

www.survivorsofsuicide.co.za

DURBAN NORTH joy@crisisteam.co.za
Joy Chiang 083 256 5993 :SueFairall 074 182 4360
Meetings are held the first Monday of every month from 18H30-20H30 at Pam Golding House, 2 Swapo Road Dbn North.

GLENWOOD
suicideprevent@gmail.com
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SADAG SUICIDE HELPLINE

0800567567

DIARY DATES : DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY GROUP MEETING: LAST TUES OF EVERY MONTH SMS Robin for details 0824991344

No one is obliged to speak and everything said is confidential.

JUNE 2016 NEWSLETTER

Father's Day : A day to remember and celebrate your father but also for some still a painful day to live through if you have lost your father to suicide.

Lori

Below two women share their feelings and experience.



Another Father's Day Without You:
by Deborah Greene

Monday will mark 14 months months since you left us. How can that possibly be? Some days it feels as if I've lived a lifetime without you, and others it is as if it just happened yesterday. If I knew then what I know now, there is so much that I would say to you Dad. And there are things I would say and do differently.

I would ask you to stay. In fact, I would beg you. I am not above saying that. I would not offer you platitudes or promise it would all get better. I never did. But I would remind you as often as I could that in all of your brokenness, just as you were, you were loved. Never again would I say that perhaps you could "fake it until you feel it." Because I know now that faking it took far too much strength and energy. I would tell you that loving you through the hard times was not a burden. That none of us would feel better off without you.

I would ask you to give the therapist and the medication time. And just as I did then, I would temper your expectation that one day you would simply wake up and feel all better. You were so desperate not to hurt anymore and you gave that tiny pill far too much power. And when it failed to act as quickly as you had hoped, you slipped further away from us. Only we didn't know it.

I would ask you to be honest with us. You showed us pieces of your pain. But you did not show us all of it. Maybe you yourself didn't recognize the depths of your suffering. Maybe you felt further weakened and embarrassed, ashamed of the notion that you might consider ending your own life. So you pushed those thoughts down into that dark hole that had opened up inside of you. Oh how I wish you had said it Dad.

Remember how I told you that to make therapy work, you would have to be willing to peel back all of the layers? It would be hard, it could be painful, but it could bring you to a place of understanding yourself and your pain. And from that place of understanding, healing would be possible. But instead you compartmentalized, you rationalized and you masked the truth. Why didn't you tell someone, anyone that death was beckoning to you, promising you an end to the suffering? Why did you only drop hints that we were unprepared to recognize then? If you had just spoken the words, you might still be here with us now.

Dad, I would tell you that we needed you. And I would remind you of all the goodness, the joy, the celebrations that were yet to come. I'd ask you to look into the faces of

your grandchildren and see all of the beautiful possibilities that lie ahead. Imagine their graduations, bat mitzvahs, and weddings. Imagine sitting with mom, dancing in joy and relishing the growing beauty of the family that you created together. Then I would ask you to see the void that would be present if you were not there. I would ask you to look at the tears, the palpable sense of missing that we would all feel with your absence.

If I had a clue that you were considering suicide, I would have been on the first flight and as a family; we would have gotten you even more help. We would have come up with a plan that met you in crisis and carried you through. Why didn't you give us that chance Dad?

If I had a chance to say anything to you Dad, I would tell you over and over again that I loved you, that I needed you in my life, that you leaving would be devastating.

I don't know if any of it would have made a difference Dad. But I am left with so many words unspoken. There was no final goodbye. I didn't get to hold your hand, embrace you and kiss you one last time. I would tell you that not getting to do that would forever hurt and haunt me. It feels like you simply disappeared.

Dad, I know that you were suffering. But if you were here now, I would acknowledge it with an even greater understanding. Hindsight offers me an insight that I didn't fully have a year ago. Your pain was so very real. You hurt all over. I would tell you that it's okay to let all of that pain show.

I would ask you to shed the layers of stigma, the shame, the fear that you would be perceived as weak, frail &

somehow less of a man. Those layers only weighed you down, causing you to sink even further. And when you asked if you would ever return to your old self, I would say instead that the goal of each day should be to meet the pain, to share it, to work through it and to strive instead toward healing bit by bit. Because returning to your old self, that may have been far too lofty a goal. Perhaps you didn't have the strength to reach toward a finish line that was so far off. But small markers, milestones that were within reach, maybe that would have been possible.

I wish I could go back. I wish you were here. I wish I could say all of these things to you Dad. I wish I knew then, what I know now. Fourteen months ago you took your life. And all that I want to share with you now; I must sit at your graveside to say. But I say it anyway. I love you. I miss you. I wish you could have stayed. We are not better off without you. We wanted you here.

Deborah Greene lives in Superior, CO with her husband & three daughters. She lost her father Lowell Jay Herman on April 20, 2015. You can follow her journey at reflectingoutloud.net where she first published a version of this post.



If We Knew Then All the Things We Understand Now :by Sheila Hamilton.

I missed much of the unfolding of my husband's mental illness. By the time I'd pieced together the puzzle

of who David actually was, he was falling apart. My once brilliant, intense, and passionate partner was dead within six weeks of a formal diagnosis of bipolar disorder, leaving my nine-year-old daughter and me without so much as a note to understand his decision. He'd left us hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt and with no plan for helping us recover from the profound grief of his suicide.

On this Father's Day, when I celebrate David's unique and brilliant life, when I mourn the loss of his warmth in my daughter's life, I remember the David I fell in love with, the sparkling, super-intellectual, blue-eyed beauty whose fire burned too bright.

When people ask me what happened to Sophie's dad, I explain he likely suffered from "too much bandwidth." David understood too much. He saw and heard too much. He had enormous intellectual capacity and had suffered several brutal, early traumas. He refused to share his concern about his brain functioning because mental illness was viewed as a weakness in his family, a moral failing of sorts.

I miss him. Horribly. Every day.

Mental illness, unlike breast cancer, isn't celebrated with big marches or pink ribbons. The stigma is stifling, and it prevents most people from seeking help. David refused to accept the label of bipolar disorder. He could not imagine a life of medications and therapy, which had helped him so little. David's path is not unique. Suicide is now the ninth most common cause of death for men and women. This year, America reached an embarrassing new milestone. Our suicide rate is the

highest it has been in the past thirty years.

For suicide loss survivors, the questions are the same ones I focus on as a reporter. Who, what, where, when, but mostly, why? We are at a loss to understand our loved one's decision to die of their own volition. But, I've learned some things about suicide that have helped me understand this: people may die by suicide, but they die OF mental illness.

David's choice was like that of a person trapped in a burning building—jump or be burned? The psychic pain David experienced was so great he told me it was as if he was possessed by demons. This from the kindest, gentlest person I'd ever known, a man who proudly cradled our baby in a front pack while visiting the many construction jobs he'd created as a designer/builder.

It is my belief that many people could benefit from hearing more about how psychiatric conditions unfold. In the years, months, and days leading up to David's death, I didn't classify him as mentally ill. I missed many signs. I ignored others, believing it could get better. And I scrambled, as the world came crashing down around us, just to maintain my own sanity and the health of my daughter.

Our daughter celebrates her birthday each June. I can't help but measure her birthdays with an equal sense of apprehension and elation. She'll celebrate her nineteenth birthday on Father's day, and I can't help but revel in the physical similarities. Yes, she has his intellect, but she also has my relatively sunny nature. She is physically stunning with long, muscular legs and a waist that defies her voracious appetite.

She has David's European cheekbones. The color of her skin is his. Her ears have the same shape. There are times I find myself staring at one of her features for too long. She bats me away: "Mom, enough." But David's genetics also carry a downside.

"There's a 50 percent chance your daughter will present with the same disorder," a well-meaning psychologist once advised. "It is most common between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one."

I knew the statistical odds by heart and this psychologist got it wrong. Bipolar disorder has a genetic composition but far too few psychologists understand or respect the enormous influence of epigenetics, or the process by which genes are turned on or off.

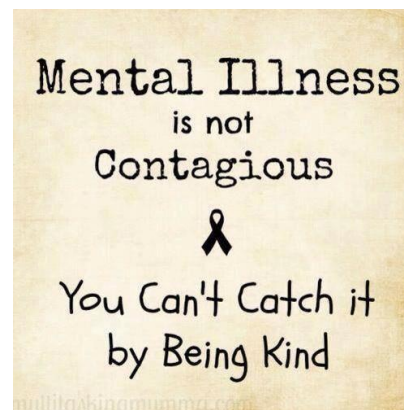
After David's death, and trained as an investigative reporter, I'd read every book and every study I could get my hands on about bipolar disorder. I'd measured the likelihood of a gene mutation against the things I could influence—what she ate, how much sleep and exercise she got, the unconditional love that I gave her. We can lessen the genetic risks. We can be more mindful of our mental health and develop coping methods before trouble begins. Those coping methods are surprisingly simple: Strong relationships. Sleep. Good nutrition and hydration. Yoga. Walking in nature. Talk therapy; especially cognitive training and dialectical behavioral therapy. A dog or cat who loves unconditionally. This is a mental health toolbox, a toolbox of goodness.

There is much to celebrate. There have been tremendous breakthroughs in brain science from

2005 to 2016. A new generation of advocates are openly, honestly, and bravely communicating coping methods for other sufferers. The stigma surrounding my husband's illness may end with a new generation of advocates.

If we knew then all the things we understand now, I might have been more equipped to do more than watch my beloved husband's decline in a state of denial, grief, and fear. I would have had more resources and wouldn't have felt so woefully unprepared for marriage to a person with a mental illness. Instead, I compartmentalized our problems in order to deal with the needs of my child and a demanding job. And in my ignorance and fear, I too allowed our lives to spiral out of control.

In the aftermath of David's death, it took years to stabilize my family's financial future and the emotional current of our lives. Once I came to terms with what killed David, I did an enormous amount of research to learn more about mental illness and what we can all do to be more compassionate to the people in our lives who are touched with brain disorders. My interest is in preventing another loss of life as exquisite as David's. If we begin modification at the earliest ages, we might improve the chances of mitigating the onset of mental illness.



Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross has described the five stages of grief as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. When a loved one dies by suicide, that list is incomplete. We are haunted by the questions “Why would he?” or “What could I have done differently?”

Suicide is an unnatural choice and leaves carnage for the living. I’d propose one more stage of grief to Kübler-Ross’s list in the case of suicide: forgiveness.

It was not until I reached this stage of forgiveness that I was able to sort out my own failings from those of my husband. In accepting responsibility for my part in David’s death, I was able to understand his sense of futility and his unwillingness to face his illness. I forgave him. And in doing so, I’ve been better able to understand his decision.

My hope is that our story—told from the other side of this sixth stage—will be a catalyst for positive change in the ways we approach, regard, and respond to the social fallout of mental illness.

If you have lost someone you love to mental illness, I leave you with this quote from Kay Redfield Jamison. I look to it when I miss David most, and when I grieve his physical absence in my daughter’s life. On Father’s day and every day, I choose to remember the beautiful human being I fell in love with, not the person mental illness claimed.

“Look to the living, love them, and hold on.”

author of “All the Things We Never Knew.”

Sheila Hamilton is a five-time Emmy Award winning journalist and the