By Jeffrey Jackson*

Guilt is the one negative emotion that seems to be universal to all survivors of suicide, and overcoming it is perhaps our greatest obstacle on the path to healing. Guilt is your worst enemy, because it is a false accusation.

You are not responsible for your loved one’s suicide in any way, shape, or form. Write it down. Say it to yourself over and over again (even when it feels false). Tattoo it onto your brain. Because it’s the truth. Why do suicide survivors tend to blame themselves? Psychiatrists theorize that human nature subconsciously resists so strongly the idea that we cannot control all the events of our lives that we would rather fault ourselves for a tragic occurrence than accept our inability to prevent it. Simply put, we don’t like admitting to ourselves that we’re only human, so we blame ourselves instead.

One of the most unusual aspects of survivor guilt is that it is usually a solo trip – each survivor tends to blame themselves. Try asking another person who is also mourning your lost loved one about any guilt feelings that are haunting them.

Chances are you will find that each person – no matter how close or removed they were from the suicide victim – is willing to take the lion’s share of blame on themselves. If they were the one closest to the deceased then they theorize, “I should’ve known exactly what was going on in their mind.” If they were distanced from that person, they feel, “If I’d only been closer to them...” Well, you can’t all be to blame, can you? Isn’t it far more logical that none of you are responsible?

Well, then, who is? The simple truth of the matter is that only one person is responsible for any suicide: the victim. But that’s a tough pill to swallow, so instead of ascribing responsibility to our suffering loved one, we nobly sacrifice by taking it on ourselves. It’s understandable to feel such love and empathy toward the person we lost that we are loathe to place blame on them.

The key lies in understanding the difference between blame and responsibility. Blame is accusatory and judgmental, but assigning responsibility need only be a simple acknowledgment of fact. It’s unclear how much control, if any, suicide victims have over their actions. And if clinical depression is at the root, then we could easily think of suicides as victims of disease, just like cancer victims. This is why a person who dies by suicide doesn’t deserve blame. However, on some level, there was a conscious choice made by that person, even if it was made with a clouded mind. So the responsibility does lie with them.  Acknowledging this simple fact does not mean that you did not love them, nor does it mean that you are not responsible for their actions.

— Continued on page 5 —

Please Support Survivors of Suicide Loss

This is a tough time for many of us in the area of finances and we are all tightening our belts. Unfortunately, the worsening economy may add emotional and mental stress to those already struggling; a job loss may mean loss of health insurance. The need for increased public education about the causes of suicide, prevention, and treatment is more urgent than ever. We are overwhelmed when we consider some of the facts about suicide.

- More than 20% of the population in the U.S. will lose a family member to suicide in the course of their lifetime; more than 60% will lose someone they know.
- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among college students and the 4th leading cause of death for adults ages 18 to 65 years.
- The fastest growing group completing suicide is children between the ages of 10-14.

We thank all of you who have demonstrated your commitment to supporting survivors and preventing suicide by donating to SOSL. We can all work together to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness that often hinders people from seeking help. We can start by talking about our experience and that of our loved one, so others become comfortable in sharing their own struggles.

Please donate as your circumstances allow.

Please support our mission and services by making a donation. No amount is too small. You can indicate your gift in memory of someone or to honor someone on their birthday, anniversary, or special occasion. With your permission, your name (not amount) will be listed in our next newsletter. Or you can donate via our web site www.sosl.org using your credit card or PayPal. Thank you!

*You must live through the time when everything hurts.* - Stephen Spender
Don't be afraid to ask for help from those close to you when you need it. So much hurt and pain go unheeded during grief because we don't want to bother anyone else with our problems. Wouldn't you want someone close to you to ask for help if they needed it? Some relatives and friends will not be able to handle your grief. Find someone with whom to talk. Seek out an understanding friend, survivor, or support group member.

**SUICIDE-RELATED WEB SITES**

- American Assoc. of Suicidology
  - [www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org)
- American Foundation of Suicide Prevention
  - [www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)
- Compassionate Friends
  - [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)
- GROWW
  - [www.groww.com](http://www.groww.com)
- Sharing and Healing
  - [www.sharingandhealing.org](http://www.sharingandhealing.org)
- Suicide Awareness/Voices of Education
  - [www.save.org](http://www.save.org)
- Suicide Prevention Action Network
  - [www.spanusa.org](http://www.spanusa.org)
- Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention
  - [www.yellowribbon.org](http://www.yellowribbon.org)

**You Are Not Alone...**

Don't be afraid to ask for help from those close to you when you need it. So much hurt and pain go unheeded during grief because we don't want to bother anyone else with our problems. Wouldn't you want someone close to you to ask for help if they needed it? Some relatives and friends will not be able to handle your grief. Find someone with whom to talk. Seek out an understanding friend, survivor, or support group member.

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**Mother’s Day**

*By Mary Wildman, TCF*

*Moro, Illinois*

As I write this, I am very much aware that Mother’s Day is coming soon. That will be a doubly difficult day in countless homes. For all the thousands of mothers who will be glowing with a radiant kind of pride and happiness on the day, there will also be those of you whose hearts are aching for that phone call that will never come, that special visit, that one Mother’s Day card that will not arrive. For us, the reading and rereading of that last card — “Mom, you are the greatest and I love you” — will have to last a lifetime.

How does a mother face a lifetime of silence on “her” day? Ask those of us who have been there already, and we will tell you of lonely Mother’s Day visits to spring-green cemeteries where the sweet clear notes of a single spring bird, perched nearby, float over our heads and seem surely to have been intended as divine comfort for a heart full to breaking. You will hear of yellow roses sent to a small church — “In memory of…” — and a cherished story of a kind and sensitive friend who sent a single rose that first Mother’s Day “in remembrance.”

Always we struggle with the eternal question — how does life in fairness exact from us the life of a beloved child in exchange for a clear bird call in a spring-green cemetery, a slender vase of yellow rosebuds or even the kindness and sensitivity of a friend who remember our loneliness and pain on that day? Where is the fairness and justice of such a barter?

The answer comes back again and again — life does not always bargain fairly. We are surrounded from birth to death by those things which we cannot keep, but which enrich, enable and endow our lives with a foretaste of Heaven because we have been privileged to behold, to experience, to wrap our arms around the joyous and the beautiful.

Can we bottle the fragrance of an April morning or the splendor of a winter’s sunset and take it home with us to place on our fireplace mantle? Can we grasp and hold the blithesome charm of childhood’s laughter? Can we capture within cupped hands the beauty and richness of a rainbow? Can we pluck the glitter of a million stars on a summer night or place in an alabaster bow the glow and tenderness of love?

No, we cannot. But to those who have been given the splendor, the blithesome charm, the glory, the glitter, the tenderness and love of a child who has departed someday the pain will speak to you of enrichment, of compassion for others, of deeper sensitivity to the world about you, of a deeper joy for having known a deeper pain. Your child will not have left you completely, as you thought. But rather you will find him in that first clear, sweet bird call, in those yellow rosebuds, in giving and in receiving and in the tissue-wrapped memories that you hold forever in your heart.

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**Are you still reading our newsletter?**

We want to know if you are still reading the newsletter. Perhaps you have been receiving it for awhile and you are now in a different place in your healing. If you would like to be removed from the mailing list, please contact us by or NEW email at info@soslrd.org; or by phone at 619-482-0297, or by writing to us at our mailing address:

**SOSL**

P.O. Box 3297

La Mesa, CA 91944-3297

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*“Sadness flies away on the wings of time.” — Jean de la Fontaine*
Spring is a time of renewal but when we are in the middle of our grief, it seems like the most remote thing in the world. How can there be new life and how can flowers flourish in the sun after the storm? After a loss to suicide, there seems to be continuous rain in our lives, without the sun to warm us and provide a glimmer of life beyond the suffering. But we can move beyond grief to acceptance and to a life that continues, we are just on a different path. It is definitely not the path we would have chosen, but we were set on this path by another person who was so alive and so dear to us and who remains in our hearts. Yet, we cannot help but question, why wasn’t my love enough? Did they not know that I would do anything for them? Why couldn’t they reach out for help? We do not know what was in their heart and soul at the time, but for most of those who take their lives, it is a last resort. The pain is so overwhelming that even the most profound love in the world cannot overcome the urgency to end the pain. In the end, it is about the pain. Their pain has ended, and ours has just begun. But we can endure and move to a different place, hopefully a place of healing and then to a place of helping. In my experience of 7 ½ years, I have found ways to share my story and as I do, others may share a recent loss or a loss from many years past. I believe every time we tell our stories we are helping in the fight against the stigma of mental health and suicide. Keep on doing your best. You can make a difference.

Warmly,
Bonnie

Death leaves a heartache no one can heal, but love leaves a memory no one can steal.”
— From a tombstone in Ireland

In Those Moments

It’s in those moments and in those times
you think you can’t go on and of adversity
and find that you must that never seem to end
that you’ve learned enthusiasm that you’ve learned compassion
as well as endurance as well as strength

and in those days and for you every day
that were too busy has become a
and you had to ask for help celebration of life
that you’ve learned to love for you’ve learned to live
as well as reach out as well as to survive.

Cathleen Young from “Inspired by Hope”

“The heart is the only broken instrument that works.” — T.E. Kalem
Our meetings are held in an atmosphere that is warm and friendly. Anyone who has lost a family member or friend is invited to attend. Feelings shared are kept confidential and discussed only within the confines of the group meeting. Thus, our S.O.S.L. groups provide a comfortable, non-threatening setting to share our experiences and thoughts. Questions are encouraged to assist in coping with the different stages of the grieving process and with the feelings that are particularly intense in the aftermath of suicide—denial, shock, disbelief, sadness, anger, relief (for some), guilt and shame. We end our discussion sessions by sharing something positive that has recently taken place or something good you are anticipating.

**Note NEW Teen Support Group in Encinitas!

### March 2010

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### Aurora Behavioral Health Center / ABHC
1st WEDNESDAY @ 7-8:30 pm / March 3, April 7, May 5
11878 Avenue of Industry, San Diego, 92128 — N. County Inland (Private Dining Rm)
From I-15 south: Exit CAMINO DEL NORTE and TURN LEFT; turn Right at CARMEL MT. RD., turn RIGHT at INNOVATION DRIVE, turn RIGHT at AVENUE OF INDUSTRY
From I-15 north: Exit CARMEL MT. RD. and turn RIGHT, turn LEFT at RANCHO CARMEL DR., turn RIGHT at INNOVATION DR. turn RIGHT at AVE. OF INDUSTRY

### Encinitas Community Center / ECC
2nd MONDAY 7-8:30 pm / March 8, April 12, May 10
1140 Oakcrest Park Dr., Encinitas, 92024 – North County Coastal
NEW Teen Support Group— Room 119, Adult Group—Room 116
From I-5: Take the ENCINITAS BLVD. exit (EAST), turn RIGHT onto BALOUR DR., turn LEFT onto OAKCREST PARK DR.

### Grossmont-Sharp Hospital / GSH
2nd FRIDAY 7–8:30 pm / March 12, April 9, May 14
5555 Grossmont Center Dr., La Mesa, 91942 - East County (Cardiovascular Center, Room 1) Look for SOSL sign
From I-8 east: Take the FLETCHER PKWY exit. Turn RIGHT onto GROSSMONT CENTER DR.
From I-8 west: Take the GROSSMONT CTR DR. Exit toward LA MESA BLVD. Turn RIGHT onto GROSSMONT CTR DR.

### Scripps Mercy Hospital / SMH
3rd MONDAY 7-8:30 pm / March 15, April 19, May 17
4077 5th Ave., San Diego, 92103 – Hillcrest (Dining Room 1). Validated parking in structure.
From CA-163: Take the WASHINGTON ST exit (WEST). Turn RIGHT onto 5TH AVE.

### South Bay Group / SBG
3rd THURSDAY 7-8:30 pm / March 18, April 15, May 20
497 E St., Chula Vista, 91910 - South County (Pilgrim Lutheran Church) Park on 5th Ave. near Pilgrim Lutheran School Look for SOSL sign.
From I-5: Take E Street exit, Turn RIGHT (going North), Turn LEFT (going South).

### Clairemont Emmanuel Baptist Church / CEBC
2nd and 4th TUESDAYS 7-8:30 pm / March 9 & 23, April 13 & 27, May 11 & 25
2610 Galveston St., San Diego, 92110 - Mission Bay Area NEW 2 x each month!
From I-5: Take the CLAIREMONT DR exit, (EAST) Turn RIGHT onto GALVESTON ST. Park in the lower parking lot. You may use the handicapped parking spots.

### Riverside County Group / RCG
2nd and 4th MONDAYS 7-8:30 p.m. / March 8 & 22, April 12 & 26, May 10 & 24
First Baptist Church of Sun City: 29029 Murrieta Rd., Sun City, 92586
Must call before attending: Kathy 951-679-2008

*The weight of grief is lighter when shared.* — Anonymous
holding them in contempt. It means that you are looking at a tragic event clearly and accepting it for what it is.

Guilt is anger turned inwards. Suicide produces many painful and confusing emotions in survivors, one of which is frustration at being so violently cut off from the victim – from the chance to help them, talk with them, or even simply to say goodbye. This frustration produces anger, and when we turn this anger upon ourselves, the result is guilt. Guilt can also come from an unfounded assumption that others are silently blaming us.

Both parents and spouses express fear that the world at large will brand them as failures in their respective roles because of the suicide. While some small-minded people may think or even speak such accusations, most will not, so don’t project negative thoughts onto others by judging yourself for them.

Parents of children who die by suicide often battle an added type of guilt. Even if they do not blame themselves for not directly intervening in the suicidal act, they often feel guilt over some perceived mistake in raising their children. “Where did I go wrong?” “I pushed them too hard.” and “If we hadn’t gotten divorced...” are just a few on the list of self-recriminations. But parents need to remind themselves that, while they have great influence over their children’s lives, they do not personally create every aspect of their children’s being, as a sculptor carves a statue. From their earliest years, children are shaped by an assortment of outside influences beyond the control of parents. Even children and teenagers have to bear responsibility for their actions.

Spouses also tend to feel acutely guilty for a suicide. The natural partnership that comprises marriage implies a mutual responsibility to look after each other. But spouses need to realize that the root causes of suicide – notably clinical depression – are beyond the control of even the most devoted husband or wife and that even mental health professionals often fail to detect the warning signs of suicide.

Moving forward with your life brings its own dose of guilt. Whether it’s returning to the simple routine of daily subsistence or embarking on new journeys in life, survivors often feel as if this is some affront to the person we’ve lost. “How can I live knowing they’re not here?” your mind may taunt you. Your strength lies in knowing that, while your lost loved one has chosen death, you have chosen life – and life is a gift that we honor by living.

* Excerpted from A Handbook for Survivors of Suicide, by Jeffrey Jackson, 2004©. Published by American Association of Suicidology. Dedicated to the life of immeasurable value that was lived by Gail Beth Levine Jackson

“God can heal a broken heart, but He needs all the pieces.” — Anonymous
Contributors:

Brian Bales
Irene Biernacki (Matthew Michael Stevens)
“I’ll be with you soon” – Love, Grandma

Caroline Blain
“In memory of Janet Blain Cooper”

David and Mercedes Browning (Matthew Browning)
“You are always in our hearts”

Leopoldo V. and Amenda B. Caniya (Melvin Barrera Caniya)
“You are always in our hearts”

Margarite Carl
Idalia Colvin (Vanessa Colvin)
“Love you ever my angel”

Maria Contrestano
“In memory of my father”

Steve and Sharon Elggren (Son Troy)
“We miss you so much”

Floyd Fletcher (Karen Fletcher)
“My wife and best friend and mother”

Jeff and Elizabeth Glass (Matthew Glass)
“Forever in our thoughts with love”

Bonnie Harms (Bob Harms)
“We remember, miss, and love you still”

Ruth Jordan

Michael and Wynter Kugel

Special thanks to the generous donation from the San Diego City School Community Service Association.
Thank you too for those of you who donate through United Way.

Thank you for supporting SOSL. SOSL is a 501 C3 organization. Your donations are tax deductible.

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Newsletter Designer
Camille Currier

Newsletter Editor

About SOSL

Survivors of Suicide Loss, Inc., is a nonprofit, nonsectarian, self-help support group system for those who have lost a relative or friend to suicide.

The Hope & Comfort Newsletter staff is dedicated to the primary goal of publishing articles and information, which will be of assistance in the grieving and healing process of our readers.

We welcome your written contributions for inclusion in the newsletter, however, we reserve the right to publish only those articles that are considered to be of benefit to the majority of our readers.

Please send all correspondence to:

Survivors of Suicide Loss
P.O. Box 3297
La Mesa, CA 91944-3297

Helpline 619-482-0297 Website www.soslsd.org Email info@soslsd.org

“I can’t change the direction of the wind, but I can change my sails.” — Anonymous
# Remembering Our Loved Ones

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<tr>
<td><strong>Lori Landholm Mitchell</strong></td>
<td>3/13/1956 – 10/31/1990</td>
<td>Remembering our loving daughter</td>
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<td>Larry and Betty Landholm</td>
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<td><strong>Robin Russo</strong></td>
<td>5/5/1948 – 5/13/2003</td>
<td>You are my sunshine. You are and always will be the love of my life.</td>
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<td>Your fiancé, Robert</td>
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<td><strong>Valerie Beth Harmon</strong></td>
<td>2/12/1954 – 12/17/2003</td>
<td>In loving memory, your sister Paula</td>
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<td><strong>Gordon R. Bear</strong></td>
<td>3/24/1941 – 8/29/2002</td>
<td>My grief does not dim the bright light of gratitude</td>
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<td>I have for the many years we had together.</td>
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<td>With all my love, your wife, Bonnie</td>
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<td><strong>Stephen Lee Puckett</strong></td>
<td>11/19/1981 – 10/28/2004</td>
<td>With love from your mom, Pam L. Puckett</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Troy Elggren</strong></td>
<td>6/14/1967 – 9/29/1997</td>
<td>With love from your mom and dad, Steve and Sharon Elggren</td>
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We are starting a new section of the Hope & Comfort newsletter where we can remember our loved ones by name with a short message. We need to be able to see, hear and speak the name of the person we have lost. Please use the form provided below to send information to remember your loved one. We publish the newsletter four times a year. If you wish to have your request in a particular issue, please send the information one month prior to the publication date.

**Schedule for 2010**
- **Summer 2010**: June, July, August  
  Request due by May 1st
- **Fall 2010**: September, October, November  
  Request due by August 1st
- **Winter 2010**: December, January, February  
  Request due by November 1st

If your request arrives late, we will include it in the next issue, unless you indicate otherwise. We will do our very best to place your information in the issue you request. A donation of any amount is appreciated to help cover costs of printing and mailing, but it is not required and no request will be denied for financial reasons.

Please use this form to remember your loved one.

Name of your loved one __________________________________________ Relationship __________________________

Date of birth __________________________ Anniversary date __________________________

Issue requested  Summer ____  Fall____  Winter ____

Requested by ________________________________________________

Please limit to 25 words or less, if possible. Longer messages may be edited if needed to accommodate all requests.

Message:
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

Please mail to: SOSL at PO Box 3297 La Mesa, CA 91941  OR  email the above info to info@soslsd.org

“Wealth soap is for the body, tears are for the soul.” — Jewish Proverb