

Those in attendance at the Survivors Support Group often relate experiences of hearing or seeing “signs” from their deceased loved ones. There might be possible explanations for these “signs.” If they bring comfort or peace of mind and heart, continue to seek and believe in them

## MAINTAINING CONNECTIONS TO DECEASED LOVED ONES



*By Anne Cronin-Tyson, M.A., and Michelle Linn-Gust, Ph.D.*

It can be a light touch on the arm. A dream in which our loved one comes to us. Or a coin that appears in one’s path. Even a butterfly that flutters around our head. The signs and symbols for each of us are unique. They bring to mind that our loved ones who have died by suicide are near us. These signs, called After Death Communications (ADCs), remind us of the unbroken bond that we hold with our loved ones who have died.

For many years, when people mentioned these kinds of happenings they were told they were “crazy” or “hallucinating.” Some people felt they couldn’t mention what they experienced because they were afraid of the negative comments from others or they themselves doubted the reality of their experience. Grief therapists many times told people that the bond

broke because the person had died.

Thankfully, there is openness now for people to feel safe to share their experiences, something that also connects strangers who previously might only know that each has lost a loved one to suicide. William Worden (2002) in his “Tasks of Mourning” doesn’t say that the bond is broken after a love one dies. Instead, he says that we “emotionally relocate” that person in our lives. The person is with us, yet in a different way.

For the grieving person, especially after a complicated death like suicide, there is a lot of comfort in knowing a loved one is nearby. And out of pain. For some people, a sign or message from the loved one is enough to know that it’s okay to move forward with life. And for others they might know that they are forgiven for anything that might have transpired in the relationship while the person lived.

The signs and messages for each of us will be as unique as we ourselves are and as unique as our relationships with our loved ones who died are. For some people, there might be one message and others might experience ongoing signs. Our ability to be open to these messages (sometimes we don’t realize they are messages and signs for us at first!) and to give thanks for them might heighten our awareness and more might come. These experiences are gifts that can bring a sense of peace and connectedness that we never realized we could still have.

— from [www.suicidefindinghope.com](http://www.suicidefindinghope.com)



### IN THIS ISSUE

Maintaining Connections To Deceased Loved Ones  
Consider This: Identity Theft?  
Grief Is... Hope Is...  
Remembering Our Loved Ones  
A Sincere Thank You To Our Donors  
Online (ZOOM) Survivor Support Group  
Continues For Now

# CONSIDER THIS: IDENTITY THEFT?



by Jeanne Moren, Volunteer SOS Facilitator

There is a great deal of discussion these days about “Identity Theft.” We are told how prevalent it has become, how we should be fearful and watchful so as not to fall prey to its many sources. We are encouraged to employ security systems to protect ourselves. The possibility that some person or group could steal our individual identifying information and cause upheaval in our lives is frightening.

Many survivors of a suicide loss have related that they feel they have lost the identity of “who they are” after separation by the death of a loved one. They may find themselves saying, or at least thinking, “I will never be the same person,” “I can’t go on with my life being so disrupted and traumatized,” “I am less without the person who died,” “I have lost my focus/purpose/stability/support for living,” “My identity has been stolen from me.”

It is not as though someone else is going to pose as them or use their private information for their own gain, but rather they fear that the person they were will never return. The question may be, “Is a suicide loss a cruel form of Identity Theft?”

Where does our identity actually begin? It is a lifelong combination of our genetic makeup, relationships and experiences. Some of our identity is created for us and some we create for ourselves. Some is through circumstance, some is by choice. Some relationships are given, as in family, and others are formed by our interactions. Many relationships may enhance and sustain us, others may drain or diminish us. While some of our identity is given, chosen or earned, much of it is gained through our actions.

Whether we are very young or have lived a longer life, identity is fluid and it changes through constant beginnings and endings. Beginnings often include wonder, anticipation, fear, hope, and opportunity. Endings may signal sadness, despair, yet also fear, hope and opportunity. We constantly evolve in our lives, creating our history by moving from what was — to what is — to what is yet to come.

A suicide loss defies any security system that might claim to protect our identity. Protections that apply to other invasions do not seem to work when survivors question their identity. The consistency of life has been shattered. We are no longer confident that we have any control over events or circumstances.

Identity that may have felt firmly in place is now

unknown. Are we no longer a sister, a mother, a friend, a husband? Are we now a widower, a single parent, an orphan? Have we gone from content, loving mother to bereaved parent? From happy sibling to only child? Are we now a surviving friend or possibly a victim of circumstance? Society defines us with some of these identities and others we place on ourselves. Has our identity been altered or is it our personality and attitudes that have changed? Has our identity been stolen or is it that our assumptions, comfort, plans and dreams been shaken away from us? Can we ever be confident about when and how change will occur? Is what we value important anymore?

An identity that existed may need reorganization after abruptly being disorganized by the suicide loss. It takes time and energy to sort out what we can and cannot control. Giving power to a “loss” to define or destroy us is paralyzing. Growth from this point forward can be stalled, delayed, disrupted. What was routine becomes challenging and may even feel impossible. When one is steeped in grief it can be difficult to simply, “get up, get dressed, get going.” Survivors may feel no reason for hope, no capacity for joy. People in our lives may desperately wish that we could and possibly encourage us to “get over it,” “get back to our old selves.”

Where and when does the energy appear that helps us to feel that our identity has not been completely stolen? It is when we recognize the need to reach out and find our own support. Our deceased loved one was not able to reach out when in their darkest place. We search for answers with, “Help me understand it.” We reach for hope with, “Help me live with it.”

Seek those who understand that you are looking for hope, skills, knowledge and eventual resolution. Instead of only admiring others who seem to be comfortable in their identity, allow them to inspire you to action. Those who we envy can become those we emulate. Sort out and take what is helpful, acknowledging that your needs may change or be different at various points in time.

When we assign power to an event or loss to “change” us, it opens the possibility of future events “changing” us also. Embrace those who might help

*continued on page 3*

continued from page 2

you to move from resistance to gentle acceptance. Look to a time when your thinking moves from “I will never” to “I am just not able to yet.” Be attentive to your stumbles or ups and downs. Forgive yourself the same way you may have had to in the past. Show the same compassion to yourself as you show others.

Changes in identity are not necessarily a result of theft. Suicide losses do challenge our sense of self. When you take charge of reorganizing your identity,

you may find that the “true you” has most likely remained solidly in place. When those who use the internet choose to create an online profile, they may often change their “status” to reflect a moment in time. How we view ourselves invites others to view us the same way.

Consider This: After putting in the work to survive, you have the option to tell or write your own story and pass it on. You will give support to others when you are able. Your identity will be yours.

—This article first appeared in our October 2016 newsletter.



## GRIEF IS...

There are many definitions and quotes about grief. Here are a few that have been shared.

“**Grief** is love with no place to go.” —Unknown

“**Grief** is like a ball of string, you start at one end and wind. Then the ball slips through your fingers and rolls across the floor. Some of your work is undone but not all. You pick it up and start over again, but you never have to begin again at the end of the string. The ball never completely unwinds. You’ve made some progress.” —Unknown

“**Grief** is like a bucket of water. You can start out with a full bucket, but when you find it too heavy to carry, you can bump it a little so that some spills, and carry it a little farther. As you continue, you bump it again so that it becomes lighter to carry for the longer distance. You must do the same with grief. To keep the burden from becoming intolerable, you must ‘bump the bucket’ a little and let a little of your grief spill out from time to time, so that you can continue.” —Unknown

## GRIEF IS NOT...

“**Grief** is not a mountain to be climbed with the strong reaching the summit long before the weak.

**Grief** is not an athletic event, with stopwatches timing our progress.

## HOPE IS...

“**Hope** is the feeling you have that the feeling you have isn’t permanent.” —Jean Kerr

“**Hope** is the pillar that holds up the world. **Hope** is the dream of a waking man.” —Pliny the Elder

“**Hope** is activated when we can say to ourselves: “I am willing to trust, to wait without demanding answers, and to contribute myself to the most positive use of the present.” —Unknown

“**Grief** is a smorgasbord where you go down the line picking a little of this and a little of that.” —Unknown

“**Grief** is like a jigsaw puzzle, some people get all the edge pieces together first and work from the outside in. Others dump everything out on the table at once and dive right into the middle. Some never open the box at all, they just look at the picture on the lid and wonder why what’s inside doesn’t match or make sense.

You meet a lot of people when you start a jigsaw puzzle. Some are full of advice, or they may try to make the puzzle look the way it ought to be instead of the way it is.

But once in a while, you meet someone who shares their own finished puzzle and helps you make sense of yours. Then you find it is not as hard as before. Some of the pieces fit together more easily, and you sigh with relief, and remember.” —by Victoria Guthrie, Tampa, FL; from *Brief Encounters Newsletter*, 6/98

**Grief** is a walk through loss and pain with no competition and no time trials.” —Unknown

“May your choices reflect your **hopes**, not your fears.” —Nelson Mandela

“Let your **hopes**, not your hurts, shape your future.” —Robert H. Schuller

“**Hope** is a renewable option. If you run out of it at the end of the day, you get to start over in the morning.” —Barbara Kingsolver

## REMEMBERING OUR LOVED ONES



Thank you to those who have shared your Remembrances for this issue. We respect the privacy and confidentiality of this information, so this section will not be included in the online version of the Newsletter. Requests can be made for a written copy of the Remembrance Issue by providing your name and complete mailing address by email to [sos@journeymhc.org](mailto:sos@journeymhc.org) or by phone (608) 280-2435 (confidential SOS Voicemail).

## A SINCERE THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS



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in memory of Randal W. Olson

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for sponsorship

To make a tax deductible donation online by credit card, visit [www.journeymhc.org/donate](http://www.journeymhc.org/donate) and designate "Survivors of Suicide (SOS) Support Group" in the pull-down menu option.

To make a tax deductible donation by check, make it payable to Journey Mental Health Center with SOS in the memo line. Mail to:

Survivors of Suicide Support Group  
c/o Journey Mental Health Center  
25 Kessel Court, Suite 105, Madison, WI 53711

Please Consider —

- \* A donation in memory or honor of someone.
- \* A donation towards our Quarterly Newsletter so that we might continue to bring it to you and others.
- \* A donation toward resources that are provided to new survivors.

*"Attitude is the mind's paintbrush, it can color any situation."*

— Barbara Johnson

## ONLINE (ZOOM) SURVIVOR SUPPORT GROUP CONTINUES FOR NOW

With no definite date set as to when in-person meetings might resume, we continue to offer **online group support**. We offer this option to survivors who would have normally desired to attend our in-person groups.

The following criteria are needed for participation.

- Be a survivor of a suicide loss and wish to interact with other survivors.
- Be over 18 years of age.
- Have technology available to use ZOOM either through computer, phone or another device.
- Be willing to register and speak with a Journey Mental health provider to be assured that a group experience would be appropriate and then receive an online invitation (Group entry codes).
- Be able to provide your email and phone contact information.
- Be aware that this is a discussion, support group and

is **not** a “therapy” group.

- Be able to provide a quiet space, without interruptions when participating, insuring confidentiality of the group.
- Be available at the group starting time.
- Do not invite or include others who have not been specifically invited to the session.

All group discussions are led by a trained volunteer fellow survivor and supported by a Journey Mental Health professional.

Meetings, for now will be held on our regular meeting nights, the second and fourth Tuesday of each month. The length of the meeting (usually 1½ hours) will be determined by the facilitator.

To request participation please email [sos@journeymhc.org](mailto:sos@journeymhc.org) or call and leave a message for call back at SOS Confidential Voicemail (608) 280-2435.

## SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE SUPPORT ZOOM MEETING SCHEDULE

*A self-help group for adults who are grieving the death of a loved one by suicide.*

**2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month, 7 – 8:30 p.m.**

For extra support please use Crisis Intervention 24/7 phone line at 608-280-2600 or leave a message at SOS voicemail 608-280-2435.

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## CONNECTING WITH JOURNEY MENTAL HEALTH

**SOS Confidential Email:** [sos@journeymhc.org](mailto:sos@journeymhc.org)

**SOS Confidential Voicemail:** (608) 280-2435

**24/7 Year 'Round Mental Health Crisis Line:** (608) 280-2600

**Journey Mental Health Center Website:** [www.journeymhc.org](http://www.journeymhc.org)

Select Programs & Services, Community-Based Services, Survivors of Suicide

### ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

Along with survivor support from Journey Mental Health many other resources are listed in our “Help After Suicide” brochure which is posted on our website, [journeymhc.org](http://journeymhc.org).

Virtual ZOOM support meetings originating in California can be found at [www.friendsforsurvival.org](http://www.friendsforsurvival.org)  
General groups along with specific loss groups for Moms, Spouse & Partner are available through online registration.



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