

Special Interest Group on Postvention: *Newsletter.*



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Voices that Inspired a Nation to Action:

The United States National Strategy for Suicide Prevention (NSSP) defines postvention as the "response and care for individuals affected in the aftermath of a suicide attempt or suicide death." In many places around the world, postvention is seen as a clinical support service for people who have lost a loved one to suicide. Such support helps individuals heal and helps prevent additional suicides by addressing the needs of a vulnerable group. But those who have lost friends, family members, or loved ones to suicide should not be viewed merely as individuals in need of clinical support, but also as allies who can add their voice to the cause of suicide prevention. The experience of the United States is a testament to the power of the active engagement of those bereaved by suicide.

In the late 1990s, I worked for a member of the U.S. Senate (the upper house of our national legislature). His name is Senator Harry Reid. While helping him prepare for a hearing on mental health and the elderly, I discovered that the state he represented, Nevada, had the highest rate of suicide in the nation. This also marked the moment when I became aware that suicide was a leading cause of death in the United States as well as in many nations around the world.

At the hearing, my boss revealed that he had lost his father to suicide many years earlier. This was the first time he had publicly shared this fact. After the hearing, we heard from individuals from all over the country who were touched by suicide. They acknowledged the senator's loss and asked him to help lift the veil of secrecy that surrounded suicide and put suicide prevention on the public policy agenda. Many people who had lost loved ones to suicide came to our nation's capital to meet with the Senator and other elected representatives. Two of these people were Jerry and Elsie Weyrauch, who had lost their daughter Terri to suicide. The Weyrauchs founded the Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN USA), which was dedicated to building the political will to address the problem of suicide. They were aware that the United Nations report *The Prevention of Suicide: Guidelines for the Formulation and Implementation of National Strategies* called for countries to create national suicide prevention strategies and coordinating bodies to oversee the implementation of these strategies.

The Weyrauchs and others who had lost loved ones to suicide collected thousands of signatures on petitions calling on the U.S. Congress to do the following: to pass legislation ending the discrimination between treatment for mental and physical health concerns, and to create a national strategy for suicide prevention. Once each year, they sorted the petitions by state and congressional district and travelled to Washington to deliver the petitions to members of Congress. They gave a voice and a face to the statistics about suicide and inspired the nation to respond.

Our legislators were asked to introduce and support resolutions affirming that suicide is a national problem and that our nation needed a national strategy for suicide prevention. These resolutions passed in 1997. At about the same time, Dr. David Satcher became Surgeon General. The Surgeon General's job is to advance the health of the people of the United States and advise the president and the secretary of health and human services on health policy. In 1999, Dr. Satcher put suicide prevention and mental health on the national agenda by issuing *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent Suicide*.

In 2001 the *National Strategy for Suicide Prevention: Goals and Objectives for Action (NSSP)* was published. In 2004, thanks to the courageous efforts of another U.S. Senator, Gordon Smith from Oregon, legislation was signed into law that helped states, tribal nations, and colleges create youth suicide prevention and early intervention programs.

In 2010 the United States created the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention to oversee the implementation of the NSSP, champion suicide prevention as a national priority, and cultivate the resources needed to make and sustain progress. In 2012 the NSSP was revised. That revision includes a goal (Goal 10) to "Provide care and support to individuals affected by suicide deaths and attempts to promote healing and implement community strategies to help prevent further suicides."

People who have lost friends and loved ones to suicide were the catalysts that led to the first NSSP; the creation of the Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention; and the elevation of postvention to the position it now holds in the field of suicide prevention in our country. The efforts of those bereaved by suicide who have lost a family member, loved one, or friend to suicide remind us how important it is to ensure all voices of those affected by the tragedy of suicide are included in the effort to create a truly national and truly comprehensive movement to prevent suicide. The voices and stories of those touched by suicide loss have inspired this nation to action.

Jerry Reed, Ph.D., MSW
Chair, Council of Organizational Representatives
International Association for Suicide Prevention

Alan Staines Farberow Award Recipient 2013



Alan Staines OAM OF (Envoy), was the Founder and Director of Hope for Life, the Salvation Army's Suicide Prevention Bereavement Support Services from 2006 up to June 2013. He was a driving force behind the establishment of the Salvation Army's suicide bereavement services. For over 30 years Alan has played a pivotal role in the recognition and development of Postvention Services in Australia.

Alan was responsible for convening the Inaugural Australian Postvention Conference in 2007 and subsequent Australian Postvention Conferences in 2009 and 2012 for the bereaved by suicide. He was also responsible for developing the Australian Lifekeeper Memory Quilt initiative which provides families with a tangible and therapeutic way of remembering their loved ones. In 2012 this initiative was researched and evaluated by Dr Kath Peters ([University of Western Sydney](#)) in collaboration with Alan. The Quilt Project has now expanded to include almost every State in Australia. In 2013 Alan was responsible for the formation and establishment of Postvention Australia - A National Association for the Bereaved by Suicide. The need for this body was highlighted at the Postvention Conferences Alan convened. He is a Board member of Postvention Australia and serves as National Secretary of the Association.

Alan has been actively involved in suicide prevention/ Bereavement Support programs for more than three decades. He played a key role in establishing the Salvo Care Line (1983) and the Salvation Army OASIS Youth Care Centre in Surry Hills (1992). In 1991 Alan founded and helped establish Suicide Prevention Australia (SPA) and for 18 years he served on the SPA Board as National Secretary. He undertook a range of additional responsibilities including organising SPA's National Conferences.

Alan's ongoing vision is to establish and build a strong network that provides holistic, physical, emotional and spiritual support, comfort and understanding to enhance the health and well-being of every person bereaved by suicide. He continues to serve as a Board Member of The Salvation Army's Hope for Life national programs.

In 2003, in recognition of Alan's perseverance and tireless efforts in suicide prevention, he was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for services to young people through Suicide Prevention Australia and the Salvation Army. In 2004, he was honoured with Life Membership of Suicide Prevention Australia. In 2007, Alan received the Order of the Founder (OF), the highest Salvation Army honour for distinguished service.

Alan Staines, OAM (Envoy)

National Secretary

Postvention Australia - National Association for the Bereaved by Suicide

When “Normal” Changed, A Survivor’s Story.

April 7, 2008 was a day that would change my life forever. Since that day, nearly six years later, my life changed in a negative way that will never fully diminish, but in a positive way that gives me joy and an understanding of me. My life continues to become more joyful each day I am blessed with breath. Fortunately, the positive greatly balances the negative.

My name is Rob, and I am a relatively normal divorced man who raised two very loving sons.

My oldest son, Andy, 26 years old, enjoyed the gem business and was engaged to his business partner.

Andy was well liked, a talented mechanic, and was afraid of very little. He called me nearly every day to check in and tell me he loved me.

Seven years ago my job relocated me from Tucson to Phoenix, Arizona. I left my two grown sons behind, and all was good. After one year of living away, my youngest son, Geoffrey, made me a Tata for the first time. After two years in my new location I was well into the process of learning my new city and making friends.

It was Monday, 5:37 PM MST. My cell phone woke me from a light nap.

“Is this Mr. Groover?” the emotionless voice asked. “Yes, I am Robert Groover.”

“Are you the father of Andy?” the detective asked?

“Yes”, I replied.

The Tucson police detective then told me my son had been found in his apartment, dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head. He confirmed his death a suicide. I was in disbelief.

Since all suicides are treated as homicides until suicide is confirmed, it was five days, Saturday, before we were able to bury my son.

Those five days remain a blur: shock- disbelief-denial-numbness.

After the funeral it was time to come back home.

I told myself I would return to work on Monday. Monday came, I went to work, and left after fifteen minutes because I could not function.

My second granddaughter was born one week later, and though I love her very much, my state of functioning made it difficult to be excited about this new person in my life.

In the two weeks that followed the funeral I saw every indoor and outdoor museum Phoenix had to offer. I did anything to keep busy and not be alone at home.

I knew myself well enough to know I could not navigate this devastation alone. With the help of the HR department at work, I found EMPACT-Suicide Prevention Center, who sponsored Survivors of Suicide (SOS) support groups in the Phoenix metroplex.

I also found a psychologist who helped me re-learn to balance my depression-distorted brain chemistry, and slowly recover my mental functionality.

I attended the SOS group religiously. I was depressed. I cried. I wanted to die but did not want to die at my own hand. I listened to stories relayed by first-timers to group, and understood their pain to be as real as mine. My deep grief remained very real, horrible and ever present for an ugly period of time.

After three months of attending group something changed. Listening to the story of a “newbie”, I realized I was no longer “new” in this club of suicide survivors. My deepest chasm was no longer as deep.

I continued with my psychologist for six months, then was released. I continued with my SOS group for two years.

During this two year process our group facilitator, also a counselor, asked me to become involved with an *ad hoc* group reporting to the Arizona Suicide Prevention Coalition. This gave me the opportunity to talk about my son’s suicide and its effects on me as I continued to talk and work towards bringing suicide out of its taboo closet.

Over the next few years I volunteered to assist with EMPACT-SPC’s 5K Walk to Support Survivors of Suicide, spoke to a few interested faith-based groups, and continued to come to terms with my “new normal”.

Moving forward is a tough road for a Survivor. I lost friends I thought I would never lose. I became better friends with those who tried to understand and who allowed me to be myself. I made new friends in other Survivors who will remain lifelong friends.

I learned to let go of relationships that didn't work, especially those relationships that didn't allow me to talk about this life crippling event. I will never be the person I was before this suicide so drastically changed my life.

There is not a single moment of each day I do not think of, and desperately miss, Andy. But I have learned my life has meaning: a much deeper meaning than I ever knew before this tragedy occurred. I found hope.

I now co-facilitate a grief course not related to EMPACT-SPC. I also co-facilitate a relatively new SOS group through EMPACT-SPC for newer fellow Survivors.

Being with Survivors is a blessing to me and to other Survivors as well. We understand what we are experiencing. Those who have not had a close relationship with a Completer of Suicide do not understand us. And, God willing, I hope they never will.

I am, and have always been, a very spiritual person. Through this experience, I never lost faith in, nor ever blamed, my Creator.

I relate to the Christian story of Lazarus, and his miraculous waking from the dead. I find this story a metaphor of me. When my son died, I died as well, but I did not quit breathing. Through hard work I escaped my death and slowly found life worth living again.

My greatest joy is to be with others as they rediscover life in their "new normal", whether their grief is a result of suicide or other loss from death.

Hard work begets hope. Hope begets living. Living begets joy. Joy begets peace.

Rob Groover

10/24/2013

EMPACT-Suicide Prevention Center

Survivors of Suicide Program

IASP Remembrance Ceremony in Oslo: A Glow Around the World.

On Friday, September 27th at dusk, I joined about 30 attendees from the International Association for Suicide Prevention's World Congress as we walked together through the streets of Oslo to attend a Remembrance Ceremony at Domkirken, Oslo's main church.

This place was chosen because of its special connection to supporting communities in grief. After the July 22, 2011 massacre, friends and loved ones gathered at the Oslo cathedral to mourn the 93 victims killed in twin terror attacks from a bombing in downtown Oslo and a mass shooting on Utoya Island. Because of the important role the church played after this tragedy, the church was forever changed and became a place of safety for community healing.

During the remembrance ceremony, participants from Australia, Norway, China, Belgium, Ireland, the US and many other countries encircled a light globe in the center of the sanctuary. After a moment of reflective silence, an opera singer began a haunting aria that filled the cathedral and brought on waves of emotion to all present. Not only for the losses experienced by our group and the spread of tragedy, but for the impact that those losses had around the planet, but for the collective grief of this place and the honoring of the lives that goes hand in hand with the mourning.

After a welcome from the church's pastor and Henning Herristad from LEVE - The Norwegian Organization for the Suicide Bereaved, Jill Fisher from Australia's StandBy and I led the group in a four candle ritual:

FOUR CANDLES RITUAL

The first candle we light represents our grief. The pain of losing you is intense. It reminds us of the depth of our love for you.

The second candle we light represents our courage, to confront our sorrow, to comfort each other, to change our lives.

The third candle we light in your memory. For the times we laughed, the times we cried, the caring and joy you gave us.

The fourth candle we light for our love.

We light this candle so that your light will always shine.

As we share this day of remembrance with our family and friends, we cherish the special place in our hearts that will always be reserved for you. We thank you for the gift your living brought to each of us. We love you. We remember you.

After the lighting of the four candles, we invited the others to light a candle in remembrance of a loved one who had passed away, in honour of those that struggle with or who have overcome suicide crises in their lives, and in solidarity of the fight we are in together to end suicide. Some people said the names of their loved ones aloud; others paid their respect in silence or in tears. At the end of the ceremony, the glow of the candles around the globe was more than a ritual, it was a symbol of how our international community can pull together out of this human devastation and bring light and warmth to a world filled with despair.

As we closed our remembrance ceremony, a cappella music again filled the space with reverence and awe. We exited with our hearts filled with emotion and made a commitment to bring this tradition to every IASP conference.

The light shines on.

*Sally Spencer-Thomas
Carson J Spencer Foundation (USA)*



Upcoming Events

27-30 August, 2014

15th European Symposium on Suicide and Suicidal Behaviour

Suicide prevention is mental health promotion

Tallinn, Estonia



The ESSSB is a bi-annual event, where people acting in the field of suicide research and prevention - researchers, clinicians, volunteers - can meet, share experiences and present recent achievements in order to save lives all over the world. The ESSSB offers not only a high-level scientific programme with plenary lectures, parallel sessions, workshops and posters, but also social events that connect conference participants in an informal way. The slogan of the ESSSB15 - "Suicide prevention is mental health promotion" - emphasizes an integrated and hopeful approach to suicide prevention. The ESSSB15 will be held in the vibrant Nordic city of Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. Conference organizers are the Estonian-Swedish Mental Health and Suicidology Institute (ERSI, www.suicidology.ee).

16-20 June, 2015

XXVIII IASP World Congress

New Technologies and New Discoveries in Suicide Prevention

Montréal, Québec, Canada

The 28th World Congress of the International Association for Suicide Prevention, in collaboration with the **Quebec Suicide Prevention Association**, the **Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention** and Suicide Action Montreal, will be held from June 16-20, 2015 in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The congress theme is: New Technologies and New Discoveries in Suicide Prevention. For further information, please [click here to contact](#) Professor Brian Mishara.

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