsforsurvival.org/meetings



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the things we pack

by Mary Gilzean, Friends for Survival Member

I gazed out the window of our cruise ship cabin. Grey-blue waves seemed to stretch out infinitely over the horizon. We were 700 miles from San Francisco where we'd departed, headed for Hawaii. Tears welled up in my eyes, fogging up my glasses. Why am I so sad? I should be enjoying this vacation, not pining away at this window. But I couldn't help it. The ocean view was just a visual



reminder of the endless grief waves that keep crashing over me. Even though it's been a little over eight months since we lost our son to suicide, they just keep coming. Will they ever stop? The grief books assure me they will eventually slow down. I sure hope so!

Back in the fall, we planned the late-January vacation knowing that the holidays, followed by our son's birthday two weeks after Christmas, would likely leave us drained. We were right. As we packed the Sunday before, I asked my husband, "Do you think there will ever be a day when we don't think about losing him?"

"We'll never stop thinking about him," Don said. "But I think in time, the loss won't be so hard." The day I packed, I realized I'd been hoping I could leave my grief at home. Reality was, I brought it with me on the trip – whether I wanted to or not. I can guarantee that sorrow wasn't on my packing list. The only things noted were clothes, sunglasses, swimsuit, books, camera, etc. Certainly not heartache, tears, emptiness. But those things came along, too.

Thankfully, most days of our 15-day cruise were joyful ones. We saw spectacular waterfalls, walked through rainforests filled with orchids and wild ginger; we snorkeled in a peaceful cove teeming with colorful marine life, and enjoyed a sunny day sailing on a catamaran while whales breached all around us. Later, we got some shave ice and relaxed under the banyan tree in Lahaina. On a more somber day, we toured Pearl Harbor and visited the USS Arizona memorial. Afterwards, our guide showed us some Honolulu highlights.

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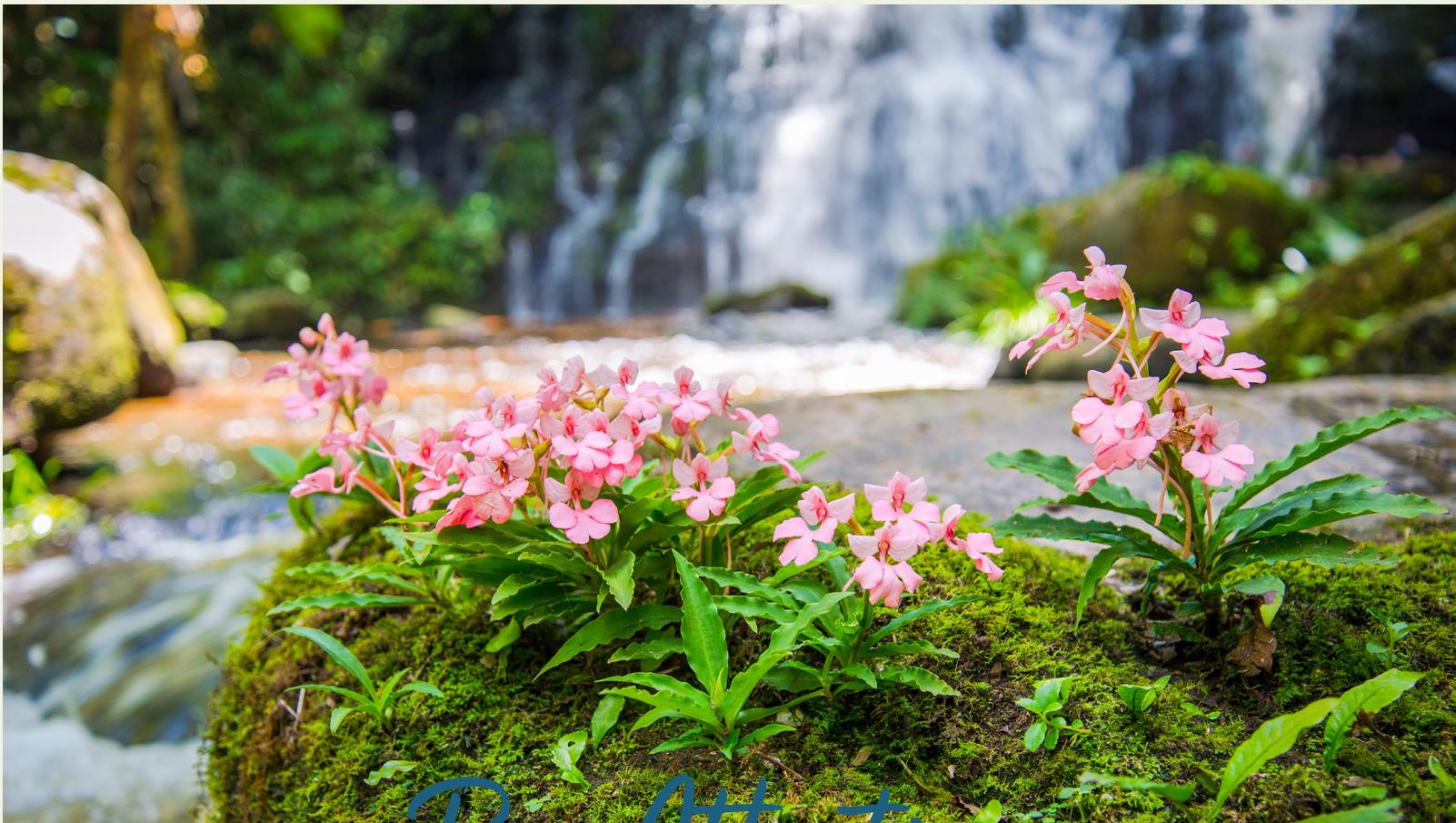
The Things We Pack (continued)...

All in all, it was an enjoyable trip. Definitely much needed! Nevertheless, in the midst of fun, there was also sadness. I could post beautiful photos on social media, and no one would ever know about my window-gazing tear fests. But they happened. I'm beginning to realize that grief will come with me wherever I go. I'll always miss my son and feel sad he missed out on so much. But some day, I'll be with him again.

In the meantime, every day is a mixed bag. Some days are sunshine and rainbows. Other days just clouds

bursting with rain. I'm learning to be okay with either one. This is my new normal.

Each one of us has countless things we carry with us in our hearts. Joys and pleasures, as well as sorrows, hurts, and disappointments. I know I'm not alone in that. I try to remember that when I interact with others. We all need grace, kindness, and patience. On the outside, someone may appear to be just a happy-go-lucky person on their way to Hawaii. But underneath, they could be pining away at a window.



Pay Attention

by Martha Whitmore Hickman

THE RELATIONSHIPS OF OUR LIFE ARE A SYSTEM, AN INTERLOCKING NETWORK, AND WHEN ONE ELEMENT IS AFFECTED, SO ARE THEY ALL. THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE WILL UNBALANCE THE WHOLE LOT...IT IS A GOOD TIME TO PAY ATTENTION, TO MAKE THESE RELATIONSHIPS AS GOOD AS POSSIBLE. IF WE ARE BUOYED AND FED BY SATISFYING RELATIONSHIPS NOW, THERE IS LESS OTHER-DIRECTED ENERGY FLOATING AROUND, TRYING TO ATTACH IN UNREALISTIC WAYS TO THE ONE WHO IS GONE.

Source: Healing after loss - Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief, by Martha Whitmore Hickman



the impact of a chocolate chip cookie

Excerpt from "Living Beyond the Why" by Dr. Bridgette Everhart Hardin

At the conclusion of my brother's memorial service, mourners were invited back to my family home to reflect on and celebrate my brother's life. I remember the house being filled with so many people. The somber mood about the house was interrupted with moments of laughter as people reflected on their personal experiences with my brother. Yet I didn't feel like laughing. I didn't want to feel anything. The emptiness that had entered my body at the funeral remained as an internal silent companion during the post-funeral reception. Looking back on that time, I remember the intention of my actions — strategically finding a chair in the corner of the room, allowing for the most distance between me and the reception guests. Sitting in the chair, I remember trying to become invisible from everyone. I so desperately wanted to blend in with the furniture. I didn't want people to console me or tell me how everything was going to be okay. I just wanted my brother back, but knew that was impossible.

As the reception continued, I watched how my parents went through motions of hugging people, shaking people's hands, conveying their appreciation for the love and support offered by so many. I remember watching my mother deeply inhaling and exhaling every life-fostering breath whenever she engaged in a new conversation with a fellow mourner. I could see how agonizing this day was for my parents. My father, ever the emotionally strong man, tried his best to be the "rock" for the rest of us. Yet even in his stoicism, my father released tears of sorrow, through puffy eyes, as he spoke fondly of my brother with family and friends. Each passing moment of that reception made the loss of my brother more and more real, with my thoughts of being the only child leaving me wrought with sadness and isolation.

Then, as if out of nowhere, one of the reception guests appeared before me, offering me a homemade chocolate chip cookie. I remember receiving the cookie into my hand and hearing the following words, "*Here, have a cookie — it will make you feel better.*" Wait, what? Feel better? Instinctively, I reached for the cookie and took a bite of it. *Wow ... what a cookie!* The taste of the rich chocolate, the feel of the sweet morsel traveling down my throat, the lingering taste of the cookie's sweetness in my mouth — it was intoxicating. For that brief moment the cookie delivered on the guest's proclamation — I did *feel better*. My grief released its emotional hold on me, allowing my throat to loosen from the tension it held,

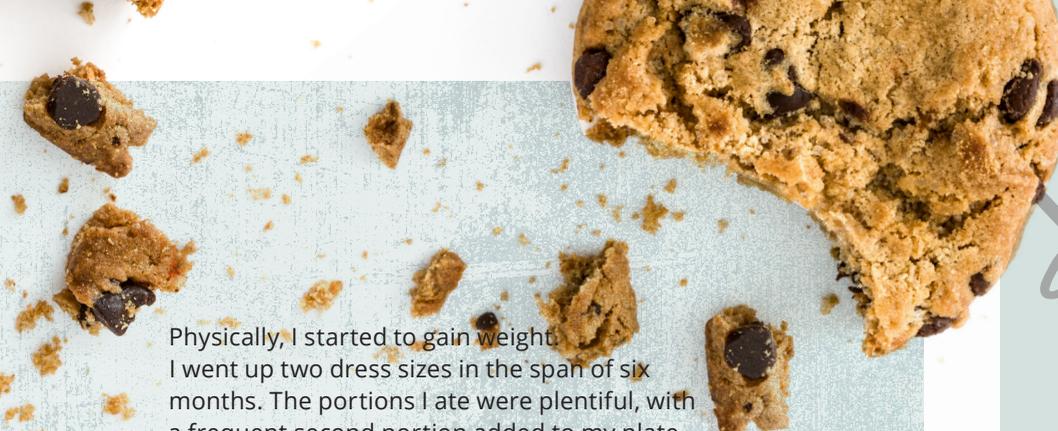
while ingesting the cookie. With each bite of the cookie, I found my thoughts leaving the mental scenes of the funeral, to focus solely on the taste, texture of the cookie; talk about satiation nirvana. For that brief moment, I stepped outside my grief and felt something different. That simple homemade chocolate chip cookie distracted me enough to alleviate both my physical and emotional pain, albeit only for a moment. The emptiness I was experiencing had been temporarily filled, all because of a cookie, a simple chocolate chip cookie. Ah, but that cookie was the start of a coping process that would later prove to be my mental and physical undoing.

Bring on the Addiction

Looking back on the intense levels of loss as I experienced when my brother died, along with the feeling of abandonment resulting from my brother's suicide, I can honestly say I desperately wanted to escape my anguish in any way possible. At the moment I ate that delicious chocolate chip cookie my mind processed a powerful revelation — the flavorful satiation I was experiencing from the cookie released me from the intense grip of my grief. The mental connection (that *click*) that I experienced was all I needed to feel as if I had regained some sense of control over my emotions. By eating the cookie, I started a pattern of unhealthy coping that would lead to food addiction.

Every time I felt sad, or helpless in my grief, I would seek out food — any kind of food. If I felt any tightness in my throat, I searched for food. If I felt the sting of tears forming in my eyes, I searched for food. If I reflected on the loss of my brother, I searched for food. I refused to allow myself to feel any of the emotional or physical pain born out of my grief for my brother. Numbing the pain with food was my way of dealing with my brother's untimely and shocking death.

Prior to my brother's suicide, I was generally an upbeat and active person. I was always outside, either riding my bike or hanging out with my friends. I really didn't gravitate to overeating as I was too busy for it. Now don't get me wrong, I loved it when my mother would make homemade meals or decadent culinary delights. I just didn't go overboard when it came to eating what was available to me. A few bites, and I was usually pretty satiated. It was after my brother's death that I began my unhealthy love affair with food. It didn't take too long for my parents to notice my new relationship with food.



Physically, I started to gain weight. I went up two dress sizes in the span of six months. The portions I ate were plentiful, with a frequent second portion added to my plate. Having legitimate concerns over my growing appetite, my parents gently approached me regarding my new eating style, suggesting that I taper off “just a bit.” Mental alarms went off in my head. I knew I had to restructure my eating patterns if I was going to sustain my relationship with food. Food was my constant companion, offering me comfort whenever I needed it. As such, I wasn’t going to let anyone jeopardize my food relationship — my connection with food eased the grief-based pain I was living with and internalizing. In order to appease my parents, and take control of the situation, I decided to only eat small portions in front of my parents. Ah, but that didn’t mean I was going to let up on the amount of time I spent consuming food.

My food addiction didn’t happen overnight. My addiction crept up on me over time. In my naivety, I thought I was in control over my actions when it came to food. When, in all reality, it was my fear of grieving that had control over me. Experts in the field of addiction describe my use of food as a way to produce a false sense of empowerment over my grief-based emotions, to take control over my feelings of anger, frustration, and sorrow. According to Dodes (2002), every addictive act is preceded by a sense of overwhelming powerlessness. The psychological component of addiction is fueled by the need to reverse the feeling of helplessness born out of the deep-rooted anger possessed by the addict. For me, it was easier to eat away my feelings, than it was to actively deal with the anger I had over my brother’s suicide and the stigma I encountered as a result of it. With the support of others living through the same type of addiction as mine, I was able to process my anger in ways that didn’t involve food.

When surviving a loss from suicide, it can be so challenging to work through the emotional and physical pangs of grief, but that is exactly what needs to be done — the work. In order to emotionally heal, grief needs to be confronted head on, with every sense of your being actively processing the ramifications of your loss. That being said, if you should find you, or someone you love, now relying on an unhealthy vice, or other addictive action as a way to cope with suicide-related grief, please seek out help. With the guidance of an addiction recovery specialist, you, or your loved one, will be able to acquire the tools necessary to navigate the road to addiction recovery. Several programs are available, including twelve-step programs, support groups (professional, spiritual and/or peer groups), as well as individual counseling.

Support

SUPPORT RESOURCES

Friends for Survival

www.friendsforsurvival.org

Phone: (916) 392-0664

Toll Free: (800) 646-7322

If you are in crisis and need immediate help, call the 24-hour National Crisis Line:

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Alliance of Hope

Survivor services including a 24/7 on-line community forum
www.allianceofhope.org

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)

Extensive lists of available meeting support www.afsp.org/find-support

American Association of Suicidology (AAS)

www.suicidology.org

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education

www.save.org

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)

For service members, veterans, and their families: www.taps.org

The Compassionate Friends

For bereaved parents of a deceased child: www.compassionatefriends.org

The National Center for Grieving Children & Families

The Dougy Center
www.dougy.org/grief-resources