



Survivors Partnership for Research Information Truth and Education on Suicide

## Survivor's Story...

By Maggie Mayer

When people ask me about the two letters tattooed on my pelvis, I'm very hesitant to explain what they mean. But I'll try to explain to you. They stand for my friend. They stand for my co-student. They stand for my sometimes partner in crime. They stand for the person that I admired most in classes and watched with amazement. They also happen to be the initials of my friend who hung himself.

Ben was one of the first people I met as a freshman in college. I was initially struck by his height. Towering more than a foot above my humble 5'3. Then I noticed his brilliant smile and warm personality. Luckily for me, I found out that we were in a few classes together. I soon learned that his smile was not the only thing brilliant about him. *He* was genuinely brilliant. He was talented in a way that made ever reaching his level absolutely impossible. He made me doubt my reasons for going into our field. He made me at times try my utmost hardest, and at other times want to give up altogether. Now when I write this, I don't intend for you, as the reader, to assume that this was a bad quality about him. It was quite the opposite. He was always the first to compliment or see the good in people and their work.

I don't know if he knew how brilliant he was, however. It takes a lot of determination for a man who is 6'5" to find a place tall enough to accommodate him hanging himself. Maybe that is what initially broke my heart in a way that I thought was

impossible. So differently than when boyfriends had broken up with me or when a grandparent dies. It was a complete and utter shattering. A pain that wakes you up in the middle of the night. People say that pain washes over you. Anyone who says that, in my opinion, has never felt pain. Pain like this is like laying on a bed of needles while someone walks on it above you. It fills you up all the way from your toenails to the ends of your hair. I lost five pounds the week after he died and stopped sleeping because I kept wondering what I could have done to change things.

I was called at home on Thanksgiving break by a mutual friend. "Did you hear about, Ben?" she said quickly and to the point. "No... Why?" I replied. "... He hung himself." I hung up on her.

I had transferred away from the school where we had met earlier that school year. I had no one that knew his warmth and kindness and genius to talk to. I was completely alone in my grief. I think in the following months was when I decided what hurt me the most about his death. All of these people surrounding me would never know him. They were the ones that should be suffering. *I* was the lucky one. The one whose life was changed for the better.

There isn't an easy way to explain my tattoo. My worst fear is that if I were to tell someone this, they would judge Ben. They would think that he was too much of a wimp to stick it out.

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## Message From the President

As the lazy, hazy days of summer are upon us, SPRITES is busy planning the upcoming events for the fall, of which there are many! For the third year SPRITES will have a team for the NAMI Walks on Sunday, October 4<sup>th</sup>. Sue Gorman is chairing the team, please contact her if you are interested in joining.

Sharon Wagner is chairing the SPRITES team for the AFSP walk which is on Saturday, September 12<sup>th</sup> in North Park. Please contact Sharon if you are interested in joining the team. Saturday, October 3<sup>rd</sup> is the Suicide Awareness walk in Westmoreland County. Contact information is in this issue if you are interested in participating in that walk.

The paper work for non-profit status was filed late April. So far one adjustment needed to be made, which the Board has done, and resubmitted. I and the rest of the Board would like to **thank Sharon Wagner** for spearheading this tedious task of taking care of all the forms and submissions to the Federal and State agencies required to attain non-profit status! Hopefully in my next message I will be able to say that status has been granted!

**Thank you to Elaine Edelman** for planning once again a wonderful picnic in June! Those who attended I know not only enjoyed a lot of really good food, but, the camaraderie of other survivors. If you missed this year's picnic, I hope you will be able to attend next year's.

The Board received feedback both via email and at the picnic regarding the Coffee Socials. Lori Elnyczky, **thank you Lori!**, has volunteered to chair these gatherings. You'll find more detailed information about the 'Coffee's' in this issue.

As always, we hope that SPRITES will be able to help you in your journey of healing, coping, remembering, and moving forward.

Take care,  
Lynn Fletcher

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Or for some, that he was “suffering in purgatory for committing such a selfish sin.” I feel sorry for the people that would think that. They’re blessed enough to not drown in their own lives and not see any other option, but suicide. As for the suffering in purgatory, the God that I know wouldn’t punish someone who is already hurting so very much. The God that I know would have said, “Ben, my dear son, welcome home!”



## SPRITES Picnic Huge Success

*By Elaine Edelman*

June 7th was a beautiful day for a picnic. The weather couldn't have been better-warm and no rain. A perfect day for the 2nd annual SPRITES Picnic. We gathered at the Willows pavilion in North Park for good food and fellowship. The SPRITES organization provided the grilled chicken and everyone attending was asked to bring an appetizer, side dish, or dessert. There was a wide assortment of delicious dishes for all to enjoy. About thirty-five people were in attendance. We welcomed some new faces who were learning about the SPRITES organization and the work that we do. It was a nice way to get out in the fresh air and relax a little with friends.

Looking forward to 2010 - think about joining us for the third annual picnic! Of course, we are always looking for new ideas on how to make the picnic bigger and better. If you would like to get involved with picnic planning give me a call at 412-486-8755 or email [eedelman@verizon.net](mailto:eedelman@verizon.net). The time commitment is small, one or two planning meetings maybe an hour each and a couple of hours the day of the picnic. Thank you. Elaine Edelman

## Walking News

### • September 12, 2009 AFSP Walk

Net proceeds from the Out of the Darkness Community Walks will benefit the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) to fund research, education, survivor and awareness programs -- both to prevent suicide and to assist those affected by suicide.

Please contact Sharon Wagner for more information on the Sprites Team: [sharon.wagner@bnymellon.com](mailto:sharon.wagner@bnymellon.com)

### • October 3, 2009 Suicide Prevention and Awareness Walk SPRC

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) provides prevention support, training, and resources to assist organizations and individuals to develop suicide prevention programs, interventions and policies, and to advance the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention.

Twin Lakes Park Activity Center #7 @ 10am. If Registering before August 31, the cost is \$10. After August 31 is \$15.

For questions concerning this walk contact: Renee Dadey [dadeyr@westmoreland.swsix.com](mailto:dadeyr@westmoreland.swsix.com)

### • October 4, 2009 NAMI Walk

In 2009, thousands of concerned citizens in nearly 80 communities across the nation will walk together to raise money and awareness about our country's need for a world-class treatment and recovery system for people with mental illness.

Sue Gorman is chair, if interested in being on the SPRITES walk team please contact her at: [susangorman@comcast.net](mailto:susangorman@comcast.net)



## Board Members Needed!

There are a few Board positions available. If you are interested, please contact Lynn, Sharon, or Erin. It's a great way to help out and be with people who understand!!!

## Sharing Corner

### Survivors Helping Survivors

By Linda Ryan.

Review: *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith*

Those of us who are survivors have had to learn to grow comfortable with our stories of hardship and loss. On a good day, our memories find a resting place and we experience joy. On a bad day, well, I think we know too well what those are like. The mix of loss, joy and finding connection help to shape the essays in Anne Lamott's 1999 book of essays: Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts On Faith.

The essays describe and illustrate a spiritual journey that continues to this day. In the same way that survivors find meaning in sharing their stories, Anne builds upon her case that a flawed, recovering alcoholic who finds her way into a church one Sunday morning can discover (or re-discover) faith and the workings of God in everyday life.

Traveling Mercies starts out like a memoir, covering Anne's childhood through early adulthood. Calling this essay, "Overture: Lily Pads" Anne uses the lily pad image to describe how she "leaped" from one religion to another during visits to the homes of childhood friends. As part of her life story, Ann shares two devastating losses: the death of her father from a brain tumor (he was 56, she was 25) and then later, her best

childhood friend at the age of 37. Grief is a theme throughout the book. Here she reflects on the meaning and purpose of grief:

*After awhile it was like an inside shower, washing off some of the rust and calcification in my pipes. It was like giving a dry garden a good watering. Don't get me wrong: grief sucks; it really does. Unfortunately, though, avoiding it robs us of life, of the now, of a sense of living spirit.*

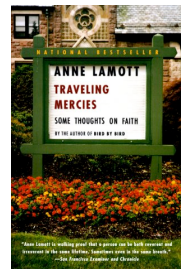
Witnessing miracles is the topic of "Knocking on heaven's door," where Anne confronts turbulence and mixed political viewpoints on one scary airplane ride. She thinks about her fellow passengers and observes how everyone is handling the shaky ride. Most of all, she thinks about her son Sam back at home and wonders if she will see him again. While hoping for a miracle in the midst of the air turmoil, Anne reflects on two people from her church, an AIDS patient who recently lost his partner and a devout woman who sings in the choir. After several Sundays of not talking, they join together in worship thanks to the uplifting music. Somehow, strangers on an airplane and a pair of unlikely friends produce an essay that makes perfect sense. It's as if Anne is trying to tell us to look for connections and take a step outside of our comfort zones. (Granted, serious airplane turbulence is high drama that would make anyone cling to their seatmates, if only emotionally.) After one more high-altitude drama (a passenger is treated for a possible heart attack) Anne

and her fellow passengers eventually land safely and gratefully.

In "Mountain Birthday," Anne and her son Sam are vacationing in Idaho, celebrating Sam's seventh birthday, when Sam is offered the chance to paraglide off the side of a cliff with an experienced instructor. "Please Mom" the familiar refrain goes, but Anne is hesitant. She understands that parenting requires letting go and allowing one's child to grow up, but she can't ignore the tug-of-war happening in her heart, and the reality that Sam is still very young. She contemplates, consults with friends back home, and even approaches fellow vacationers she's just met. By the end of the essay, she has made her decision.

Anne's take on life is both unique and universal. In "Why I make Sam go to church" she sizes up adult life this way:

*It's funny: I always imagined when I was a kid that adults had some kind of inner toolbox, full of shiny tools: the saw of discernment, the hammer of wisdom, the sandpaper of patience. But then when I grew up I found that life handed you these rusty bent old tools—friendships, prayer, conscience, honesty—and said, 'Do the best you can with these, they will have to do. And mostly, against all odds, they're enough.'*



## Recipes to Share

### Spicy Buffalo Chicken Dip

By Elissa Berman

- 1lb Boneless Chicken Breast (or canned chicken) \* I use about 1.25lbs, but some people use 1 lb
- 16 oz cream cheese \* fat free, or 1/4 less fat works fine
- 1cup franks red hot ( or any buffalo sauce you prefer )
- 3/4 cup blue cheese or ranch dressing ( i used a little bit of each )
- 1/2 cup shredded cheddar or mexican cheese

Preparation:

Cook chicken in skillet, after cooked all the way through, let cool. Shred chicken into large bowl. Add softened cream cheese, red hot, and Ranch (or Blue Cheese) to chicken. Mix in cheese and add pepper if you want (if not spicy enough, add more buffalo sauce). Serve chilled with Crackers, Tostito Chips, or celery. To serve hot ( very yummy also ), just throw Chicken dip in baking dish, and keep on 350 for 20 minutes. Enjoy!!

### No Bake Krispy Cupcakes

By Clare Vaill

- 1 cup Karo Syrup
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 1/2 cups peanut butter
- 6 cups Rice Krispies Cereal
- Large package of mixed chocolate and peanut butter chips

Preparation:

Mix the syrup and sugar together and add the peanut butter and Rice Krispies. Mix well and form into bite sized balls. Put balls into small cupcake liners. Frost with melted chocolate and peanut butter chips. This is really quick and easy! Enjoy!!

## The Gazette Needs YOU!!!

As the organization grows, so should the newsletter! The SPRITES Gazette is looking for any kind of submissions from its members, families, and friends. Let's come together and make a great way to show our love and support for one another and the organization. Feel free to submit anything as it comes your way!

Here are some contribution ideas:

- Recipe section
- Kid's craft ideas
- Inspiring email chain letters
- Members in the news section
- Recommended reading/Book reviews
- Coping techniques
- Member accomplishments (especially the kids!)
- Sharing Corner
- Survivor Story

The possibilities are endless! Please send anything and all to [s.bainemiller@gmail.com](mailto:s.bainemiller@gmail.com) and put SPRITES in the subject line. To be published in the November newsletter, please submit what you have by October 31, 2009

## SPRITES Coffee Socials

By Lori Elnyczky

Due to an overwhelming response of interest, SPRITES has decided to hold "Coffee Socials" for members and non members alike to join together in an informal setting to talk, share, and develop friendships without any judgement. The first Coffee Social will be **Sunday, August 23, 2009 at Panera's Restaurant on McKnight Road from 6-8pm.** Please email Lori at [lorielnyczky@yahoo.com](mailto:lorielnyczky@yahoo.com) for directions and more information.

Message from Lori:

I really wanted to become more involved with SPRITES as this is the only thing that has helped me really try to come to terms with my 15 year old son, Ryan's death. So, when speaking to Lynn and Sharon in regards to the fact that SPRITES has helped me a lot by being with people who know the pain and are on the same journey as I am, I asked them what I could do to help out. They suggested chairing this activity and I cannot wait for the first meeting just to share and talk with people. I think it is a great idea and it will be amazing to be with people who truly understand there is no stigma or judgement surrounding our loved ones ending their lives so tragically. I know this will be a great help for not only myself but for those who can come!

## Suicide Stigma Overruled

By Robert Sanders

I had a disturbing discussion with a friend the other day about a very touchy subject. No not about politics. We were talking about religion and how he believed our mutual friend was going to hell because he took his own life. I was appalled. Here I thought my friend was a "good Christian boy" with strong morals and a compassionate heart but there he was, damning our dead friend and citing bible passages to back up his claims. His main argument was suicide boiled down to murder and according to 1 John 3:15, "No murderer has eternal life."

It took me a few minutes to realize he was serious. I took a deep breath. I grew up in a strict Catholic home, but was a bit of a rebellious young man and tried my best to do anything *but* listen in church. I may not have had specific bible passages to retaliate with but I thought I understood the main themes of religion and God and wanted to change his unthinkable thinking.

I took another deep breath and asked him a simple question. "What is God?" I asked. He replied, "God is Love." I knew I had him and knew I should have been a lawyer. "Well, if God is Love and loves all of his people how can he choose not to

love those people who have suffered so much during life and instead send them to a place of more suffering?"

My friend started to respond but I cut him off again. "And I thought I was taught that even murderers, rapists, thieves, and general bad people could go to heaven as long as they were sorry for their sins." He nodded. "Then if those people who commit suicide are considered murderers, wouldn't they be welcomed into heaven because they are sorry for their sins they committed on earth? It's the same thing."

I had rendered him speechless at this point. But I continued. "This all forgiving and loving God does not turn His back on anyone especially the people who are suffering the most. If He did that it would negate everything we believe about Him. If we are suffering we look to God for comfort. People who commit suicide are suffering and are looking to God for comfort in heaven because they can't find that comfort on earth anymore."

I ended our "discussion" at that point and walked away because I knew I had won. God comforts those who suffer. Period. People who think suicide is the only way out are definitely suffering.

And I know God will even comfort and love unconditionally my hypocritical friend too.

## SPRITES Board Members

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## SPRITES Committees and Chairpersons

### Social Events

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### NAMI Walk

Sue Gorman

### 1st Responder Pamphlet

Ron Vaill

### Grants

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### Webmaster

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### Coffee Socials

Lori Elnyczky

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## 2009 Calendar

### Tues. Aug. 18, 7pm

General Meeting, NAMI Office

### Sun. Aug. 23, 6-8pm

Coffee Social, Panera's

### Sat. Sept. 12

AFSP Walk

### Sat. Oct. 3

SPRC Walk

### Sun. Oct 4, 9am

NAMI Walk

### Wed. Oct 21, 7pm

General Meeting, NAMI Office

### Thurs. Nov 19, 7pm

General Meeting, NAMI Office

### Wed. Dec 9

Candle Light Memorial

## SPRITES Mission

The mission of SPRITES Foundation is to provide support to individuals whose lives have been altered by the loss of a loved one to suicide, to instill a spirit of compassion involvement with integrity, perseverance, determination, and knowledge through courtesy, respect, and leadership. SPRITES is also committed to reducing the stigma associated with suicide through supporting education of the general public about brain illnesses.

**If you** have or know someone who has lost a loved one to suicide please join fellow survivors for support, information and assistance in moving forward in the processing of this devastating occurrence. We currently meet at the NAMI Office, located at **105 Braunlich Drive, Suite 200, Pittsburgh, PA 15237** - just off McKnight Road in the North Hills (412-366-3788).

# Explaining the Acronym of



Survivors **P**artnership - Survivors helping survivors  
**R**esearch - Support research efforts  
**I**nformation - For Survivors  
**T**ruth - Suicide is a medical condition  
**E**ducation - Change the stigma associated with  
**S**uicide

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