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Suicide: In Memory

By Kay Kopit

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by: **Kay Kopit**

Debra was radiant in her scarlet dress wrapped tautly over her swollen belly. Proudly she gave each guest a tour of the nursery, decorated in yellows and greens with love and care, as she awaited the birth of her first child. I commented to her friend Carol, "What a perfect day for a shower. The weather is beautiful." Carol and I were hosting this special event for Debra on April 10, 1988. Her baby was due the middle of May. We knew, as well as all her family and friends, she longed to be a mother. She had been planning her family since high school. As I drove the half hour drive home, I reflected what a superb day this had been. Debra was healthy and her dreams were coming true. I felt extremely close to her and was grateful I could honor her with a party.

Around 10:00 p.m. that evening the telephone rang. I was startled. The phone ringing after 9:00 p.m. has always bothered me. I chose to let the answering machine pick it up and I screened the call. At this time of my life I was doing commercial voice-overs. My message was an upbeat rhythmical ditty, which might have been construed by some as annoying and commercial. I heard my sister-in-law say in a somber tone of voice, "Kay, you must get rid of that message." I picked up. "John is dead. He did it. He shot himself." I was paralyzed with the weight of her words! I don't think I have ever felt worse emotional pain in all of my life. My brother, age 45, my only sibling, had killed himself.

I had already experienced death. My mother, father and stepfather all had died from complications due to alcoholism. Although I do believe that drug abuse and alcoholism are a form of suicide, this was different! The depth of my grief was indescribable. I do the best I can with thoughts of John, but to this day I can't dwell on him for too long because it still hurts so badly. He was my baby brother, a devoted father, and a good soul who grew up with major distortions in his home life. Because I understood the nature of his disease, I had empathy for him and his decision.

John was troubled, beginning in his youth. He was the child who "acted out" his frustrations with the imbalanced life we led. In grade school he tormented other children, not with violence, but with incessant teasing. He craved love and attention and went out of his way to concoct methods of getting

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it. There was an underlying loneliness, which I could detect. In high school, my brother was sick and bed ridden for several weeks. He had epilepsy (which was under control with drugs) and thrombophlebitis (blood clots.) It was recommended by his physician that he quit playing football a sport he loved. During his illness he plotted his future. He wanted to be a millionaire. He thought the path to a successful life was money. As soon as he was able, he began studying and working at a variety of sales jobs to accomplish his goals. He had a gift for marketing and a charismatic personality, which enabled him to influence sales, whatever the product, and also impress women. He became quite popular, was well dressed and handsome. From outward appearances it looked like John would succeed.

His businesses grew rapidly; he married and started a family. I truly believe he wanted to flourish in relationships as much as work. But, he was crippled. He didn't know how. He loved being a father and did the best he could for his two young girls. They remember him fondly. On his tombstone it reads, "Greatest Dad." They were 10 and 11 when he died.

Although John didn't drink because of his epilepsy, he was a compulsive gambler. This disease accelerated during the early 1980's. Before his death, he was heavily in debt. Although none of our family knew, he was also addicted to "the businessman's cocktail; cocaine," and had become a heavy user. It didn't take long for him to slide into deep depression. His world began to deteriorate and he was in trouble with the law for the first time in his life.

I lived away from John, in different states, for many years. I wasn't aware of the seriousness of his addiction. Actually, no one was because my brother was expert at keeping secrets. The culmination of his disease was with his arrest for selling cocaine. The fact that he would go to prison exacerbated his sadness. He felt he could not survive incarceration. The fear, shame, and humiliation consumed him. He tried an overdose of pills and was unsuccessful. I didn't find out about this until weeks after the attempt. I begged John to go to NA, Al-Anon, or any 12-step program. He wouldn't confront the truth and remained in denial. I used myself as an example because; after all, we shared the same family background; all this to no avail. He actually tried again a second time, but a friend thwarted his efforts. This put him in Intensive Care for several weeks. It was there that I spoke with him for the last time. He said, "I wish I had spent more time with you; I love you Kay." The day he left the hospital, he was determined not to fail, and chose a gun. A precious life was over.

We were different in many ways, John and I. He didn't believe in God. He did not feel the guidance of a Higher Power and he did not have faith in the divinity of Love.

Several years before my brother's death, I, too, reached the level of psychological depression to want to end my life. This event is detailed in my DVD, "I Survived: One Woman's Journey of Self-Healing and Transformation." I thought about it, but instead of acting on it, I reached out to Suicide Prevention and was saved by a voice on the telephone. A gentle man listened to my crying and enveloped me with understanding. The day I reached bottom, I knew I was dying. But, I heard the voice of God, the Brain of the Universe. I didn't give up. My transformation is documented in the article, "I Survived."

Debra and her family were loving and supportive when John died. She tried to help me come to grips with my sorrow. I had no idea that she herself was beginning the throes of addiction. It wasn't

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obvious. Debra was consumed with being a new mother and she excelled at the role. She seemed to handle the myriad jobs of motherhood without flinching. What no one knew was her reliance on wine to combat stress. She hid it well. There was no reason to suspect codependency or compulsive drinking, because Debra's parents are not alcoholic or drug users. Although not as common as when one grows up in a dysfunctional family, she was steadily becoming a closet drinker.

I spent time with Debra after her first child, a beautiful girl, was born. I was in awe of her parenting skills. She seemed to always be confident with her decisions. Intuitively she was a loving parent and she had a great sense of humor. She and I spent much time on the phone conversing playfully. During these conversations Debra always wanted to know what I thought and felt about codependency, alcoholism and recovery. She would approach these subjects with curiosity. Whenever I would try to go deeper and ask her what she felt about these issues, she couldn't seem to answer. She would get the glazed look that I have seen so many times in my life; denial. But I didn't get it, for the only time I saw her drink was socially and never to excess. Having spent the majority of my years in a sick, unhealthy environment, I didn't suspect that Debra was in that place at all.

By the time her second child arrived, three years after the death of my brother, we were like sisters. She invited me to come to the hospital to await the birth of her son. I expected to be in the waiting room for hours. Instead, the nurse invited me to go to the labor room. It wasn't long before we moved

to the delivery room where I joined her husband to witness this miracle. The energy in the room was electrifying. Debra gave birth naturally, without drugs, courageously. This was one of the most elevated spiritual experiences I have ever had. I am grateful to have shared it with my good friend.

The 1990's proved to be quite challenging for Debra. Her husband was transferred several times with his job and she was called upon to relocate her family. This was painful for her and by the time of her last move to Washington State in the late 90's her alcoholism had progressed dramatically. Her husband and children were living with a different person. But, all the rest of us, her friends in California, had no idea that she was sick.

All I knew, she was seeing a counselor for depression and I was happy for her. What I didn't know, she wasn't being honest about her drinking and the therapist had prescribed anti-depressants. She always sounded groggy and "out of it" on the phone. I began to worry and wonder what was "real" when we spoke. I found out much later, she mixed alcohol and prescription drugs for months. She was on a down hill slide which ended with a DUI. Finally, she was forced to get help. She entered a Residential Treatment Program ordered by the court. It wasn't long after she was sober; she relapsed and once again returned to an In-House Recovery Program. After that stint she was clean. The Debra I talked with on the phone was my long lost friend. I thought if anyone could make it, she would be the one. I was wrong. On September 5, 2002, she took her own life.

What has helped me reconcile Debra's death is that she communicates often with me through my dreams. They are quite real. She answers questions that I have, and generally leaves me feeling empowered by her presence. For those of us left behind, the effects of suicide can be devastating. I strongly urge grief counseling; it is never too late.

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We need to talk about our feelings of loss. If it isn't possible to see a therapist, open up to a friend who will listen. There is someone who cares.

If you are thinking about killing yourself, you will feel like you are going crazy. You will be numb to the world. When temptation is looming in front of you, turn your back! Reach out; ask for help! Let us know how much you are suffering. We don't want to lose you! I know it isn't easy being here, but when you cross over to the other side you will be continuing your soul's journey. What you haven't healed here, you will need to work on there. Life is a continuum. It never ends. What we learn while in the body accelerates our spiritual growth. Don't give up!

I believe we are all one, all a part of each other. This is why I feel such pain from the loss of my brother and Debra. We are each other's accumulated sorrows as well as our cumulative joys. When someone commits suicide, there is an open sore in our collective psyche. It can be healed. Each time one of us breaks the cycle and recovers; we help the whole of humanity. Each day, in every way, I thank God for the gift of Life. What about you?

For more information on Kay Kopit:

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Kay Kopit, accomplished artist, actor, writer, speaker and gifted teacher.

Kay Kopit grew up in the Midwest town of Clayton, Missouri. At the age of sixteen she choreographed as well as designed and made costumes for several high school productions. Here she found her passion for art and theatre.

Kay attended the University of Missouri where she received a B.S. in Art Education and M.A. in Painting and Ceramics. While in college she continued her interest in theater production succeeding in choreography and costume design for several major productions, including "Carnival" and "Once Upon a Mattress." After graduate school she taught Life Drawing, Design, and Ceramics at the very prestigious Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri.

In 1969 Kay was inspired to move to the East or West Coast. By the flip of a coin (literally) she decided to move to the East Coast where she made Boston, Massachusetts her home. She was immediately offered a position teaching art at Lexington High School. After several successful years teaching Kay was determined to pursue a career in the arts and theatre and moved to California.

Kay moved to San Francisco where she trained with Wendell Phillips of the well-known Stagegroup Theatre. For several years she studied acting, dance, public speaking, and playwriting with reputable names such as Elizabeth Huddle of A.C.T., Peter Layton of The Drama Studio of London at Berkeley, and Sue Walden of the Improvisational Workshop.

Kay had continued success in her acting and modeling career. She appeared in many national

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commercials including: Dreyer's Grand Ice Cream, Hunt Wesson Foods, Totino's Pizza, Shaklee, and many more. She acted as the principal spokesperson for several Industrial Films including: Chevron, Fireman's Fund, Zenger Miller Productions and American Protective Services. Her print work was extensive including: Ketchum Advertising, Safeway, and Emporium–Capwell.

Kay's good business sense and devotion to teaching inspired her to open her own pottery in Marin County, California. She founded and operated, "Clay In Mind," a ceramic school and gallery in San Rafael. This venture led to "Clay In Mind II" a manufacturing plant in San Diego, California. After many productive years the opportunity to sell came and Kay felt it was a good time to do so.

Most recently, Kay is the writer and producer of a documentary of her life story, "I Survived: One Woman's Journey of Self–Healing and Transformation" which covers 15 years of living with an alcoholic. Although Kay was successful in her life, behind closed doors she endured pain, shame and emotional maiming. Her story is being told to help others overcome the debilitating disease of codependency.

Kay is now living an amazing life with her husband Bryan of 17 years (who just happens to be 19 years her junior.) To complete their family they adopted a daughter at birth when Kay was 54 years of age. Besides being a mother and wife she continues with her love of painting, writing, teaching and speaking on the subject of codependency. Her passion is not only the arts but to help people through her inspirational story. Her courage, stamina, and faith have given her direction and the gift of helping give others hope. Kay has several published articles and writing a monthly column for Recovery Times.

Read more about Kay Kopit at

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"Someone I Love Died By Suicide" –review

By Joan Bramsch

"Someone I Love Died By Suicide" –review by Joan Bramsch

Book Review: "Someone I Love Died By Suicide"
written by Doreen T. Cammarata, MS

"Someone I Love Died by Suicide: A story for child survivors and those who care for them".

This book is one of only a few books available today that is specifically designed to be read to children

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survivors.

Book Review By Joan Bramsch

My dear Doreen,

I've completed your book. Outstanding! You're fulfilling such a need among children who lose someone they love by suicide. You provide so much help for youngsters and teens. Actually, you have also helped me.

When I read your suggestion about making a memory box I knew exactly what I would do: I happen to collect handmade wooden boxes that once held stationery, candy, cigars, or was simply a treasure box. Now I am going to choose among my favorites and make one a Memory Box for my beloved Bill. I thank you for this healing suggestion.

Your book gives mourners permission to grieve. You help them to find their way through the difficult work of grieving, after loving deeply. And you are careful to point out that there is no "one right way." Bravo! But you do show the reader what s/he can expect, that it's okay to cry and feel sad, that it's okay to be angry and punch a pillow or throw stones where they won't do any harm.

Last, you help your reader to understand there is no time limit on grieving, but that it is also okay and, actually, wonder-filled to celebrate the memories about her/his loved one by being happy and having fun.

I am so glad you've written this important story. Surely, you are doing Angel Work! Thank you, in the name of children everywhere, who need your help.

Sincerely,

Joan Bramsch

JOAN BRAMSCH is a family person, educator, writer and E-publisher. Her articles appear internationally in print and online. Six of her best-selling adult novels – near one million copies – have worldwide distribution. Her Empowered Parenting Ezine serves 1000 parents around the globe.

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