

The SPRITES Gazette



Survivors Partnership for Research Information Truth and Education on Suicide

Vol. 1 Issue 2

November 2008

President's Message

The journey of SPRITES is continuing! Just like our journey in life, and survivorship after the loss of our loved ones, we are progressing step by step. The tedious paper work of applying to register with the PA Bureau of Charitable Organizations (BCO) as a not-for-profit organization is slowly but surely moving forward. After we have achieved that status, we will move ahead with the application process on the federal level. Again the steps are moving slowly, but moving forward all the time!

As you receive this issue, we will be entering into the 'holiday season'. Holidays may have taken on a new aspect for some since their loved one has passed. With this in mind we asked that you send in your ideas of how you cope during the holidays. Thank you to those of you who sent in your ideas. You'll find them in the Creative Corner of this issue. Whether this is the first holiday season, or the umpteenth one, I think we all may find an idea that may fit for us.

We were very excited when Patty Sedlak volunteered to be our newsletter editor. Unfortunately her computer didn't want to cooperate, so she is not able right now to fill that position. (Don't worry Patty, I'm sure SPRITES can find another position for you!!) However, Sara Baines-Miller has volunteered to be the editor, and will take on those responsibilities starting with the first issue of 2009. Thank you, Sara. Sara's email is listed under editor and any Survivor Story or item for Creative Corner can be submitted to her.

SPRITES had a table at the AFSP walk with copies of the "Coping After a Suicide" pamphlet and our newsletter. A lot of people at the walk took the literature and were very interested in SPRITES.

I would like to remind all of you of our upcoming General meeting which will be on Monday, November 17. Also, please plan on attending the non-denominational Candle Light Memorial Service on Wednesday, December 10th.

During this holiday season, let us all keep each other in our thoughts, and know that along with our loved ones, we are loved by one another as well.

Hope to see you at a SPRITES meeting and/or event soon and Take care,
Lynn Fletcher

Survivor's Story

By Michele McDonald

On March 5, 1978, a small wirely-haired baby girl was born. I thought she just may have been the ugliest baby I had ever seen. As the oldest of three girls, I was very independent at the ripe age of six. I knew what another child in the house meant. In hindsight, I knew very little of just how much this sibling would affect my life. Melissa would become not only my sister, but my best friend and at times, my child.

At age 4 she was diagnosed with a chronic kidney disease. At that time, we were told that she would not live past ten years of age. By age 9, she had her first kidney transplant and then at

age 11 another transplant. I was by her side throughout the hospital stays, coaching her on. After numerous escapes from death, at age 13 Melissa became one of the youngest children to begin hemodialysis. I was so proud of her. We were told she would not live to be 20 years of age. At age 18, Melissa graduated high school with honors. Although, she was not able to attend much of her high school years and needed home schooled, she still met the challenge with arms wide open. I was by her side, in dis-belief. Melissa continued to go to dialysis three days a week, went to community college and worked part time. I was by her side, watching proudly. Melissa spent most of her early

twenties, LIVING. She had many friends, boyfriends and work associates. She frequently went to the clubs and out to eat. She enjoyed every minute she could. Everyone who knew her always said the same thing, "she is so easy to like, she loves life so much..." Aside for only a few of her closest friends, most of the people who knew Melissa did not know she had a chronic health condition. She did that on purpose, she never wanted people to look at her differently or treat her "special." I was by her side, watching and very jealous that I could not be as carefree as she.

In 2003, our mother died suddenly. This was Melissa's best friend and emotional support throughout most of her life. Somehow, I didn't think Melissa could make it through such an ordeal but she did. I was by her side the whole time. She never really got over the loss, despite her outward appearance. She continued to LIVE.

I began to play a bigger role in her life after our mothers' death. I was the one who had to make sure she was eating and taking her medications correctly. I also made sure she was seeing her doctors appropriately. I would financially care for her and then be there to listen and lecture, if needed. Sometimes we disagreed on things but we were there for each other. It was at this point, I became aware of who Melissa really was and what she wanted from this life. She was strong, courageous and smart. Wise beyond her years. She lived every day like it was her last. She would frequently tell me, "Michele, you need to live you life..." She looked at the world with a different pair of eyes than most. Facing death as she did many times before, she knew her time was limited and she wanted to do everything, see everything and be "normal." And she did and she was and I was there. There simply was no greater joy in my life than knowing she was here, healthy and happy.

On November 20, 2006, Melissa died. Her death was not a result of her life long illness, rather from a hidden illness, one that even I did not know she had. Melissa died from a mental illness with an ugly title, called SUICIDE. In her letter, she wrote: I am so sorry for hurting everyone, I am just so unhappy and I did not know what else to do..." I never knew she hurt so badly. I was so busy trying to make things happy for her, that I forgot to ask her if she was happy. For a long time after her death, I felt guilty that I had missed something. That

somehow I should have known and should have been able to make IT better. Should have's, could have's, need to's and what if's became my every day existence. I was in such a state of guilt, I could barely get out of bed. Plus the fact, I missed her more than I could have ever imagined. I was now left with just ME and what do I do now?

Two years later, I still do not have any answers to the questions that loom in my mind. The fact is, I didn't see this coming and I couldn't make it better but I can LIVE. I LIVE not in spite of her death but because of her example and her LIFE. Every day is a new day and every day, I start over. Some days are good and some are bad but I am here remembering her, loving her and now she is at my side. It is her turn now to be there for me and encourage me to LIVE. So I do and I am and I will....



CREATIVE CORNER

COPING WITH THE HOLIDAYS

TRADITIONS Submitted by Ramona Corey

At 18 years the holidays are so different that if Mike were to return he would not know them but in the early days, I recall my son's need for the comfort of tradition.

Mike, my husband, died in Aug and as the days of Christmas crept up on us I remember wanting only to disappear - yes, that's it, I would whisk us away. I planned that we would go away and spend the holiday at Disney - what child wouldn't want that - but to my shock Michael (9 yrs old) said "aren't we going to have Christmas like we always did" As we always did? What a question how could anything be as it was. Reluctantly I reassured him yes, it would be like always, so zombiefied I put up a houseful of decorations, did the Christmas shopping (which really was just a pile of stuff that could be wrapped and placed under the tree - who could think about the perfect gift).

Well the season pounced upon us like an agonizing ton of bricks falling on us - there was no escaping it. I recall to my daughter's horror, shopping at the mall with her and the song Ice Castle came over the sound system and it was the final straw - I burst out sobbing, you know the one where you can't contain it any longer. I tried not to be a spectacle but..... and so goes that road of healing!!

The day finally came, we kept the traditions of delicious coffeecake and OJ while we opened the presents then on to an afternoon of cooking with company coming and going (and yes each one came with that look you get in the early days). Finally it was dinner but what about THE EMPTY CHAIR at the head of the table, what to do about the empty chair. That was the day that I **decided** that was my place and I have been there ever since. It was a decision, I needed to remind myself that WAS where I belonged and I needed to reassure my children that I was there to do the job. It really is the subtle things that often impact us. After 18 years I still recall that decision each time I sit at the head of the table. We survived the day and on the 26th left for Disney and then to Reno so share New Year's Eve with family.

The trip although less than perfect was dotted with some moments of joy and some of great pain but it is what we were able to do at the moment as a family. My daughter's 19th birthday was while we were away but it is just a blur other than it was painful for her and for me. I recall her crying as the New Year rolled in and there was nothing I could dotime always marched forward. Life goes on.

What I have discovered is that the tradition of the past kept us safe and secure for a time but after a few years of tradition it gave way to change as tradition became painful in it's self and growth became necessary for survival. I also have discovered that "out the mouths of babes". I'm so grateful I listened to the need of a very small boy who seemed to know the best road for us to take.

To those of you embarking on this journey, listen, listen to the words of your family and find a balance for all because there is no right way to get thru the holidays – only what is best for your family. Be brave, approach the subject – before the holidays descend upon you, come up with a plan (and yes plans can be changed but start somewhere) and allow yourself to be less than perfect. At 18 years I embrace that fractured person I used to be and am ever so grateful that I have survived the unthinkable.

I spent this past Christmas with my son's fiancée and family and my son had to make sure that we had coffeecake to share while we opened our gifts. The tradition has been passed on.

Here are some ideas from other survivors on coping during the holidays:

☆We survive by doing the 12 days of Christmas every year for someone else in need. It helps us to think of something/someone else and it helps them to get through the days. Laurie Kolish

☆My son and I are participating in a program called Project Angel Tree - where gifts are given to children who have a parent in prison. We are delivering the gifts on Christmas Eve. It helps us to remember that we are blessed and to give to others who are in need and especially to children who are in a difficult situation due to no fault of their own. Brett Christman

☆Instead of staying home, we go away for the holidays, someplace new/different. No old traditions, but the new ones each year of a new place. Kathy O'Hern Fowler

SPRITES Team Enjoyed the NAMI Walk

By Sue Gorman – Walk Team Captain

On Oct 5, about 50 Sprites team members joined the flow at the South Side Heritage Trail for the NAMI Walk. The weather was beautiful, a bit cold in the morning but, warmed up very nice by walk time. We sported our new logo on beautiful blue T-shirts. We raised about \$ 950.00 for NAMI and also about \$1,000 for SPRITES Foundation. As Team Captain, I want to thank all for the support.

We had many people ask what SPRITES stands for and about our team. Some were very interested in the foundation and requested more information. Our SPRITES is growing and the awareness is coming, maybe in little steps now, but I am sure they will turn into large strides very soon.

We still have some of our T-shirts available for sale. If you contact Sprites or me, I will be happy to arrange for you to buy one for \$15.00 per shirt. (Susangorman@comcast.net) Sales from the shirts helps to send out these news letters and have get-togethers like our picnic held this past summer. I am hoping SPRITES has a team for the NAMI Walk next year, and I'm sure we'll have as nice of a time as everyone did this year.

On Saturday, Sept. 13, The Westmoreland County Suicide Prevention Task Force held their second annual Suicide Awareness 5k walk. A dove release started the walk with 180 participants circling the upper lake of Twin Lakes Park in Greensburg, PA. All participants received informational material on suicide including the SPRITES pamphlet "Coping After a Suicide"

Meeting and Events Dates



November 17 - Monday	General Meeting 7:00 PM
November 21 – Friday	Suicide Awareness Conference 9:00 AM
November 22 – Saturday	National Survivor's Conference 10:00 AM
December 10 - Wednesday	Candle Light Memorial - Riverview Presbyterian Church 7:00 PM

2009

February 16 – Monday	General Meeting 7:00 PM
April 21 – Tuesday	General Meeting 7:00 PM
Date to be Determined	Annual Picnic
Dates to be Determined	General Meetings

ANNOUNCEMENTS

James Doyle, MPA, Director, Outreach and Volunteer Recruitment for CONTACT Pittsburgh will be attending the Nov. 17th meeting to present possible ideas of how our two organizations may be able to compliment each other.

3rd Annual Suicide Awareness & Prevention Conference will be held in Greensburg on Friday 11/21/08 from 9 AM – 4 PM. For information and to register call Lorin Zimmerman @ 724-520-1111 ext. 315.

National Survivor's Day Conference will be held in at the University of Pittsburgh on Sat. 11/22/08 from 10 AM – 3 PM. 3500 Victoria St, Victoria Bldg. 2nd Fl., Pgh 15213, University of Pittsburgh Nursing School

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Mission Statement

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 compassionate 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.

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