

Surviving a Loved One's Suicide

I was twenty one years old when I lost my best friend, Katie, to suicide. Her death was unexpected, it leveled me. She was a bright and engaging person who made the world a sunnier place. She loved people in her life fully and openly. She also suffered from crippling depression, a topic she did not broach often, living in fear of appearing frail to those around her.

I started having anxiety attacks six months after she passed away. For years, my profound loss masqueraded as anger - it was so much easier for me to feel fury rather than allow myself to feel sadness. My pain created a sense of isolation and sank me deeper into depression. I lived alone for years with suicidal ideations before I acknowledged those feelings with my loved ones and medical professionals. The truth is, I'm not unique. On average, one person dies by suicide every ten days in Leon County. Only one in four survivors of suicide loss seeks help, and as many as 25 percent of survivors indicate they struggle with their own thoughts of suicide. The pain and tragedy of each suicide radiates outwards. Each person who dies by suicide leaves 18 others behind who experience a major life disruption. We are not alone in our grief.

NAMI Tallahassee is the local affiliate of NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) serving Leon and surrounding counties. NAMI is an organization that works to improve the lives of people living with mental illness and their families, through education, support, and advocacy. The Bluebird Run & Walk for Brookie B is their primary fundraising event. Our experiences of living with mental health struggles are battles that are fought as individuals - but the war against the stigma of mental illness, the war in raising suicide awareness and having conversations about prevention and postvention - that is a fight that we are united in as a community.

In remembering Katie, I am flooded with profound loss, but also with a memory of our love. Instead of dwelling in guilt, shame and resentment, I find myself looking for ways to make sense of this tragedy and to reach out to a larger community of suicide loss survivors. NAMI Tallahassee is my link to that community. The Bluebird Run & Walk for Brookie B is an event I'm passionate about. I'm working to raise suicide awareness and prevention, turning to a community of survivors. This event gives me so much hope in rebuilding after loss. We have all been uprooted by our pain, but when we come together, we begin to learn how to grow. We learn how to move forward with love, while honoring our lost loved ones. The Bluebird Run & Walk is a race, but far more than that, it is an opportunity to add meaning to your miles, to join a community, to be less alone, to be a part of something that's bigger than our pain. Learn more at www.BluebirdRun.com. Register. Volunteer. Donate.

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