



**SURVIVORS OF
BEREAVEMENT
BY SUICIDE**

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John Peters – A Crusader and Survivor

John, who died in April, was a great champion for those who have been bereaved by suicide. He and his wife, Jean, survivors themselves after the loss



of their son Dale, made it their mission to bring to the attention of those who should be concerned and interested, the particular grief experienced by those who suffer this type of loss.

Originally from North Wales and trained in agriculture, John worked in Kenya for ten years before training as a science teacher on returning to the U.K., then taking a degree in psychology. After his son's death, he graduated with a Master's in Suicidology just before his 70th birthday.

His tireless efforts on behalf of the bereaved, talking, lecturing and writing, made him internationally recognised on the subject. He strongly believed in the postvention, the intervention conducted after a suicide, which he felt should mainly take the form of support for the bereaved. He argued that this pillar of Suicidology was often neglected by professionals and academics, in favour of the science of prevention and intervention. He strongly emphasised the importance of Science **and** Practice, stressing that research must benefit its subjects.

He asked, "If the objective of suicide research should be to inform those who most need the support, would it not be more effective to publish the research in popular magazines, rather than condemn them to lie on academic shelves?" This was typical of his belief that the value of research and academic thoughts are diminished without subsequent practice and supplementation.

His pragmatic approach and concern to assist the bereaved brought him to SOBS; Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide, which is a UK charity run by the bereaved for the bereaved.

Our main strands of support are local groups, a National Helpline, which operates every day of the year from 9am to 9pm and an email helpline. He was involved in the running of groups in Staffordshire and Warwickshire and gave a day every week to manning the Telephone Helpline.

The loss of a dear one to suicide be it a child, partner, parent, sibling, close friend or colleague carries extra burdens of grief and worry above and beyond those felt after other sudden deaths. Survivors will be concerned about the inquest and possible scrutiny from the Press. They may well feel that suicide still carries a social stigma with which they will be forever associated. They can be consumed by the unanswerable questions of "Why did it happen?" and "Could I have prevented it?" The trauma of finding the deceased may plant visions in their mind, which persist forever. There is often anger, which may be directed toward the deceased, society in general, health and professional services, a specific individual, or all of these.

John was a master at encouraging survivors to unburden themselves of these feelings, either in a group situation or one to one on the Helpline. Recognising that the survivor may also feel suicidal, he could assist them in acknowledging their feelings and taking the first steps to deal with them.

In the book *The Winding Road*, which he co-authored with Michelle Linn-Gust, John discussed the concept of rejection and sense of 'abandonment', deeply felt by survivors. He referred to the sense of rejection by the deceased of any thoughts for the well-being of survivors and also of their avoiding of issues that are left for the survivors to face. He also identified the rejection of a commitment for those left behind; for instance children left for a partner or grandparents to bring up. He also talked about the rejection by the deceased of the opportunity to share a future with the other members of their family.

While we do have over 50 local groups active, we are always looking to set up more, especially in major conurbations where we do not yet have a presence. This includes cities such as Belfast, Bristol, Leeds and Milton Keynes and we want to have more groups in the London area. If any professional in one of these areas would like to work with us to establish a new SOBS group, we would be very pleased to hear from them.

John's insights made him an invaluable contributor to the debates on postvention and prevention. He had a quick and enquiring mind and was a stimulating conversationalist. His background in public service and education made him cautious about expenditures by charities and the contribution of paid officers, which was understandable when he gave so generously of his own time to us at SOBS. This led to some brisk discussions on strategy to which John was always ready to make an input. However, there was never any doubt about his over-riding objective, which was the care of the bereaved. He will be missed very much by many people.

GEOFF PRICE
TRUSTEE AND TREASURER SURVIVORS
OF BEREAVEMENT BY SUICIDE.

The Volcano That Exists Within Us All

Being a member of this exclusive club for just over one year the journey has been and still is difficult and torturous. But as each day dawns a reality emerges that is set in stone that the loss of my wife Michelle is final and permanent. There were no goodbyes, no protestations of love, no hugs and no final kisses. So what am I left with? Well, I have three children aged 19, 23 and 32 none of whom are married and all living away from home. Thankfully we are a very close knit family unit which is ironic considering that Michelle chose to end her life leaving me to be the anchor in the family.

Recently another thought has emerged that says we as survivors are like volcanoes, because that's how I see myself. Some volcanoes have seemingly appeared quiet for years, and I in much the same way have appeared to be quiet and coping in the eyes of my family, friends and work colleagues. When

those around me question as to whether the volcano within me is silent more often than not I nod and say 'Yes, I'm ok'.

However, even the most silent of volcanoes can change. Occasionally my volcano for no apparent reason begins to rumble and within my thoughts and emotions start to bubble slightly but then subside just in the way that some volcanoes behave. We all have as survivors this volcano within us and it will never remain dormant and silent. For me seeing a couple holding hands, walking arm in arm sharing moments together even if it is shopping in the supermarket, makes my emotional volcano stir itself.

Every so often I have those awful moments when the volcano within not just rumbles but erupts furiously and suddenly, out of nowhere, a burst of emotions pour out of me like the lava pouring out of the volcano. I cry and cry at the loss of Michelle, my tears seem to go on endlessly. It's hard to control. Its heart wrenching but then it too stops and calm returns.

So I have come to realise that for the rest of my life the volcano that occupies my soul will never be permanently silent and dormant and that I will have to live in its presence knowing that from time to time it will rumble and even spew out its emotional lava. However, I will not let it destroy me and my family.

I leave you all with one last thought of comfort which is you are not alone. When your volcano erupts there is the SOBS helpline at hand to calm things down again. I rang it when all my emotions were about to erupt and I was so thankful to hear at the other end of the phone a voice I was familiar with and gradually as we talked the volcano within me began to quieten down. Thank God for SOBS and let's pray that we do not let that volcano within destroy us completely.

DAVID WINSTON
BRADFORD SOBS

Fishes Flying

I lost my brother to suicide in August 2013. My mother and I are regular attendees at Sheffield SOBS where we were told about the group art day at one of the meetings. It was going to be a workshop day to produce a piece of art as a memorial to the person we'd lost, and that it would be exhibited as part of a larger exhibition by CAST, giving people with emotional and mental issues an outlet through art.

I went with my mum and we were both feeling emotional on the day as it brought lots of feelings to the surface. There were nearly 10 of us who came together with different stories, different loved ones that had taken their lives but we all felt on the same level. After a fantastic lunch we all set to work. Some did collage, some painting, others poems. We were all totally involved with our pieces and it seemed like a meditation in itself.



I painted a scene with 2 fishes leaping over crashing waves to explain that my brother was free now and escaping all of his problems, his pain was there with love (the other fish) to be free.

The afternoon went so quickly, before we left we explained our art. There were some beautiful, personal and painful works. It was such a comforting, creative and, in the end beautiful experience to be with loving people that had been through similar traumatic times and had space to express our feelings.

Most of us had to complete our pieces at home before we all came together to help put the exhibition together. The opening was a great mix of speeches, music, art and food. The entire exhibition was great with all kinds of different art.

The feedback from the exhibition was really good.

We've since met up a few times and had another session. Many of us have said that it



felt like a corner had been turned with our grieving, that it had been the start of a process and that we would all like to have the chance to express different emotions.

I would really recommend anyone to do this. It doesn't have to involve an exhibition of the work. Just getting a group of people together who have been affected by suicide was such a great outlet and sharing experience.

ANNA GUEST
SHEFFIELD SOBS

“When we lose someone we love, we discover that time does not heal everything. After a while, the ache in our heart begins to ease a bit, and we laugh again, life goes on and many times we reconnect with those still physically with us in much deeper more beautiful ways. And eventually the good memories outnumber the sad thoughts and we begin to sense that what we thought was lost, has actually been with us all along. We can't explain it, touch it or prove it – but there are moments we catch ourselves smiling because we know it's true.”

PAUL S. BOYNTON – BEGIN WITH YES
ANITA

Life after Suicide

Many people wrote about the programme on TV that Angela was involved with. It proved a great help to lots of people and I copy here one of the many emails that I received. She wrote:

“I've just watched the documentary by the lovely Birkenhead woman all about her husband's suicide and the repercussions for her and her family. I had seen it on IPlayer for a while but only tonight plucked up the courage to watch it. Most of the programme was watched with slow persistent tears pouring down my cheeks. It all rang so true with me and

my bereavement 'journey' following my Dad's suicide 7 years ago.

There was no note; there were no warning signs (although I still analyse those last few weeks and conversations, looks and behaviours for clues). I was with the police when Dad had just been found hanging in a tree 500 yards from my childhood home and my anxious Mum so near wondering where he was.

The pain was I struggle to find the right word, it was just catastrophic and seeing the interview with the recently bereaved wife on TV brought it all back. I also wanted to die, to escape the all-consuming pain and anxiety, the nausea and panic. I rang Samaritan's, I rang 999 I was angry, the pain was so huge not even the love and consistency of my husband or the need to look after my 3 children could shift the horror of anxiety that truly overpowered me. It was a vile time, my Doctor helped with tablets, my friends helped as I talked and talked obsessively about what had happened and desperately searched for some way to get rid of the pain and find some fun and joy and relief again.

But, as said in the film it DOES/DID get better. It has taken a long time and now I realise there was an order and a timeline that I had to go through which would not be rushed. But life did return, peace did come back, happiness is here again. There will always be a sad legacy to my Dad's death, my Mother will never recover and is now institutionalised.

I do worry that my children have an "opt out option" if things get tough in their lives but we have talked and I just hope they are a product of a more open honest family upbringing than my Dad had. He kept his feelings in and now I wonder if I ever truly knew him. How could I not have seen his pain?

I think it was powerful in the programme when asked by the Downton Abbey actor if things would get better the presenter emphatically said "Yes, yes, it will I guarantee". It resonated strongly with me when I asked the same question to my Doctor desperately and she said "Yes, you will get better" and I hung onto that trying to believe her and here I am now, better.

I always think Dad's suicide was like letting off a bomb in our family and it's only now 7 years on that the grass is beginning to grow over the earth and the stars are beginning to fade.

My Father-in-law my children's other adored Grandad committed suicide 18 months before my Dad. He had tried once, a failed overdose, and had some psychiatric help but 6 months later succeeded, also by hanging. I wonder if my Dad thought in some way "that's a man's way out". Was there an element of copying? It's all so interwoven and now none of it can be changed.

Of course this has been a double whammy for my children, my husband and me. I can't change things, it has all happened and now my grown up children are hopefully different human beings and I am always there for them. They know that. I have to have faith in my abilities as a Mother.
Thanks for listening!!!

RUTH

Change in Church Law

The Church of England Synod has voted very recently to "sweep away centuries of ecclesiastical law which said those who die by their own hand must be denied the complete rites of a Christian burial". This is a very welcome and long overdue change. The motion proposing this change has been put before the Synod earlier but only now voted on with a very positive outcome.

Canon Mike Parsons argued that the continued existence of the law sent out a message that the Church is "hostile" towards people who feel driven to take their own lives and that a change in canon law would send out a "very positive message to society at large".

Canon Mike Parsons had previously attended a day conference on Suicide Prevention which had had a deep effect on him. The NHS together with SOBS were involved in that conference and it's encouraging to see how it has had an influence in this national change.

TRISH THOMAS, GLOUCESTER GROUP

Hi my name is Rob,

My young son Adam who was 15 and my beautiful wife Nikki both sadly took their own lives.

Alarmingly, each year more than 6000 people tragically take their own life. Each one leaves a lasting and devastating impact on their families, friends and colleagues.

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS) provide valuable support to those left behind in the wake of suicide as well as raise awareness and help to improve access to support services.

On the 22.3.15 I ran the Reading Half Marathon to raise much needed funding to SOBS and promote awareness of the challenges faced by those affected by Suicide.

I'm not a professional athlete and getting fit has been a challenge in itself, but Jason at DW Fitness Clubs in Southport has been excellent in helping me to get 'race fit'.

I have raised £2768.76 and my employer Microsoft will be matching the amount raised. So thanks once again for your support. You are helping to make a difference.

ROB

I like many other young people faced many anxieties and depressive episodes while learning about myself, my feelings and other people and still do to this day. Nothing however could prepare me for one September morning in 2011. Simon my 21 year old brother felt the only way he could express his rejection and



anger was to take his own life due to personal cyber hate received on social media. I ran the London Marathon on 26.4.15 to raise funds for SOBS Gloucester to develop their work. I have raised a total of £880.00. I wish to thank everyone for their support.

It's reported that 6000 people take their own lives, through suicide each year in the UK, with numerous relations and friends left distraught; with your help we could change this.

GARY FOXLEY



Becca, myself and Ashley did a tandem sky dive on the 22.3.15 in loving memory of Katie. We have raised

£159.00 for Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide because the support that SOBS provides is essential. Thank you to all who have supported us.



We held a Charity race night on 7th March and raised £2000.52 which has gone directly to the Sheffield group.

We have also done the Sheffield half marathon. So far we have raised £620 on our Just Giving page, hopefully more to come.

We hope every penny helps. Thank you again for the comfort and support you have given to Katie's family and friends. You will have my continued support. Thanks.



NATASHA

Walking Out Of Darkness

Suffolk SOBS joined hundreds of walkers on Saturday May 16th and walked ten miles along the River Thames with the charity CLASP.



Just over £1,280 was raised, it goes without saying a very big thank you to everyone who helped to make this event a success. Survivors fundraising from Suffolk voted on 45% of all funds going to support their National head office, 45% was donated on a county level and the remaining amount was given to CLASP (Counselling, Living Advice, Suicide Prevention) who organised a packed full day.

We hope to join the walk next year and would love to see more survivors on the day representing SOBS

SUZY (SOBS SUFFOLK))

Dates for Your Diary

World Suicide Prevention Day 10-9-15. For more information follow the link www.iasp.info/wspd

Bolton Retreat 11-9-15 – 13-9-15. Franciscan Friary Pantasaph. For more information contact Janet or Noel on 01942 201744.

The University of Manchester's 4th Annual Suicide Bereavement Conference – 24-9-15. Please open the following link www.bbmh.manchester.ac.uk/cmhs/ConferenceFlyer2015.pdf

Swindon Group 2nd Annual Conference 7-10-15. For more information please contact jackyswindonsobs@gmail.com by 1-9-15.

Gloucester SOBS Annual Retreat 23-10-15 to 25-10-15. For more information please contact Margaret Carter on 01242 609346, 07810 386216 or onemargaretcarter@talktalk.net

Kent Annual Retreat 8-4-16 to 10-4-16. For more information please contact Sheila Burgman on 01622 751976 or 077515 22125 email: shebee330@gmail.com

Spread the word

Many people have never heard of us – many will never need our help and most cannot imagine that a suicide will ever affect them.

But, when it happens, it is so important that they get the right help and support. Help us by spreading the word and raising awareness about SOBS.

If you know people working in the following professions, tell them about us and encourage them to take a look at our website for more information.

GPs and health professionals
Funeral directors
Police
Coroners

Contact our office if you would like some business cards that include our website and helpline details, also for a small fee we can provide bulk supplies of our publication Support after a Suicide.

Thank you

We would like to thank all our Volunteers for their dedication and hard work. Thank you so much for your commitment of time to our organisation.

Also to all those people who have raised funds with determination and generosity, thank you.

Why not donate

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide is a non-profit organisation which is devoted to assisting at risk and vulnerable clients throughout the country. We provide a supportive environment where they feel comforted, respected and listened to.

We rely on support of generous donors such as you.

Your donation will help ensure the success of our future.

We have attached to the back of this Newsletter a Standing Order mandate form. We ask that you consider supporting our cause by completing the form.

We thank you for your consideration of our request.

Submission of articles, news, events, reflections, etc., for consideration for the January 2016 newsletter must reach the editor no later than 1st December 2015. We reserve the right to publish those submissions that seem most relevant and suitable for the newsletter. Submission does not guarantee inclusion. Submissions can be sent via Email to Ann Culley sobs.news@googlemail.com or sobs.admin@care4free.net or by post to Ann Culley, Flat, 20, Bethell Court, 31 Mickleham Gardens, Cheam Sutton, Surrey SM3 8AF

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