

Comforting Friends

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

March 2025



Updates & Announcements

From our Board President, Mary Rossell:

We are pleased to announce that Susan Reynolds has been appointed as our permanent Executive Director, effective immediately. Over the past seven years, Susan has been a key part of the FFS organization. She has led our support group work with empathy and insight. She has helped our community to process grief in new ways by initiating the writing groups. And she has provided solid leadership to our staff and volunteers. The Board of Directors is fully confident in her ability to lead our organization going forward.

From our Executive Director, Susan Reynolds:

The Friends for Survival Board of Directors has appointed me as the permanent Executive Director, a role I am honored to accept. I am deeply grateful for the trust placed in me and for the guidance of our founder, Marilyn Koenig, who established the organization in 1983. I also appreciate the dedication of our volunteers, Board members, and others who have shaped the organization over the years.

My personal journey with Friends for Survival began after the suicide of my cousin in 2017. I found comfort and support through the organization, connecting with others who understood my grief. This experience has motivated my commitment to ensuring that we continue providing comfort, education, and empowerment to those impacted by suicide loss.



Black Box Project: Expanding Support for Suicide Loss Survivors

an important message from



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We are humbled to share that Stop Soldier Suicide's Black Box Project is now open to all families who have lost a loved one to suicide, offering a meaningful way to contribute to life-saving efforts while honoring your loved one's memory.

Inspired by the "black box" used to understand airplane incidents, this initiative securely analyzes data from digital devices (smartphones, tablets, laptops) loaned to us by families navigating the pain of suicide loss. By pooling this information, our team of data science experts uncovers critical insights to better identify, understand, and prevent future suicides.

Our mission is twofold:

To advance suicide prevention efforts by uncovering valuable patterns and warning signs; and to provide a pathway for survivors to experience healing through meaningful participation in this project.

This work is deeply personal to us. Many members of our team are survivors of suicide loss, and we understand the weight of this journey. We've been privileged to collaborate with more than 100 families, many of whom have expressed finding comfort and purpose in their involvement with the Black Box Project.

On **Thursday, March 6, at 3pm ET**, my colleague Amy Dozier and I will be hosting a 45-minute webinar to introduce **Stop Soldier Suicide's Black Box Project**. This innovative suicide prevention initiative is dedicated to identifying warning signs of suicide by analyzing digital data from smartphones, tablets, and laptops loaned by surviving families. Our goal is to uncover insights that could help prevent future suicides and to offer survivors a meaningful way to honor their loved ones while contributing to life-saving research.

[Register for the webinar here](#)

Sorry For Your Loss by Donna Ashworth

When I say *sorry for your loss*
it may sound perfunctory
trite even

but what I mean is

I am sorry
that you wake in the night
gasping for breath
heart racing in agony.

I am sorry
that you will know a lifetime
of *what ifs* and
could have beens.

I am sorry
that you ache
for one more minute with your love
knowing it can never be.

When I say *sorry for your loss*
please know
my soul is reaching out to yours
in understanding
and trying very hard
to take away
just one little ounce of your pain.

We used the beautiful poem above as a recent Writing Circle prompt. Writing Circle member Ashley Trasser writes:

"I felt such deep longing when I heard that poem, because I want so badly to be seen that way. It feels like an ache, a hunger inside me, a gnawing desire to be seen, to really finally be seen. I want someone in my life to look at the face of my grief and not flinch away. It is too much for others, even those who love me best. They want to fix it, cure it, make it go away, when really all I want is someone to just sit in the pain with me, and not dismiss it, and not compare, as though grief and pain is a finite source, places to plant flags and say, 'I have it worse,' 'they have it worse,' or 'at least you aren't here.'

"I often wish I could show people what my insides look like. I wish I could crack open my ribcage and they could see the hurricane swirling in my chest. I don't feel as though I am in a storm, as grief is so often compared to, but instead the storm is inside me, endlessly churning, tying knots in my stomach and putting lumps in my throat. I wish I could paint it, the blacks and blues, the churning waters, the sharp edges and broken glass. I wish I were a dancer, or a musician, so that I could better express it, because maybe that

would help get it out of me. Instead, words will have to suffice. I think if people could see, if they could really just see, I think they would have more patience, more understanding, rather than chide me when I am short-tempered, or rather than scold me for being late to work. They would understand that feats that once were part of the everyday mundane are now superhuman.

"I wish more people meant 'sorry for your loss' in the way it is laid out in Donna Ashworth's poem, instead of a platitude to fill the space while they impatiently tap their foot and wait for you to return to a normal that no longer exists."

Dedicated to my mother, Teri, born 10/22/61 died 08/01/24.



Join us for a virtual 8-week closed group, open to all loss survivors. We will be writing about our grief using thoughtful prompts.

Program fee is \$179 (or \$22 per session). Limited to 10 participants. Attendance at the first session is mandatory. No prior writing experience required. Weekly email with prompts and resources provided.

MT_WC_20250312 Cohort starts March 12: Group full

MT_WC_20250514 Cohort starts May 14: [Registration now open](#)

MT_WC_20250716 Cohort starts July 16: [Registration now open](#)

MT_WC_20250917 Cohort starts Sept 17: [Registration now open](#)

Don't forget: Our Writing Circle Reconnect is held every third Thursday of the month. More info and register [HERE](#).

The Writing Circle Welcomes A Special Guest

Special guest speaker Carla Fine will be joining us for a **free** Writing Circle on **Thursday, March 27** (3pm PT / 4pm MT / 5pm CT / 6pm ET).

Carla, who lost her husband to suicide, is the author of the widely acclaimed book, [*No Time to Say Goodbye: Surviving the Suicide of a Loved One*](#) published by Broadway Books/Doubleday in 1999 (now in its 28th printing).



Read more about Carla here www.carlafine.com. Carla will talk about healing through writing, then lead us through a writing prompt.

Register Here : March 27

When You Meet Someone Deep in Grief

*by Matt Sanders, M.A., Chaplain
Spiritual Care Services Department
Dignity Health, Mercy San Juan Medical Center*

I find myself returning again and again to the beautiful message and imagery in the poem by author Patricia McKernon Runkle, "*When You Meet Someone Deep in Grief*." This poem reminds me, as a chaplain, how to listen, deeply and with great patience, to another who is suffering from painful loss.

The poem also reminds me to apply the message to myself, to listen gently to my own heart, my own grief, my own need. I have been deeply impacted by the suicide loss of several very important people to me: two previous students, a priest mentor, a colleague in ministry, a great uncle. And I have been impacted many times, through vicarious traumatization, as a chaplain working in a busy emergency department.

When I sit with the beautiful, tender, wise message of this poem, I remind myself that I'd like to be a person who listens like this, and I remind myself to be kind to myself, too, with similar sacred silence. May these words encourage you also.

WHEN YOU MEET SOMEONE DEEP IN GRIEF

Slip off your needs
and set them by the door.

Enter barefoot
this darkened chapel

hollowed by loss
hallowed by sorrow

its gray stone walls
and floor.

You, congregation
of one

are here to listen
not to sing.

Kneel in the back pew.
Make no sound,

let the candles
speak.

Source: [Grief's Compass: Walking the Wilderness with Emily Dickinson](#)
by author Patricia McKernon Runkle. Reprinted with permission.
www.patriciarunkle.com

Support Group Meetings & Other Resources

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March Remembrances

When loved ones have to part
To help us feel we're with them still
And soothe a grieving heart
They span the years and warm our lives
Preserving ties that bind
Our memories build a special bridge
And bring us peace of mind.
~ *Emily Matthews*

[Click HERE to Remember](#)



We are honoring our loved ones with a new format. If you would like to add or update your loved one on our **Friends Remembrances**, click on the button below. You can also add a photo or a dedication.

[Click HERE](#) to add or update

Become a Friends for Survival "GEM" With a Monthly Pledge

by Kristine Cozine, Finance Director

We are so appreciative of our **GEMS** (gives every month) members of our Friends for Survival community. There are several ways to establish sustained giving: simply set up an eCheck through your bank, or create a recurring credit card or PayPal donation through our website (just check the "Make this a monthly donation" box).

We can also send you 12 self-addressed, stamped envelopes if you prefer to mail in a monthly check. Call or email me if you have any questions or need assistance setting up your pledge.

Other Ways to Give:

There are many simple and effective ways to help our suicide loss survivors:

- Gift of stock and securities
- Donor-advised funds
- Retirement plan distributions
- Including Friends for Survival in your will or trust

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Friends for Survival has provided bereavement support to suicide loss survivors since 1983. All gifts are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Click [HERE](#) to Donate Now



This program is funded by the Division of Behavioral Health Services through the voter approved Proposition 63, Mental Health Services Act (MHSA).

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2024

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