

**Survivors of Bereavement
by Suicide**



S.O.B.S.

Reg. Company No. 4754829
Reg. Charity Number 1098815

S.O.B.S.

Biannual Newsletter - January/June

January 2008

National Office: SOBS, The Flamsteed Centre
Albert Street, Ilkeston, Derbyshire, DE7 5GU

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT - SOBS HISTORY



The Humber Bridge

S.O.B.S TIMELINE 1990 - 2007

The main article of our current newsletter is about the origin and some of the developments within SOBS in the UK. It is my belief that we should have accurate, historical records that will serve as 'source' material for people in the future who may wish to research the role, purpose, effectiveness and development of SOBS in the UK. It is also important that credit is accorded to those who initiated SOBS and those who have given much of their time and effort in the last seventeen years to bring SOBS to where it is today. These people and their work are not to be forgotten.

In this edition of the newsletter we are covering the history of SOBS as recorded by Alice Middleton, our Founder, which we hope you will find interesting. We know that there are many other names and events associated with the development of SOBS to be recorded. If you have not already done so, please provide us with the 'missing pieces' and these will form the second instalment of the history of SOBS in our June edition.

1990 - Founder of S.O.B.S - Alice Middleton lost her brother to suicide on February 7th 1982. It was at this time, she recalls, that the seed was sown in her mind, related to establishing a group specifically for those bereaved by suicide. At the time Alice's brother took his life, Alice was living and working in London, while the rest of her family were in Hull. When Alice returned to live in Hull some years later, she found that her idea to provide a service for those bereaved by suicide was still in her mind. Thus, eight years after her brother's death, she set about establishing such a group. This is how she describes, in her own words, her goal at that time: *'The main aim of SOBS is supporting those bereaved by suicide, being compassionate, having empathy and confidentiality. It is important that survivors feel safe to be themselves. I saw group work as a safe environment, a place of healing and HOPE.'*

Between 1990 and 1991 Alice began advertising, contacting local radio and newspapers and exploring what grants might be available. At this time Alice was working on her own and she realised that she was going to need a support system for herself if she were to be successful in providing a service for others. Alice was a trained Samaritan and this background helped her to be successful in setting up SOBS and providing appropriate support.

**IMPORTANT NEW HELPLINE NUMBER - 0844 5616 855 - BOTH NUMBERS WILL RUN
PARALLEL UNTIL FEBRUARY 2008**

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April 16th 1991 Alice led the first group meeting. It was held in a room at the Social Services in Arcon Drive in Hull. Thirteen people attended. The meetings were held monthly, but in between, Alice also provided telephone contact, support through correspondence and some one-to-one help. Alice had two booklets that she sent out to those who requested them namely **Grief in the Shadows** and **Grief coming out of the Shadows**. Alice recalls that word spread quickly and she received calls from all around the UK and from Europe.

By 1994 there were three groups running. Alice's group in Hull, John and Jean Peters in Birmingham and Hilary in Cheshire.

September 15th - 17th 1995 Alice organised the first SOBS conference at Needler Hall in Cottingham. The Conference included presentations, discussions, group work and workshops. The guest speaker at this Conference was the well known writer and speaker on issues of bereavement Dr. Colin Murray Parkes. These conferences continued until 1997.

1996 saw the founding of a SOBS group on Jersey. Kathleen, from Jersey, had been in contact with Alice the previous year, so that, by the time a meeting was arranged and Alice visited Jersey, a group of people had gathered, willing and ready to work together to provide support to survivors on the island. The group is still in existence today. 1996 also marked the beginning of the one day Conferences organised by John and Jean Peters, supported by their daughter, Heidi. These Conferences continue up to the present day, and you will note that the 2008 conference is advertised in this newsletter.

Eventually, SOBS was registered as a Charity and trustees were enlisted. Funding became available so that a part-time secretary could be employed to ease Alice's load. Gradually, Alice became less involved in the work of SOBS in order to concentrate more on training and lecturing, but there is no doubt that we owe the inception of S.O.B.S. to this lady, and express our thanks to her. Over time, the 'cause' was taken up by others who have worked tirelessly to keep the charity in existence and provide, as we all know a much needed service.

**The Editors look forward to receiving information from others within SOBS who have set up groups and initiated ideas and action to the benefit of Survivors.*



Our attention has been drawn to the e-petitions site linked to 10 Downing Street. If you are computer-literate do go online and support this petition. If you are not handy with a computer ask a family member or friend to go on the site and vote for you. Encourage friends and family to sign up too.
<http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/losttosuicide/>

Dreams Ignored are like unopened letters

Shortly after my daughter Sue took her own life, I had a dream that she was helping my family and me to guide a sailing boat to its mooring. While we were all busy, it dawned on me that Sue was supposed to be 'dead', yet there she was working with us in our shared project. I said "Are you alive, Sue?" She replied cheekily, "Are you, Dad?" I awoke, shocked by the directness of her words and the delivery. Sensing the dream's value, I recorded the dream immediately as I believed this was a gift of communication from my daughter because her words and manner were so much in my daughter's style.

Since that time I have been fortunate to attend two workshops run by Veronica Whitty, who, besides having worked for two years in Calcutta alongside Mother Theresa, has trained in recognising and using the healing power of dreams. Veronica's workshops helped me to accept the gift of my dreams. I relate this experience to you in case there are some of you who might wish to take part in a workshop run by Veronica, to help you respond appropriately to your dreams and to the loss of someone you loved so deeply. If you are interested contact me, BOB HOLLAND on 01484 715 750 or e-mail uztoo@tiscali.co.uk

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The 24th IASP (International Association for Suicide Prevention) World Congress was held in Killarney, Ireland at the end of August. Over 800 researchers, practitioners, volunteers, students, suicide survivors and policy makers attended. Jean and I attended together with Ann Davies and Caroline Simone from SOBS and met many old and new friends from the U.K. and other countries. It was particularly valuable to see how suicide survivors are supported in other countries. In some ways we have innovative activities, but we also have much to learn from other countries. I was invited to join the IASP Task Force on Postvention and will be consulting with other task force members on a document produced by the IASP with the World Health Organisation on the setting up of Survivor Support Groups.

The next big event organized by the IASP is the **12th European Symposium on Suicide and Suicidal Behaviour** on 27th - 30th August 2008 in Glasgow. We have arranged to increase the profile of Suicide Bereavement Support at this symposium, and this will include the result of research being carried out, as well as the way that support is offered to survivors in different countries. You can find out more on the website www.hamptonmedical.com/pdf/2008/esssb12/announcement.pdf or call me on 01827 830679.

John Peters

BOOK REVIEWS

Silent Grief: Publisher Jessica Kingsley: Revised edition April 2007:

Authors: Lukas & Seiden: Price £13.99 ISBN 9781843108474

As a survivor and one who has read a wide range of books on the subject of suicide bereavement, the distinctive feature of this text is its exploration of the effects of the silence that surrounds a suicide bereavement. The subjects of reactions, bargaining, questioning and so on, are discussed in relation to this silence; both silence in the family and in the community. In the preface the authors acknowledge that, since the first edition of this book twenty years ago, the survivors 'still carry a grief that is largely silent.' The book is well written and relevant to both survivors and professionals concerned for the welfare of those bereaved by suicide. I consider that it would be particularly helpful to 'adult children' who are often subject to silence in the family when their parents feel unable to discuss the suicide of a brother, sister, father or mother. In this situation, adult children often have nowhere to turn; this book might help to ease their sense of isolation and break through the silence.

Title: Let me Finis Author: Udo Grashoff ISBN 07553 1443 3 Price:£12.99

This anthology of suicide notes has been arranged with sensitivity and without sensationalism. For those survivors left with a suicide note, it could provide a background against which they can compare and contrast their own message. The theme that caught my attention in many of the notes is the sense of relief that the deceased felt at being able to release themselves from the agony of living. This theme may leave the reader feeling angry that, while releasing one person from mental torture, it is passed on to those left behind. On the other hand, some survivors may experience comfort in knowing that the mental agony of the person they loved is now passed.

It is a book I would recommend to professionals who care for those bereaved by suicide, as it is thought provoking and it is likely to raise their awareness of this particular aspect of suicide bereavement. It might also be helpful to some survivors who are left with a suicide note.

Title: Empowering Children through Art and Expression (Culturally sensitive way of healing trauma and grief)

Authors: Bruce St. Thomas and Paul Johnson ISBN 978-1-84310-789

For anyone new to the subject of grief work with children, and wanting to support children bereaved by suicide, this book provides a starting point for further exploration, into this emerging and valuable approach in helping children to come to terms with their experience of loss and grief. A constant mantra throughout the text is 'creating safety and building trust', as the two core values which must be tangible in the environment if children are to explore grief in the ways that are outlined. These two core values would be essential to children bereaved by suicide, as they often feel that their world is no longer 'safe' and some children lose trust in feeling able to depend on the adults in their lives. This book is theoretical rather than practical.

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VOTES OF THANKS Our first 'thank you' is extended to The Officer Training Corps at the University of Exeter, for their huge donation of £2,578.46, which is going to cover the cost of printing and posting the newsletter for the next few publications. The second vote of thanks is to Paul Coates, Andy Mardell and Malcolm Pidduck, who tackled the coast to coast walk. Malcolm's brother took his own life in 2004 so in memory of him, his brother and friends tackled the 120 mile walk hoping to raise awareness of our charity and at the same time much-needed funds. They also donated money to a charity based in Plymouth called Jeremiah's Journey, which supports children going through bereavement as Malcolm sadly lost his partner to illness around a year after his brother's death. Overall, they raised around £3,500 (money is still coming in), so each charity will be receiving £1,750. Last, but not least Nina Kennedy, London Group leader and a new S.O.B.S. Trustee, completed the Dublin Marathon on 29th October, raising over £1,700 for us. If you did not sponsor Nina at the time, you can still send in a donation, either through the website Just Giving or by sending a cheque directly to the office.

PETS HELP THE GRIEVING PROCESS Michelle Linn-Gust, author of the book 'Do they have bad days in heaven?' spoke about her experience as a sibling survivor at the Post-Vention Conference in Killarney. She is a keen advocate of the place of pets in the grieving process. Children will often speak to a pet about their concerns when they will not speak to adults. I have witnessed this and heard others relate the same experience. The child I am thinking of talked regularly to his hamster about the death of his Grandma, who died a natural death, and his personal tutor, who took her own life. His mother found comfort when she listened to him because she knew then that he was dealing with his grief and loss. Michelle Linn-Gust has written a further book - 'Ginger's Gift; Hope and Healing through dog companionship'. Are there any of our readers who have stories of encouragement to share on this theme? If you have, we would like to hear from you. For those of you who have access to the internet you might like to visit Michelle's website which is www.siblingsurvivors.com

SAM COLLINS, EXPERIENCED FAMILY HOLIDAY FACILITATOR and volunteer with SOBS South Wales Support Group, would like to hear from families who would be interested in joining her on a fully supported family holiday in the South of France. The venue is located in the Cevennes www.gardoussel.com It offers superb accommodation, delicious cuisine, and a host of activities that make up a holiday retreat. The focus is to provide time and space in this healing environment for the whole family, sharing with other families who have also been through the devastation of losing a family member to suicide, For full details please contact Sam at samheartson@phonecoop.coop or on 01269 825231. This event is planned for August 2008 and places will be limited, so if you are attracted to this idea and want more information please make contact as soon as possible.

BIRMINGHAM SUPPORT DAY MAY 17th 2008

John and Jean Peters have held twelve successful support days at Birmingham and have arranged their thirteenth event. They offer you the opportunity to meet others bereaved by suicide, with the aim of gaining support and help by sharing feelings in a constructive and positive atmosphere. Their speakers for 2008 are:

Paul Kelly of **CONSOLE, Ireland** Setting up bereavement services in Ireland.
Caroline Simone of **Derby University** studies in parental suicide.
Margaret Creaney from the West Belfast Suicide support group

The Support Day will be held at the **British Midland Institute** from 9:30 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. on Saturday May 17th. The cost will be £25, which includes coffee/tea and a buffet lunch. The B.M.I. is less than ten minutes' walk from New Street Station, Birmingham. Please contact John Peters (01827 830679) for further details, or see the Events Page on the SOBS website.

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