

# Comforting Friends

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

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## HEALING AFTER LOSS

by Martha W. Hickman

Sometimes it's hard to remember how life felt to us before this loss came and shifted the ground beneath us as surely as a landslide or an earthquake.

For a while we mark events with a kind of "first time since it happened" syndrome. At first the events are very mundane and immediate – "the first time I went to the grocery store ... the first time I got the car washed ... the first time I went to a movie." Then the seasonal milestones come along – "the first Fourth of July ... the first Thanksgiving ... the first birthday," and so on. And all of them shadowed by the loss that darkens everything we do, everything that happens.

We wonder whether it will always be so, and if so, how we can bear it.

Our loss will change the constellation of our lives. That fact will not go away. But its edges will soften, and other events will come along to enrich our lives, so that this grief, which seems as though it will forever be "front and center," slips into the background tapestry and our hearts are often and profoundly made glad once more.

Source: Martha Whitmore Hickman, Author, *Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief*

## September:

Two mothers grieving the suicide deaths of our teenage sons, Chris Moon and I started *Friends for Survival* in 1983 with the desire to help other grieving families find comfort, encouragement, understanding and hope. Our growth is the result of grieving families willing to acknowledge their loss and hundreds of volunteers who have responded to each and every request for help. Each of you plays an important part, offering your time, stories of hope, suggestions and financial contributions. We appreciate your notes of encouragement and are grateful for your involvement in our outreach. FFS is able to impact many thousands because of caring volunteers and your support.



Gratefully,  
*Marilyn Koenig*  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# Support

## SUPPORT RESOURCES

### Friends for Survival

[www.friendsforsurvival.org](http://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](http://www.allianceofhope.org)

### American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)

Extensive lists of available meeting support [www.afsp.org/find-support](http://www.afsp.org/find-support)

### American Association of Suicidology (AAS)

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

### Suicide Awareness Voices of Education

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

### Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)

For service members, veterans, and their families: [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org)

### The Compassionate Friends

For bereaved parents of a deceased child: [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

### The National Center for Grieving Children & Families

The Dougy Center

[www.dougy.org/grief-resources](http://www.dougy.org/grief-resources)



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## the long hard fall

Words & Music by Alan Pedersen - EverAshley Music

SHE LOVED THE WAY THE LEAVES DANCE ON THE  
WIND IN LATE SEPTEMBER. IT WAS HER  
FAVORITE TIME OF YEAR.

SHE SAID THE FALL REMINDED HER HOW EVERYTHING  
MUST CHANGE. SHE WAS RIGHT CAUSE NOTHING IS THE  
SAME WITHOUT HER HERE.



AND WHEN SEPTEMBER COMES AROUND I'LL FIND MY  
WAY SOMEHOW. BUT THERE IS JUST TOO MUCH TO DO TO  
THINK ABOUT THAT NOW.

IF I CAN GET THROUGH AUGUST

I JUST MIGHT MAKE IT AFTER ALL.

IF I CAN GET THROUGH AUGUST

MAYBE I CAN FACE THE LONG HARD FALL.

I LOVED THE WAY SHE'D LOSE HERSELF IN THE  
COLORS OF OCTOBER. WHEN GREEN WOULD TURN  
FROM GOLD TO BROWN.

SHE SAID IT WAS A PERFECT TIME FOR PICKING UP THE  
PIECES. WITH MEMORIES OF SUMMER LYING SCATTERED  
ON THE GROUND.

OUTSIDE MY WINDOW I CAN FEEL IT IN THE AIR.  
AUTUMN IS SO FAR AWAY I WONDER IF SHE'S  
THERE.

SOMETIMES I CLOSE MY EYES AND MY MIND  
DRIFTS BACK IN TIME. TO LONG AGO AND FAR AWAY  
... AND THAT SEASON SHE WAS MINE.

# choice

by LaRita Archibald, Author - *Finding Peace Without All the Pieces*

Following my son's suicide, I was greatly conflicted over the issue of choice. It was beyond my comprehension that this cherished young man, who loved his family and appeared to love living, would choose to leave us by deliberately ending his own life. It was not until I began to study the vast variability of human behavior, and especially suicide, that I had an inkling of how difficult and painful "choice" had been for him.

As survivors mourning the suicide of someone dear, we must not assume responsibility for the "choice" they made, the decision they reached, the option they exercised, or the death they left their loved ones to mourn. They were struggling with demons we could not see, with pain they could not articulate, perhaps the torment of an undiagnosed mental illness or being trapped in an irreconcilable situation. They experienced despair so intense it crowded out their love of living, despair that grew far greater than their fear of dying and leaving those they loved. One's last breath is valued above all else. An individual who kills him/herself does not give up that last breath easily, not without searching for, failing to find, and finally perceiving there were no other options. In their distorted perception, at least for a small space of time, there was no other way. Regardless of how impulsive, preventable, and regrettable we believe the choice to have been, the death that resulted from exercising that option, making that choice is our loved one's responsibility.



# Time

by Margaret Gerner

**TIME IS THE PASSING OF MOMENTS LIVED ONE AT A TIME. OUR RECOVERY DEPENDS ON WHAT WE DO WITH EACH MOMENT. WE CANNOT SIT BACK AND SAY, "TIME WILL HEAL ME." TIME IS MERELY THE MOVEMENT OF THE CLOCK. OUR SUCCESSFUL RETURN TO COMFORTABLE LIVING IS WHAT WE DO WHILE THE CLOCK IS MOVING. WE HAVE TO LOOK AT THE BEAUTY LEFT US IN LIFE INSTEAD OF WHAT WE NO LONGER HAVE. WE MUST FIND REASONS TO GO ON.**

**SOURCE: THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS**





# how comforting others helps with your own struggles

by Kira M. Newman, Editor & Writer - Greater Good Magazine

According to two recent studies, we need practice dealing with our difficult feelings - and we get it from helping other people manage their own.

When we feel bad, we often turn to others for help and support. And when others come to us in pain, we do our best to help them feel better. This natural cycle seems to be part of the human experience.

Two recent studies suggest that trying to make people feel better not only supports them—it allows us to practice emotional skills that may help us with our own problems. While negative emotions feel isolating and personal, the best way to deal with them may be profoundly social.

Both studies also highlighted one skill that seemed to really benefit both other people and ourselves: perspective-taking, the part of empathy that involves understanding someone else's point of view.

In the first study, 166 participants spent three weeks interacting on a social network the researchers created specifically for expressing and responding to distress. Before and after, they filled out surveys measuring various aspects of their emotional lives and wellbeing. In the social network, participants could post and comment on other people's posts. The platform trained them to leave three types of comments, representing different types of emotion regulation:

- \* Validation, which affirms what the person was feeling.
- \* Reappraisal, which offers a different interpretation of an event.
- \* Pointing out thinking errors, such as black-and-white thinking or believing you can read other people's minds.

The control group could only post their experiences and not see other people's, more like using an online diary.

In the end, the researchers found that the more comments participants posted about other people's problems—no matter what type of comment—the more the commenters' happiness and mood increased and their depressive symptoms and rumination decreased over the course of the experiment. On the other hand, more active members of the control group didn't reap the same benefits.

These positive changes were partly accounted for by commenters practicing reappraisal more often in their

own daily lives. Responding itself—in other words, helping other people regulate their emotions—seemed to be training people in the very skills of emotion regulation. It didn't seem to matter if participants helped each other with validation, reappraisal, or pointing out errors; the interaction itself was most important.

"Helping [others] regulate their emotional reactions to stressful situations may be a particularly powerful way to practice and hone our own regulation skills, which can then be applied to improve our own emotional well-being," the researchers write.

These results "are particularly striking given that emotional support was provided through text-only interactions anonymously to strangers, with little to no possibility of a face-to-face or online personal relationship."

A second study suggested that helping others regulate their emotions may not just be good for you, but may also be better for them, too—better than them dealing with their feelings alone. Here, 45 couples came into the laboratory and were split up into two roles: target and regulator. The "target" would view a series of distressing photos. The "regulator" saw the photo briefly. One or the other would decide on an emotion-regulation strategy to use: either reappraisal (reinterpreting the photo in a more positive way) or distraction (thinking about something else). The target performed that strategy and then reported how much distress they felt. Ultimately, the regulators' strategies worked better than the targets'. Targets viewing the disturbing images felt less distress when using their regulator's strategies than their own—suggesting that, in the thick of negative feelings, our partners may actually know what's best for us.

"The results are in line with other studies that emphasize the advantage of an outside perspective without a direct emotional involvement in reducing stress and improving emotion regulation," the researchers write.

Both studies point to the same answer: the skill of perspective-taking, which is the ability to put ourselves in someone else's shoes. All this suggests that getting out of our heads and into the heads of others—empathy, in other words—is good for everyone involved. And when we feel alone in our suffering, we can turn to others both for our own sake and for theirs.

# SINK OR SWIM

By Juliet Simon, *Friends for Survival* Volunteer



After the suicidal death of my son, Scott, on July 9, 2015 at the age of 34, I spent two solid years grieving him severely. My pain was intense, my heart was broken, and hopelessness settled in. I believed my life was over – for how could I ever be happy or content without him? I sat on my pity pot without contact from the outside world. I persistently shunned phone calls, visits and the activities I had once enjoyed. I vowed to silence my laughter.

On the second anniversary of his death, I, too, was contemplating suicide. I could NOT go on living in so much pain and isolation. It was sink or swim time – continue sinking until I drowned or rise to the top and start swimming toward the shore. I asked myself what Scott would want me to do.

I knew instantly that he would not want his death to define my life.

I started swimming. I returned phone calls, I accepted visits and invites. I started therapy. I became active in my church. I reached out to people who needed help. I started gardening. I even started hiking again (our favorite thing to do together was hiking and camping). I could feel my sadness easing. My grief will always be with me and I miss him every day, but my life is no longer defined by emotional pain. I have a good and purposeful life today.

**PLEASE, CHOOSE TO SWIM!**



## Support N. CALIFORNIA SUPPORT GROUPS

Our meetings are peer support, not therapy sessions. They are free and you are invited to attend for as long as you need. All locations are drop-in meetings, no RSVP required.

**Please call our office  
for specific meeting  
locations: 916-392-0664  
or 1-800-646-7322**

### **Carmichael (Sacto)**

Tuesday, 9/17 @ 7pm – 8:30pm

### **Cameron Park**

Tuesday, 9/10 @ 7pm – 8:30pm

### **Chico**

Monday, 9/9 @ 4:30pm – 6pm

### **Elk Grove**

Wednesday, 9/11 @ 7pm - 8:30 pm

### **Modesto**

Monday, 9/16 @ 7pm – 8:30pm

### **Roseville/Rocklin**

Thursday, 9/19 @ 7pm – 8:30 pm

### **Yuba City**

Tuesday, 9/24 @ 6:30pm – 8pm

