

SPEAKING OF LOVE

A Suicide Loss Survivor's
Guide of Hope, Healing and Love



La Toya Bond

Speaking Of Love

*A Suicide Loss Survivor's
Guide of Hope, Healing and Love*

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**WHAT IS A SUICIDE LOSS
SURVIVOR?**

**A PERSON WHO HAS LOST A
LOVED ONE TO SUICIDE.**

I AM A SUICIDE LOSS SURVIVOR.

AN ENDLESS LOVE
I FOUND IN YOU
WARM AND INSPIRING
IN EVERYTHING YOU DO
YOU'RE A PART OF ME
THAT NEVER DIES
A LOVE UNDIVIDED
BECAUSE WE SEE EYE-TO-EYE

~EDDIE KENDRICKS

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PREFACE

“GRIEF IS THE PRICE WE PAY FOR LOVE.”

-QUEEN ELIZABETH II

At some point in our lives, we will inevitably lose someone we love. Grief is universal, but the loss of a loved one to suicide is different. Suicide is an extremely sensitive topic and one that needs to be discussed. Nearly 1 million people die by suicide globally each year. The aftermath takes a toll on the family and friends left behind – the suicide loss survivors. These individuals are left in pain with unanswered questions. Suicide loss survivors often face unique challenges that differ from those who have been bereaved by other types of death. Coping with life after suicide can become a struggle. The outcome is traumatic, especially when suicide is sudden, unexpected, and violent. The grief process is always difficult, but a loss by suicide is like no other. Grief from suicide is traumatic and complex.

I am a suicide loss survivor. My purpose for writing this book is to provide my personal advice and resources to help others heal after losing a loved one to suicide. This book was written by a daughter with a broken heart. Please bear in mind that a broken heart is also an open heart. My prayer is that you will read this book with an open mind.

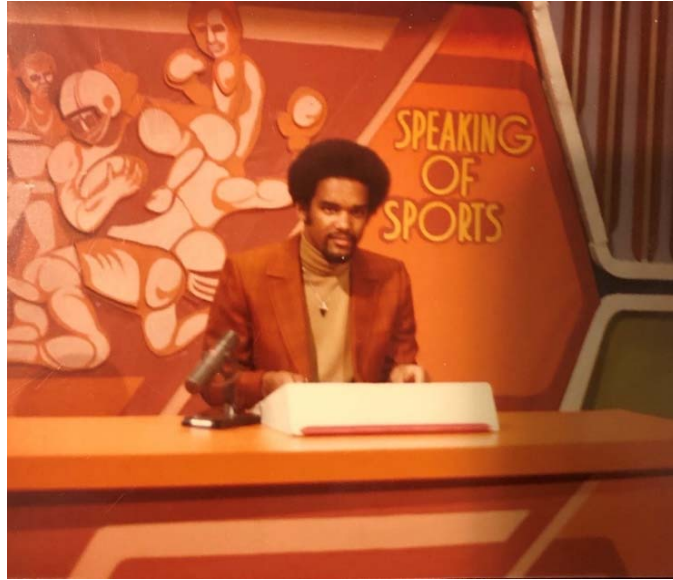
This book is for people who want to live in a world full of love where suicide no longer exists. I am not a psychologist or a medical care professional. I am a woman who lost her dad in a tragic and horrific manner. I make no claims to have all the answers related to suicide. What I know for sure is that I loved my dad for over 45 years. His sudden absence from my life has been breathtaking and beyond devastating. Losing him to suicide has been a life-changing experience and my mission is to help others.

I know that by helping others, I can heal my own pain. For we are not placed on Earth for our own benefit, but for the benefit of mankind.

Due to the sensitive nature of the tragic events that took place on March 2, 2020, I am limited in how much detail I can provide about my dad's wife. Respectfully, I will not mention her name in this book. I do not have permission from her family to discuss any parts of her life, other than what has already been reported in the news. What I am willing to say is that she was a beautiful and precious soul who did not deserve to die at the hands of my dad. I am heartbroken, ashamed, and devastated by my dad's actions. To her family, I want to publicly say that I am so sorry that this happened. I send you my love and continued prayers.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the memory of my dad, Herman McKalpain, Jr., who died by suicide on March 2, 2020. This book was published on May 25, 2023, which would have been my dad's 70th birthday.



In 1975, my dad was captured live on the air at WGPR-TV 62 Studio in Detroit as he hosted "Speaking Of Sports"- the program upon which this book was named and inspired.

A MESSAGE OF LOVE

*"YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE PERFECT IN ORDER TO BE LOVED." -
DR. LAURA SCHLESSINGER*

For all of those contemplating suicide, you are precious. I know what it feels like to be stuck in a never-ending spiral of pain. Life can be hard at times, but you can survive this. The journey of life is a balancing act of highs and lows. Please know that your life has value. You are special to me because you took the time to read this book. By doing so, you are already on the right path for a better tomorrow.

Every year in the United States, more than 47,000 people die by suicide. You don't have to be one of them. If you are feeling suicidal right now, reach out for help immediately. Call 988 or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **1-800-273-TALK (8255)** or text **HELP** to **741741** to reach a crisis counselor. Help is just a call away. You are not alone. Many people struggle with suicidal thoughts at some time in their lives. I personally have thought about it before. It doesn't mean you are weak or crazy. It means you are going through something that is difficult and painful right now. With the proper love and care, things will turn around for the best, in due time. I promise you. Don't try to go through this alone, reach out for help. Please! You were born with a divine purpose. You are not alone. You matter and most importantly, **YOU ARE LOVED!**



988
Suicide & Crisis
LIFELINE

Call Now For Help!
You Matter!

Herman McKalpain, Jr.
1953-2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"LOVE IS THE THING THAT MAKES ALL THINGS BEAUTIFUL."

-BARRY WHITE

Writing a book takes a village of LOVE. First, I want to give honor to GOD, for without him, nothing in my life would be possible.

To my beautiful daughter, Crystal. Thank you for being my editor for this beautiful book. You are so incredibly smart. Your patience and attention to detail amazes me. My strength, I draw from you. I am so blessed to be your mom. I love you so much!

To my mom, you are the strongest and the bravest woman to ever walk the planet Earth. Without you, I would not be the woman I am today. Thank you for the countless sacrifices you've made in my honor. I love you!

To my brother “*John John*” - thank you for being so supportive and encouraging during the process of writing this book. Thank you for showing up faithfully for my podcast every single week. The love you have shown towards me is so authentic. You are my protector and you have always had my best interest at the center of your heart. I love you!

I wish to thank the amazing individuals from all around the world who have appeared as guests on my podcast, *Speaking of Love*, honoring the memory of my dad. As of today, I have interviewed over 125 guests and each episode has been life changing. All of you have enormously contributed to this book. Thank you for accepting my invitation to be a guest and supporting me on this sacred journey of love. *Speaking of Love Podcast* is my global classroom. I love you all!

SPEAKING OF LOVE

To my beautiful cousin, Tamika “*Tae*” Bond, my podcast started with you! Thank you for being the very first guest on Speaking of Love (Episode #1.) Your wisdom and love set a precedence for my podcast. I have admired you my whole life. You will always be my number one Bond Girl. I love you!

To my sista-friend, Osnita Norman, thank you for being there for me when my dad passed away. Your consistent acts of kindness made the world of a difference throughout my journey of grief. You are such a beautiful soul. I love you!

I want to express my love and gratitude to Michael Van Tull, my radio mentor and friend. It was an absolute honor to sit alongside you as the co-host of your radio program, “The Michael Van Tull Show.” Thank you for believing in me and giving me the opportunity of a lifetime.

The first time my dad heard me live on your radio show, I received a message of love and compliments from him. He was so proud of me. Your professional guidance provided the essential tools needed to launch an award-winning podcast. Thank you for taking me under your wings and showing me the way. Your gift allowed me to walk in my dad's footsteps. Without you Michael, Speaking of Love, would not have been possible.



Herman Mckalpain

You're a natural. Well prepared'-research done & confident. I'm so proud. Don't change a thing. You're doing it well and you're being yourself !! Love Dad 🥰

1h **Like** Reply



Photo Credit: Facebook November 2019

This is the message my dad sent the first time he heard me live as a radio co-host on the Michael Van Tull Show.

To my beautiful aunt, Katherine Bond – Thank you! You have always been my die-hard advocate. You believed in me at times when I did not believe in myself. I am so grateful that you connected me with Michael Van Tull. You made sure that I had the opportunity to appear on his show as a guest to promote my business. However, God had other plans and he used you as an instrument of his love. The future that you have predicted for my life is manifesting right before our eyes. I love you!

To my former boss, Timothy Divine (*former General Counsel at The Detroit Land Bank Authority*), thank you for honoring me with the Peer-To-Peer Recognition Certificate during our weekly legal team meeting in February of 2020. This acknowledgment occurred shortly before the tragic passing of my dad. The certificate will forever be one of my most sacred possessions. During my last conversation with my dad, we discussed the certificate. He was proud of my accomplishments. At the time, I had no idea how valuable those final words would

become. This occurrence was truly a “divine” intervention. Thank you, Mr. “Divine.”

To Dr. Nelson Beltijar – You are amazing! Thank you for supporting me throughout this journey. You are the one who put the fire under my belt to get this book launched. I am forever grateful to you – my soul brother. *“I’m bringing sexy baaacck!”*

To my former business coach, Tamara Bennett of Southern A-Door-nments Decor, thank you for introducing me to the art of making door hangers. Your transformational influence taught me how to tap into my own inner creativity. When I first met you, making door hangers was a hobby that eventually turned into a business. Then it became my grief therapy. I made a collection of sacred door hangers immediately after my dad’s passing - *my therapy pieces*. I love each of them in a special way. Making door hangers is the best medicine to help heal a grieving heart. Thank you! I love you.

To Gail and John Urso of Kevin's Song, I admire what the two of you have accomplished together in honor of your son, Kevin Francis Urso. I am honored to serve on the Board of Directors for Kevin's Song. My journey of grief has been touched by your dedication and compassion for suicide loss survivors. Thank you for trusting me to be a part of your sacred mission. I love you both!

I want to thank my significant other, Keith. You came into my life and taught me the real meaning of friendship. Since the first day we met, you have been in all four of my corners, supporting me in EVERYTHING that I do. Our love for each other was cemented on the foundation of friendship first. I have never met a man with such a gentle heart. I am blessed to have you as my man and most importantly, my BEST FRIEND. I love you!

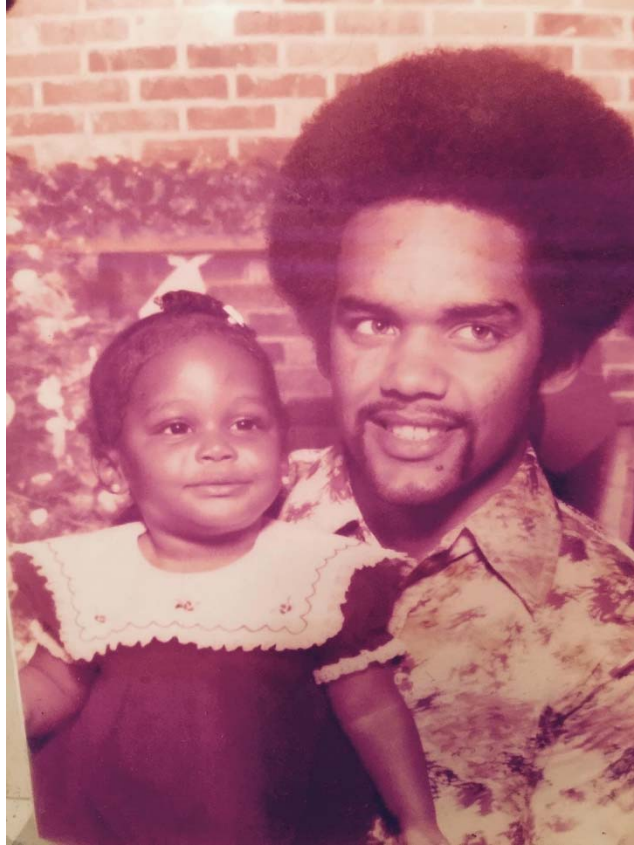
Finally, I want to thank my dad...

On August 23, 1975, at Detroit Memorial Hospital, you held me in your arms for the very first time. From that moment on, you became an integral part of my existence. You never abandoned our journey. You were always just a phone call away. Our relationship was not perfect, but we had a beautiful life together. Your funny jokes, your life lessons, your wisdom, and your unconditional love, will carry me until the end of my lifetime. When you died, a part of me died too. I am sad that you are no longer here in the physical world. I was proud to have a father like you, a modest man who rarely took credit for his own excellence. I want you to be remembered for the way you lived, not by the way you died. This book is a tribute to you, the greatest man I've ever known.

I love you, Dad.

~La Toya

*"I SAW THAT YOU WERE PERFECT, AND SO I LOVED YOU.
THEN I SAW THAT YOU WERE NOT PERFECT AND I LOVED
YOU EVEN MORE." -ANGELITA LIM*



My dad and I took this photo in 1976
in Detroit, Michigan

CHAPTER 1 - MY DAD

*"EVEN IF THEY SEPARATE US, A THOUSAND MILES APART, WE'LL
STILL BE TOGETHER IN EACH OTHER'S HEART."*

-EDDIE KENDRICKS



My dad and I took this photo together on Father's Day in 2012.

I love my dad. He was such an amazing guy. He was a gentle soul with a big heart. He had an infectious laugh and a magnetic spirit. He was a handsome man with beautiful gray eyes that turned hazel in the sunlight. Shaped like a teddy bear, my dad was a heavy-set man who rarely ate sweets. He preferred fried pork chops over homemade pound cake. He was the type of guy who made everybody feel like somebody special. If you were to place him in a crowded room of 100 people, my dad would be the smartest person in the entire room. He was a true hopeless romantic with a deep understanding of the emotion we call “love.” He often expressed his love through the lyrics of romantic music. As a Detroit native, his favorite singer was Eddie Kendricks of the Motown legendary group - The Temptations. While he loved all of Eddie’s music, “*Tell her love has felt the need*” was the ballad he enjoyed the most. Singing was not my dad’s best feature, but he never let that stop him from imitating Eddie’s distinctive falsetto singing style.

Growing up, my dad enjoyed making breakfast for his children. Yet, there was one item that he refused to let us eat – and that was oatmeal. “*I ate so much of that nasty stuff growing up, I just can’t stand the sight of oatmeal now!*” he reflected. Crinkle-Cut French Fries was always his breakfast specialty of the day. According to my dad, having French fries for breakfast was a delectable replacement for boring hash browns. I loved watching him prepare French Fries. He would only use the Ore-Ida brand. I remember him prancing around the kitchen like an executive chef as he dumped the entire bag into a skillet of hot oil. I was fascinated by the way he would squeeze a gigantic glob of ketchup on our plates. “*Dip’em in there!*” – he would jokingly demand of us. He had a special way of transforming random moments into exciting adventures. There was never a dull moment with my dad around.

McDonald's is one of the most popular fast-food restaurants in the world. It was also our secret hide-away, a place where we shared our love. We visited the location on Mack Avenue the most. We would usually dine at a table with a window view. One day, my dad and I were eating lunch inside McDonald's when he suddenly yelled, "*Lookout the window!*" When I turned my head to see what happened, he quickly grabbed a few of my French Fries and put them in his mouth. Secretly, I knew what he was up to, but I pretended as if I did not notice the missing fries. It was our game and we played it every single time we visited McDonald's.

During one of our many visits, he taught me how to properly drink out of a straw. According to his philosophy, a straw should only be slightly inserted at the top of the cup where the ice floats. "*Placing the straw at the top enhances the flavor of the drink – it is the coldest point of the beverage,*" he explained as he demonstrated his point.

There was always a lesson to be learned from his wisdom. He was an educator by nature, a true analytical problem solver. My dad had a clever answer for almost every situation in life. If he was unsure about how to answer a question, he would just fabricate a believable one. Those brilliant comebacks were a trait of his intelligence. He was so charming and quick witted.

During his early years, my dad was a young man with big dreams. He was born and raised on the east side of Detroit. His childhood home was located on Seyburn Street. This is where my dad lived with his parents, Jeannette and Herman, Sr., and his siblings; Fred, Wayne, David, Renee', and Lexine. My dad was the youngest boy in the family, lovingly referred to as "Junior." After graduating from Kettering High School in 1971, he had the opportunity to play professional basketball in another country.

On the wise counsel of his older brother David, my dad opted to stay in his hometown. He enrolled in Wayne State University. My dad was anxious to try out for the basketball team. This was his dream, and he was determined to make it come true. He practiced diligently and his hard work paid off. This is where he developed a lifelong love affair with the sport of basketball. You could hear him a mile away as he dribbled his basketball down the neighborhood streets. As a college basketball star, my dad was the shortest point guard on the team. He was admired for his ability to jump high in the air, while slam dunking with either hand. He often dominated the basketball court with his quick cross-over moves. As a young athlete, the world was in the palm of his right hand, and his basketball was in the palm of his left hand. Herman McKalpain, Jr. was at the top of his game.

SPEAKING OF LOVE



*My dad was short, but he could slam dunk with either hand,
a unique skill that he developed at a young age.
He was a phenomenal basketball player.*

In 1975, he earned a Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communications from Wayne State University. Radio/Television Broadcasting was his major. This degree was his golden admission ticket to a life of fulfilled dreams and successful accomplishments. With fate on his side, my dad began his career at WGPR-TV 62 in Detroit, the first black-owned radio/television station in America. He was an inaugural employee at WGPR which stands for **Where God's Presence Radiates**. He also hosted a radio show called "Inside The NBA." The show aired live every Thursday night at 6:50 p.m. on FM-98 WJLB in Detroit.

A few years later, he advanced in his career and moved on to WXYZ Channel-7 News in Detroit. He soon earned his way as an award-winning television broadcast engineer. His professional career was decorated with a multitude of accomplishments. In August 1987, his meticulous photography skills were praised when he captured the aftermath of Northwest Flight 255, an event

recounted as one of the worst aviation disasters in American history. According to news reports, the flight crashed shortly after takeoff from Detroit Metro Airport. In total, 156 people died, including two people who were traveling by car on I-94 near Middlebelt Road. When my dad arrived on the scene, he stood on top of an emergency vehicle and captured an astounding photo of the aftermath. The photo soon became a significant piece of U.S. history and has been used in media reports throughout the world.

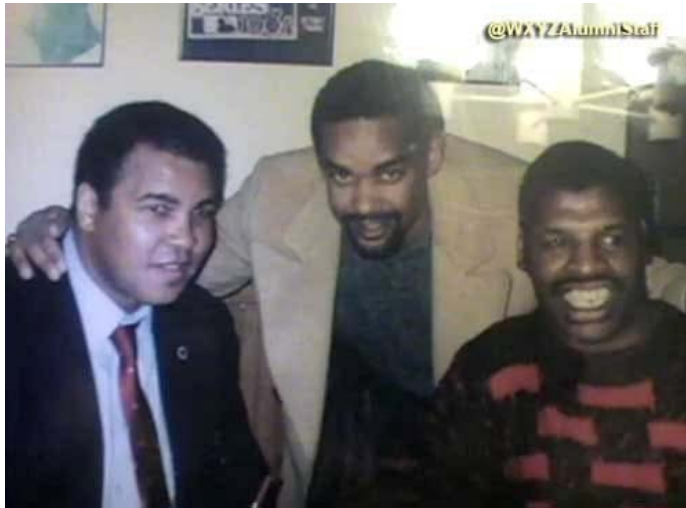
My dad was dedicated to his career. You rarely saw him without his video camera. He spent nearly 3 decades working behind the news camera while producing and editing inside of the studio. Working for WXYZ Channel-7 was one of his greatest blessings. The room where he made the news come to life was called “Edit and Playback.” It was adjacent to the live news production studio.

There was a large glass window to aid visual communication between my dad and the news anchors. This room was his sanctum, his happy place. He would often say, *“People may not know who I am, but if you’ve ever watched Channel 7 Action News, you’ve definitely seen my work.”*

My dad was a master in the art of television news production. Sports journalism coverage was his stimulation and area of expertise. Over the course of his career, he acquired an extensive photo collage of famous athletes. It is not uncommon for a news camera man to also act as a reporter. My dad took advantage of every opportunity to interview famous athletes. After each interview, he would be sure to have someone take a candid snapshot for his “collection.” This collection of photos was his most prized possession. He proudly displayed the collage along the walls of his living room.

SPEAKING OF LOVE

When people visited his apartment for the first time, he would behave like a museum tour guide chaperone. He carefully explained the significance of each photo in full detail while using his “radio voice.” His favorite photo included sports legends Muhammad Ali and Leon Spinks.



In this undated photo, my dad is pictured with boxing legends Muhammad Ali (left) and Leon Spinks (right).

He also held a certified license as a professional boxing judge, another one of his sports passions. My dad had many rewards in his life, such as coaching a youth basketball team, wedding photography and videography. Herman was a man of many gifts and talents.

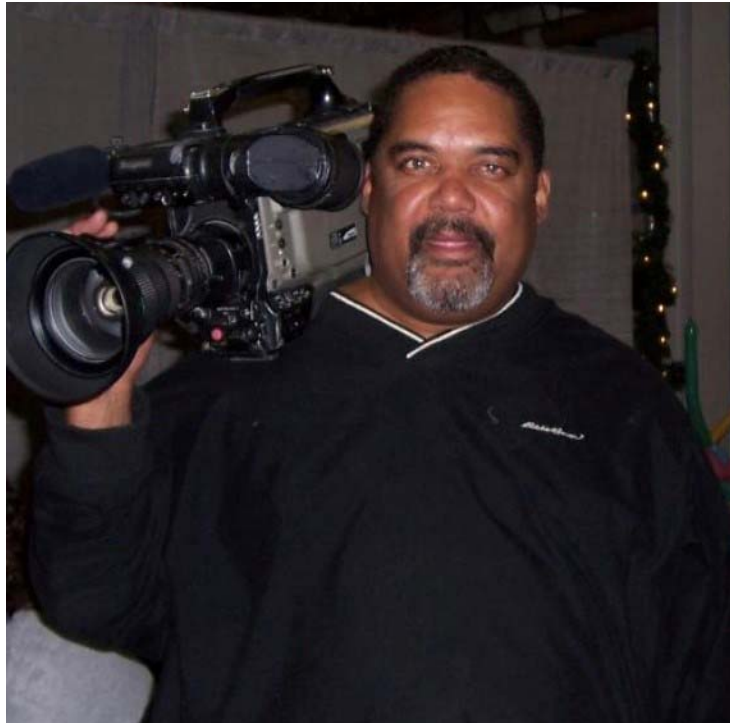
While working for WXYZ Channel-7, he was featured in a documentary film, "Homeless In Detroit." The documentary took place during the winter, just before Christmas, in Downtown Detroit. My dad and a fellow co-worker posed undercover as a homeless couple from Ohio. For two brutally cold days and nights, the two embarked on an odyssey of homelessness. Wired with body cameras, the couple had only five dollars and a blanket for survival. The highlight of the film happened when my dad was rejected by a stranger after begging for twenty-five cents.

SPEAKING OF LOVE

My dad needed the spare change for bus fare to a nearby shelter where he planned to sleep for the night. The impact of the documentary was massive and profound. The five-part series can be viewed on YouTube. I was a young girl at the time, but the film's message forever changed the way I view homelessness in our society. Eventually, my dad retired from WXYZ Channel-7 News after more than 30 years of service.



This photo was taken in 1998 at a family gathering.



*I took this photo of my dad at WXYZ
Channel 7's Holiday Party in 2005.*

My dad loved being a father too! Kevin, La Toya, Tiffany, and Shadae were his pride and joy. When he needed help, his children were the first to be called upon. Technology was not easy for him to navigate, but my dad knew our phone numbers by heart. He had no problem calling us day or night. He often had trouble with logging into his e-mail account. To solve this problem, he changed his password to a simple “ABC” combination. *“As long as I know my ABCs, I’ll never forget my password now!”* he jokingly stated.

There are so many wonderful things that I can say about my dad. The countless memories of love and happiness could go on forever. Yet, I will now move on to the most difficult chapter of this book.

CHAPTER 2 - THE WORST DAY EVER

*“EVERY TIME THE RAIN COMES ALONG, THE ABSENCE OF YOU
BECOMES SO STRONG.”*

– EDDIE KENDRICKS

I love my dad. He was a star in the public eye. Behind closed doors, he struggled deep within. Though he appeared to be a happy man, his life was complicated, and at times, difficult. He was super smart and talented, but none of those qualities hindered his mind from becoming ill. I will not list them all here, but there were both physical and mental health challenges that caused a great deal of emotional pain for my dad. This is where his life began to spiral silently. For many years, he enjoyed the pleasures of excessive alcohol abuse. E&J Brandy was his preferred weapon of mass destruction. This brand of liquor was cheap and easily accessible to him when money was tight. My dad called it “*Easy Jesus*.”

At the end of a long day, he often craved for a solitary space, a small glass with only one ice cube, and a bottle of *Easy Jesus*. More than just a nightcap, the concoction served as a broken man's liquid anesthesia to numb the pain of life's troubles. He endured failures, setbacks and heartbreaks in his life that contributed to his demise.

Unfortunately, the stigma attached to mental illness and alcohol abuse took a toll. My dad was often quiet about his depression. He was reluctant to talk about his feelings of hopelessness. Depression created a wall that blocked him from receiving love from his family and friends. He often masked his pain with humor. He loved telling funny jokes, dirty ones too. Sometimes he made humorous statements about "*looking for the Ambassador Bridge*"- so that he could jump after a stressful day. I have now come to understand that those jokes were real. He actually wanted to jump off the bridge.

By all outward appearances, his life was pretty good. Very few people were aware of my dad's inner turmoil. There were parts of him that were only known to him. Eventually, his private struggles became public.

On March 2, 2020, I woke up in the middle of the night. I looked at my phone and realized that I had several missed calls and text messages from family members. I soon discovered that my dad had taken his own life in a murder-suicide. He lived his entire adult life as a news camera man, but now he was on the opposite side of the news camera. The final chapter in the news story of his life. This was a headliner that he did not deserve. So brave, yet so fragile – his life was over. Reportedly, he shot and killed his wife moments before turning the gun on himself. The details are unclear as to what truly happened. The news reports indicated that a neighbor found my dad's wife unresponsive near the front door of the couple's condo.

Police later discovered my dad in an upstairs bedroom. He died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. The newlyweds had only been married for 9 months.

When he died, a part of me died too...

He's gone now - forever. This was so traumatic and complicated. I never got the chance to say goodbye. We'll never eat at McDonald's again. No more funny jokes about the Ambassador Bridge. He killed himself. He killed someone else too. Why didn't he call me first? How do I go forward with my own life? The guilt I felt was unbearable. Self-blame had become my worst enemy. I missed the clues, the subtle signals behind the jokes. This happened out-of-the-blue for me, but for him, I believe it was a long time coming.

In the beginning, I had so many unanswered questions. My dad and I could talk openly about all subjects. We had a special bond. He had a purpose in my life beyond that of just being a father. He was my emotional support when the world was against me. There were times in my life when I faced adversities and setbacks. My dad's wisdom helped me during those difficult days.

His love lifted me higher when I was at my lowest point in life. In my darkest hours, I could always pick up the phone and call him. How could something this tragic happen? My first reaction was shock and extreme sadness. It all seemed surreal, like being in the middle of a dream. I was broken, and I found it hard to breathe. As with most suicide loss survivors, I was also angry with my dad. He took his own life and he also snatched away the precious life of someone else, his beautiful wife. I often wonder if I had been there with him on that fateful night, would the outcome be the same?

I had no idea that he was struggling to the extent of ending it all. His actions devastated the hearts of many, especially those who loved him and his wife. This is the worst tragedy that could ever happen to anyone. My dad professionally covered many murder-suicide news stories, but now he has become the subject of his own. I am still shocked behind it.

My dad's memorial ceremony took place at Swanson's Funeral Home in Detroit, just a few days before the Covid-19 pandemic. The vibration in the funeral chapel was cold and empty, even though the room was filled with lots of people. The outpouring of love and support was not enough to illuminate the darkness. I sat in the front row, shocked and in pain. The country went into lockdown, and we all were forced to limit our access to the world. I felt robbed of my life, my freedom and most of all, my dad. I was isolated in my own private chamber of hopelessness.

I did not choose this journey, yet I was forced to travel it – alone. Very few people showed a genuine interest in my well-being after my dad passed away. Most people just wanted the gruesome details about how the tragedy had occurred. Losing a loved one to suicide is a lonely journey, especially when it involves a murder-suicide.

A few days after my dad’s memorial, my sisters and I scattered our dad’s ashes in several private locations. We chose places that were special to him. We also saved some of the ashes and placed them inside of keepsake pendants. I also used flowers from his memorial service and I made keychains using the flowers after they dried. Each piece turned out beautifully. Now, each of us will always have a piece of him.

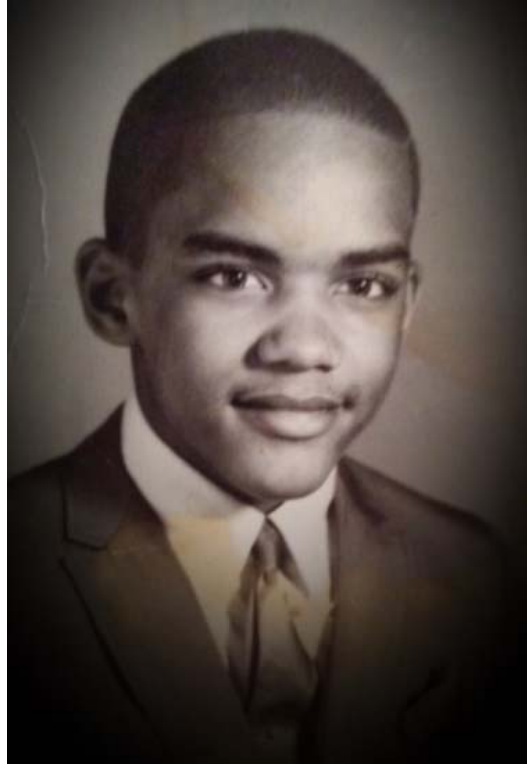
Most suicide loss survivors experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). I have learned that one does not have to be present when the suicide occurs in order to be inflicted with PTSD. Just the mental image of the violent death is enough to cause trauma. I believe that I was suffering from a form of PTSD. I had all of the classic symptoms that most suicide loss survivors develop after losing a loved one to suicide by violent means. My sleep patterns changed dramatically.

I started experiencing recurring night terrors. There were episodes where I would envision my dad's final moments on Earth. I would replay those moments over and over subconsciously, in an effort to understand his death. I could not get those thoughts out of my head. In my sleep, I could hear his voice so clearly. I felt the urge to hold his hand.

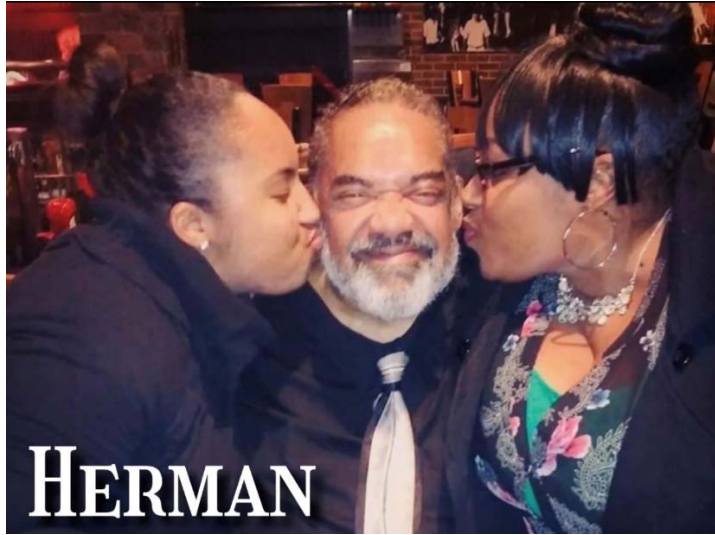
I was dying to talk with him just one last time, literally. In those dark hours, I wanted to reunite with my dad, even if it meant that I had to die too. I wanted to sit next to him like I did at McDonald's. I wanted him to steal my French fries again, just one more time....

I love my dad...

SPEAKING OF LOVE



*This photo was taken when my dad was a student
at Barbour Middle School in Detroit.*



In this 2019 photo, my sister Tiffany and I are sharing a special moment of LOVE with our dad at his favorite restaurant, Fridays.

CHAPTER 3 - ROCK BOTTOM

“SINCE YOU’VE GONE AND LEFT ME,
EVERYTHING BEAUTIFUL HAS DIED.” -EDDIE KENDRICKS

Then one day, I hit rock bottom. I was sitting in my kitchen, when suddenly, I started to feel extremely dizzy. It was like the whole world was spinning around, but my body was frozen still. I could not hold my head up straight and walking was nearly impossible. Leaning against the walls, I made my way to my bed. I kept telling myself that I just needed to lay down for a bit. I had never experienced any form of illness in my entire life. I kept wondering, “is this a chronic disease coming to the surface?” After about an hour of rest, I felt no different. I felt worse. The dizzy spells were constant and very intense. I was beginning to feel nauseous. I had to be driven to a nearby hospital where a series of tests were performed.

The doctors suspected that I may have suffered a mild stroke. I was admitted into the hospital after sitting in an emergency room wheelchair for three hours. The first night in the hospital was horrible. I was placed in a hospital room with an elderly lady who was gravely ill. She appeared to be in her late 80's. Her voice was barely above a whisper. She was kind to me. From my observation of her condition, she should have been placed in the intensive care unit. Her body was weak, naked, and fragile. She deserved privacy. I wanted to help her, but I was sick too.

Our room was dark, and it smelled like a sewer drain. I was unable to rest due to the constant flow of medical staff in and out of our room. There were loud machines beeping and buzzing incessantly. The doctors and nurses were not friendly at all. I would describe them as cold and robotic. I was not treated as a sick person, I was treated

like a customer at a concession stand. There was no gentleness, warmth, or love – just methodical actions of people who never made eye contact with me. I was starting to lose my hope for life. Suicidal thoughts were at the forefront of my mind. I was slipping into the dark tunnel of depression. I had been an independent woman my entire adult life. Yet, here I was, waiting for apathetic medical staff to make decisions about my well-being. This was just too much to withstand. I wanted to be free from the hospital bed, free from pain, free from life. It was time for the grand finale, the final chapter of a life filled with hurt and pain. I was ready to die now. I wanted to be reunited with my dad – a daddy-daughter reunion. I was starting to understand how my dad must have felt moments before he pulled the trigger.

Where is the Ambassador Bridge? Take me there...

During this crisis, I felt so alone and afraid. I wanted to receive the same love from others that I had given so freely throughout the course of my life. On those dark nights, there was no love around me. My heart was bleeding. Love had forsaken me. I needed a hug or someone to talk to. I was suffering in silence. It seemed as if no one cared, not even the medical staff who were being paid a salary to help me.

When the nurses visited my hospital room, they would write notes on the white board, then walk out – never acknowledging me. I was in a facility full of trained medical professionals, but I was alone and afraid. There was no love, no empathy, no compassion – nothing. All I had was a tear to give to my misery. Pain was becoming my best friend.

During my 3rd night in the hospital, I cried out to God. I turned to my heavenly father for help because I know that God can do all things but fail. There was little brown bible on the desk in my hospital room. I have always been attracted to nice books. I loved the fact that the book was new, and it appeared to have never been read. I picked it up and I sniffed it. I love the smell of books, especially hardcovers. I grew up in the church, so I knew that all the medicine I needed was in this Great book. I turned to the best doctor in the history of life - God.

I went to GOD with honesty in my heart. I asked GOD to help me. Deep within my soul, I knew that I did not want to meet the same fate as my dad. All of those bad thoughts of suicide were not real, it was my grief lying to me. I realized, in that moment, that I had to make some changes in the way I was handling my grief. My life was worth more than the hurt I was experiencing.

Deuteronomy 31:6 says, “Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid or terrified of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you.”

After four days of testing, it was determined that I did not have a stroke. I was diagnosed with high blood pressure, and it was dangerously high. The medical staff would not release me until my blood pressure was regulated. This took more time as the doctors needed to determine the right combination of medicine for my condition.

I was prescribed medications to lower my blood pressure, placed on a low sodium diet and allowed to go home - finally. After my release from the hospital, I was reunited with my beautiful daughter and my beloved cat. I missed my babies. I started feeling better emotionally.

There is nothing like the comfort of sleeping in your own bed. My first night back home was a trial of managing my new life. It was good to be home, but I was overwhelmed. I knew that I needed to work hard in order to keep my head above water.

CHAPTER 4 - HOPE, HEALING AND LOVE

“YOUR LOVE TAKES ME HIGHER, MY LIFE, YOU INSPIRE.”

– EDDIE KENDRICKS

My dad was a very important person in my life. I valued him and I cherished the love we had for each other. While it is not possible to ever let go of someone you've lost to suicide, it is possible to go forward and live a quality life. This is what I wanted to do. I am a mother and a respected member of my community. There are people who depend on me. I needed to find a better way to cope with my loss. My pain deserved a greater purpose.

As a home-based business owner, I enjoyed being a creative entrepreneur. I began to think of ways to channel my inner creativity. It was time to get back into doing what I loved – being creative. I wiped the sawdust off an old jigsaw and started creating one-of-a-kind wooden art

pieces. Door Hangers! I found this experience to be calming and therapeutic. The adorable art pieces I made during that time in my life will forever be sacred to me. I call them my “Therapy Pieces.” I received a great sense of accomplishment with every completed piece. I would take photos of my work and say, “*Wow, I created this all by myself.*” I fell in love all over again with this side of my creativity. I love making door hangers. Yet, I still needed something more, like baking and cooking.

I learned to cook at a very young age. I feel alive when I am working in the kitchen. This is the place where I find the most solace. I love preparing soul food meals and desserts from scratch – a gift that I inherited from both my mother and grandmother. The kitchen has been my playground since I was a teenager.

Ms. Valeria Bankston was my home-economics teacher at Columbus Middle School in Detroit. One day during my 8th grade year, she taught my class how to bake peanut butter cookies from scratch. At the end of the school day, I couldn't wait to try the recipe on my own. I loved peanut butter cookies and I wanted to bake some for my family.

My mom was in favor of the idea and drove me to a nearby grocery market to buy all of the ingredients. I remember going to each aisle in the store, selecting the best ingredients. I was not taking any shortcuts with generic brands. I needed my cookies to be rich and flavorful, just like Ms. Bankston's. My mom gave me money to buy all the ingredients. When I arrived home that evening, I took my time and carefully baked the cookies, precisely as my teacher had instructed. The cookies turned out AMAZING.

Those famous peanut butter cookies have been a family favorite ever since. This experience changed my life!

I started my home-based baking business a few months after my dad passed. While I am knowledgeable in all areas of cooking, I only sell baked goods in my business. I designed all of my own advertisements and promotional materials. Love is the theme of my business. I put my heart into my work and I wanted people to taste and feel the love. My business cards and flyers were posted everywhere. I promoted my baked goods on social media and there was no shortage of support. The love I received from my customers was like a glue that cemented my broken heart. Peach Cobblers, German Chocolate Cakes, Pound Cakes, Lemon Bars, and Coconut Cakes – were some of the items on my menu. I made everything completely from scratch – a labor of love! My number one seller at the time was my homemade chocolate chip cookies.

Not to toot my own horn, but those babies melt in your mouth. I charged \$25 per dozen – plus a free sample item. Baking with love was just the first step of my healing process. Each order was packaged in a cute container, wrapped with lovely iridescent cellophane. I even made fancy, handmade bows for each order. I used heart shaped “Thank You” stickers and personalized name tags on each order. My customers’ orders did not leave my kitchen until each item met my quality check of love. This is how you make people fall in love with your products. By doing what I loved, I was spreading love in return. I love baking, but the greatest love of all is sharing those baked goods with others. I was starting to feel alive again. When I am spreading love, by doing what I love, it brings out the best in me.

I love my customers.

The money I earned during the first month of starting my home bakery actually paid my mortgage. My grief was being managed by focusing on spreading love to my community with my “love products.” On weekends, I would meet my customers at the local Walmart to deliver some love. The response was incredible. Cars would be lined up waiting for me. I felt like a local celebrity. I was discovering new ways to manage my grief – baking and making wooden art. I was starting to feel better, but I knew I needed more.

I wanted my dad to be remembered for the way he lived, not by the devastating way he died. He was a man of many accomplishments, both personally and professionally. To honor him, I created a podcast, “Speaking of Love” - a platform for spreading love.

My podcast aims to serve individuals like my dad who are struggling with the effects of mental health challenges, which often leads to suicide. When I am hosting a podcast episode, I feel connected to my dad. It's as if I am walking in his gift. The podcast has positively helped me cope with my grief. Every Saturday morning as I prepare for my podcast, it feels as if I am getting ready for a therapy session. I interview people from all around the world and from different walks of life. I produce my own podcast, I am the host. I do my own research. I use my own "*radio voice*" when speaking live to my guests. Just like my dad, "EDIT AND PLAYBACK" is my specialty! I deliver relevant media topics to an international audience, with love. This is a wonderful way to give my pain a greater purpose while raising awareness for suicide prevention.

I have become a strong advocate for mental health and suicide prevention. I became actively involved with *Kevin's Song*, a charitable organization dedicated to generating public awareness about suicide and its causes. This amazing non-profit was established in honor of Kevin Francis Urso, who died by suicide.

Following Kevin's death, his parents, John and Gail Urso, started the foundation. According to their website, www.kevinssong.org, Kevin Urso, like my dad, was a funny guy with a legendary sense of humor. Sadly, Kevin dealt with depression – also like my dad. This is where I gained a wealth of knowledge about suicide. Not only have I learned about the causes of suicide, but I have also learned more about the causes of my dad's suicidal nature.

Kevin's Song gave me the closure and the peace that I was looking for to begin the healing process. Kevin's Song saved my life. I am currently on the board of directors, and I also serve on several planning committees within the organization. I joined Kevin's Song's Suicide Loss Survivor Group. The group meets on a regular basis both in person and virtually. I found this connection and kinship to be a true blessing. I felt safe in this space because I was surrounded by other suicide loss survivors. We all shared the same common pain. Sharing my experience with others who have been through similar experiences has helped me realize that I am not alone.

My advocacy efforts have attracted the attention of several media publications, including the front page of the Macomb Daily Newspaper. I have also been interviewed on radio stations across the world. I have traveled great distances as a keynote speaker for suicide prevention conferences.

My voice is saving lives. My greatest hope is to create a world where suicide no longer exists.

The loss of a parent can be one of the most emotionally difficult events in a person's life. Losing a parent by suicide can add additional layers to this grieving process. We are all unique and there is no right or wrong way to grieve. There is no simple solution for grief. The grieving process can take months or even years. However, the aforementioned tools have helped me in so many ways. I still have sad days from time-to-time. When those emotions come to the surface, I allow them in and I don't resist.

As I mentioned in the earlier chapter, I was in a dark space after my dad died. Suicide can shatter the things you take for granted about yourself, your relationships, and your world. This space was completely normal and

I am not ashamed to share my private journey with you. I want to inspire others with my story. I am a suicide loss survivor. I am no longer in the dark space. I miss my dad. I wish he was here to witness this beautiful work that I have done in his honor. I love my dad.

SPEAKING OF LOVE



My dad and I are pictured in this photo taken in the summer of 1980 in the parking lot of WGPR Studio in Detroit.

CHAPTER 5 - WHAT IS SUICIDE?

*"YOU'VE GOT A SMILE SO BRIGHT; YOU KNOW YOU COULD HAVE
BEEN A CANDLE."*

-Eddie Kendricks

Before the tragedy, I knew very little about the subject of suicide prevention. When my dad passed away, I became obsessed with the subject matter. As a suicide loss survivor, I was plagued by the need to make sense of the tragedy and to understand why my dad made such a terrible decision. I purchased several books on suicide. I joined a Facebook group for Suicide Loss Survivors.

I became actively involved in other online support groups. I created a playlist of YouTube videos about suicide. I watched them daily, especially on sleepless nights. I was on a crazed mission to catch my dad's killer.

It is human nature, when trying to make sense of a tragedy, to place blame on someone or something. I was eager to conduct a psychological "autopsy," by finding out about the circumstances that led to my dad's death. I wanted justice for all of the victims in the world who died by suicide. I needed to know the causes of suicide. I had to learn the WHY behind my dad's death. I needed to make sense of the pain and confusion that led to this nightmare. I was on a quest and *nothing* was going to stop me. Seeking these answers was a necessary part of my grief. On the flip side of this, I knew that some of my questions would never be answered. I had to come to peace with this reality.

In this book, I want to share what I have learned about suicide and its causes. Suicide is defined as death caused by self-inflicted injury with the intent to die. In most cases, suicide is the tragic outcome of mental illness and the desire to escape unbearable pain. Unfortunately, there

is no simple answer as to why people take their own lives. Suicide is a complex health issue. It's never the result of just one thought. Suicide is a result of multiple intersecting factors. These factors include health, historical, and environmental factors. Suicide is a disease of the mind, not a disease of the brain. I have also learned that suicide is a serious public health problem.

The most common methods of suicide are by gunshot, hanging, drug overdose, and vehicular impact. Many suicides go unreported, as it can be difficult to identify. Suicide is the number one preventable cause of death in America. Since becoming an advocate for suicide prevention, I have learned that over 90 percent of people who die by suicide have a diagnosable mental illness. Those individuals may feel that suicide is the only way out of the darkness they may be feeling as a result of their mental illness, trauma, significant loss, rejection, or disappointment.

Depression and bipolar disorder are the most common among people who die by suicide. However, most people who have depression and bipolar disorder do not die by suicide. Having a mental health condition does not mean that one will surely die by suicide. It is estimated that 85% of people in the United States will know someone personally who has completed suicide. For each suicide completed, at least 7 loved ones are directly affected by the death.

If you were to stand in a room with 20 people, at least two of those individuals are contemplating suicide at that very moment. You are far more likely to encounter someone who is having suicidal thoughts than you are to encounter a person having a heart-attack.

The good news is that anyone can help save a life. You don't have to be a doctor or a trained professional in order to help someone facing a suicidal crisis. You can make a difference...yes you! On the following pages, I will provide you with valuable information that I have found in my research from various sources.

General Suicide Statistics in the U. S.

Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death in the U. S.

Nearly 48,183 people died by suicide in 2021.

One person dies by suicide every 11 minutes.

Every day, approximately 132 Americans die by suicide.

One male dies by suicide every 13.7 minutes in the U.S.

Suicide rates among males in 2020 were 4 times higher than the rate of women

80% of suicide deaths are men

One female dies by suicide every 53.5 minutes in the U.S.

There is one suicide death for every estimated 25 suicide attempts.

In Michigan, 1,485 people died by suicide in 2021

Global Statistics

Nearly 800,000 people die by suicide in the world each year, which is roughly one death every 40 seconds.

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death in the world for those aged 15-24 years.

Depression is the leading cause of mental disability worldwide.

Warning Signs

Suicide does not have one single cause. Certain factors like substance abuse and untreated depression can lead to a higher risk of suicide. The warning signs of suicide are indicators that a person may be in acute danger and may urgently need help.

Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself.

Looking for a way to kill oneself.

Talking about feeling hopeless or having no purpose.

Talking about feeling trapped or being in unbearable pain.

Talking about being a burden to others

Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs

Acting anxious, agitated, or reckless

Sleeping too little or too much.

Withdrawing or feeling isolated.

Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge

Displaying extreme mood swings.

Risk Factors of Suicide

Mental disorders, particularly mood disorders, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders, and certain personality disorders

Alcohol and other substance use disorders

Hopelessness

A recent tragedy or loss

Impulsive and/or aggressive tendencies

History of trauma or abuse

Major physical illnesses

Previous suicide attempt(s)

Family history of suicide

Job or financial loss

Loss of relationship(s)

Easy access to lethal means

Local clusters of suicide

Gender: Although more women than men attempt suicide, men are 4x more likely to die by suicide.

Lack of social support and sense of isolation

Stigma associated with asking for help

Lack of healthcare, especially mental health, and substance abuse treatment

Cultural and religious beliefs, such as the belief that suicide is a noble resolution of a personal dilemma

Exposure to others who have died by suicide (in real life or via the media and Internet) *My dad lost his best friend and nephew to suicide at different times in his life. Being a suicide loss survivor puts one at a greater risk of a suicidal death.*

Questions About Suicide

There are many misconceptions and misunderstandings about suicide. Here are answers to some of the most common questions:

Why do people kill themselves?

There is no single answer to this question. There are many factors, such as traumatic and difficult life events, that can contribute to suicide risk. As I stated before, an estimated 90% of people who take their own lives have a mental health condition, such as a depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, or substance use disorder. Individuals with depressive disorders are especially at risk for suicide, but this risk is not overwhelming. Most people living with a depressive disorder or other mental illnesses can receive help through awareness, education, and treatment. The most common source of suicide risk is when a mental health condition is mistreated or left untreated.

How do I know whether someone is considering suicide?

You can look for warning signs for suicide that are related to the way the person is talking or acting.

However, it's not always obvious that someone is at risk, so the best way to know if someone is thinking about suicide is to ask them directly. Don't be afraid to use the word **SUICIDE**.

If I ask someone whether they're thinking about suicide, will it put the idea into their head?

No. Research has found that asking someone whether they're having suicidal thoughts does not give them suicidal tendencies. The actual risk is not talking about suicide with someone who may be in crisis.

Is a person at increased risk to attempt suicide if they've been exposed to it in their family or has had a close friend who died by suicide?

It's possible. For people without a mental health condition, being exposed to a family member's or friend's suicide attempt usually doesn't increase their suicide risk in the absence of other risk factors, like substance misuse, trauma, abuse, or a major physical illness.

However, for people with a mental health condition, being exposed to a family member's or friend's suicide attempt can put them at greater risk for attempting suicide.

Do people attempt suicide to prove something or get sympathy?

No. A suicide attempt is a sign that someone is in crisis. It should always be taken seriously and never ignored. Without intervention and proper treatment, a person who has attempted suicide is at risk for attempting suicide again.

Why do people attempt suicide when they appear to feel better?

Sometimes, a person having suicidal thoughts doesn't have enough energy to attempt it. They may regain some energy, but their feelings of hopelessness remain, and the increased energy level could contribute to acting on suicidal feelings.

Another theory proposes that a person may “give in” to their feelings of hopelessness. This relieves some anxiety, which makes them appear calmer in the period preceding a suicide attempt. The most important takeaway is to maintain an open dialogue with someone who has recently been in crisis; never assume that those feelings have gone away.

If a person’s mind is made up can they still be stopped?

Yes. Never give up on someone who is thinking about suicide, even if they’ve stated that they have already made up their mind. A person determined to attempt suicide often experiences feelings of hopelessness and a desire to stop their suffering. You can help a person in crisis by giving them hope and by helping them regain perspective, which can lessen their suicidal thoughts or prevent them from attempting suicide.

Ways to help prevent suicide

Make Plans With a Friend — and Keep Them!

Meet in person. Connecting with friends on social media or through text is easy but try to catch up with your friends in person whenever possible. Face-to-face interactions help strengthen social connections in part by allowing us to see and hear our friends' nonverbal body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice. Meet for coffee, go for a walk, or do something else where you can put away your phones and give each other your undivided attention. Research shows that friendships have the power to influence our lives in many ways, including boosting our physical and mental health. Friendships increase opportunities for social contact and decrease social isolation — a known risk factor for depression and suicidal thoughts. Friends make us laugh, listen to our problems, and are there for us when we need them.

SPEAKING OF LOVE

Having even one close friend can make us feel loved and important, and that feeling can be lifesaving. When a suicide-related crisis occurs, friends and family are often caught off-guard, unprepared, and unsure of what to do. The behaviors of a person experiencing a crisis can be unpredictable, changing dramatically without warning.



My dad was a prostate cancer survivor. In this photo, he rang the bell to symbolize the victorious end of his cancer treatments.

There are a few ways to approach a suicide-related crisis:

Talk openly and honestly. Don't be afraid to ask questions like: "Do you have a plan for how you would kill yourself?"

Remove means such as guns, knives, or stockpiled pills

Calmly ask simple and direct questions, like "*Can I help you call your psychiatrist?*"

If there are multiple people around, have one person speak at a time.

Express support and concern, be patient

Don't argue, threaten, or raise your voice!

Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong!

If you're nervous, try not to fidget or pace.

Like any other health emergency, it's important to address a mental health crisis like suicide quickly and effectively. If your friend or family member struggles with suicidal ideation day-to-day, let them know that they can talk with you about what they're going through. Make sure that you adopt an open and compassionate mindset when they're talking. Instead of "arguing" or trying to disprove any negative statements they make ("*Your life isn't that bad!*"), try active listening techniques such as reflecting their feelings and summarizing their thoughts. This can help your loved one feel heard and validated. Let them know that mental health professionals are trained to help people understand their feelings and improve mental wellness and resiliency. Forms of psychotherapy, like cognitive behavioral therapy and dialectical behavior therapy, can help a person with

suicidal thoughts recognize ineffective patterns of thinking and behavior, validate their feelings and learn positive coping skills. Suicidal thoughts are a symptom of varying factors, just like any other — they can be treated, and they can improve over time.

Suicide is not the answer. There is always hope.

Now let's address some myths about suicide...

MYTH: Asking a person if they're thinking about suicide will encourage them to end their life.

FACT: Asking about suicide doesn't "*plant a seed*". The message is of care and concern. Many times, what people want to do is make that social connection with someone and be heard and listened to. This gradually gives them an opportunity also to think out loud and to process what they're going through. Once that person feels heard, you can suggest that they seek help. You should also ask if they plan to hurt themselves and how. Then, discuss and develop a safety plan. Remove guns, or other weapons, and drugs that pose a risk.

MYTH: There's nothing you can do to stop someone who wants to end their life.

FACT: There are many things we can do to intervene when someone is thinking about suicide. For most, the crisis is a limited-time period. With the right help and support, it may subside. Asking someone directly about their suicidal thinking puts time and space between them and the potential of them ending their life. When we limit a person's access to lethal means, most are not likely to seek an alternative.

Limited access includes:

Securing firearms and weapons

Adding carbon monoxide sensors to cars

Using blister packaging for medications

Adding barriers on bridges

If you suspect a loved one is thinking of ending their life, have a non-judgmental conversation with them. Listen to them. Don't minimize or dismiss their experience.

Avoid giving advice or trying to “fix” the problem. Help them connect to their reasons for living rather than try to convince them their life is worth living. This conversation allows for the opportunity to encourage professional help. This can make all the difference. Learn how to talk to someone who may be struggling.

MYTH: People take their own life “out of the blue.”

FACT: Through their words or actions, most people who take their own lives really have communicated their intent beforehand to other people. There are generally warning signs. **Warnings are generally organized in three distinct categories:**

Talk: Some things they may say include, “wanting to die,” or “having no reason to stick around anymore.”

Behavior: They may withdraw from friends and family, no longer do the activities they enjoy, or act recklessly.

Mood: They may show extreme irritation, anger, increased depression, or even a complete, sudden improved overall mood. Witnessing such behavior can be distressing, but it's an opportunity to share your concerns openly. It also starts the conversation to encourage professional help and support.

MYTH: Someone who has their act together isn't at risk of suicide.

FACT: On the outside, someone can appear to have it all: a great job, a healthy family, an active social life, a beautiful home. We look at the outside veneer and say, *'They're doing great. Life is wonderful. How could they even contemplate suicide?'* You really don't know what's going on inside of someone. The deaths of Robin Williams and Kate Spade are high-profile examples of famous people dying by suicide.

They are all a reminder that we can't make assumptions about people when we don't know the full story.

MYTH: Most suicides happen around the winter holiday season.

FACT: The holidays are a time of togetherness. They can also heighten depression among people who already feel lonely or stressed by the demands of the season. Still, contrary to popular belief, suicides don't peak during the winter holidays. Suicide rates are at their highest in the springtime. While there's no scientific consensus as to why this happens, the seasonal spike in suicides means it's best to let go of any assumptions that sunny days and blooming flowers will lift the mood of someone who's struggling. Instead, make a point to check in with them and offer a sympathetic ear.

MYTH: The risk of suicide declines following a suicide attempt.

FACT: While most individuals who attempt suicide will not go on to die by suicide, the risk for future suicide attempts remains. A prior suicide attempt is the single most important risk factor for suicide in the general population. Without adequate follow-up treatment and a support network, someone who has attempted suicide may feel alone and isolated. This can trigger those feelings that led them to attempt suicide initially. Offer connections to social support and treatment should things become overwhelming or challenging going forward.

MYTH: Giving someone a hotline number to call is enough.

FACT: Suicide hotlines can be effective. Thousands of people call the suicide prevention hotline every year for help. It's important to help facilitate getting them to take the next step, rather than just giving them a phone number because you don't know whether they're going to follow through.

The best thing to do is ask how you can help. Perhaps offer to reach out to a mental health professional they've seen in the past or drive them to the emergency room yourself. If it's a co-worker, consider asking the management at your company to contact your colleague's relative who can get them medical care.

MYTH: Suicide only happens in certain demographic areas and groups.

FACT: Suicide occurs across all ages, racial/ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic groups.

Some groups at a greater risk of suicide include:

Veterans

LGBTQ+

Youth and Young Adults

Attempt Survivors

Loss Survivors

Disaster Survivors (*Like Hurricane Katrina*)

988 - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (*formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline*) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline connects those experiencing mental health, substance use, or suicidal crisis with trained crisis counselors. Those who are worried about a loved one who may need crisis support can also dial 988.

CHAPTER 6 - SUICIDE LOSS SURVIVORS

“A DAY WITHOUT LOVE, IS A DAY WITHOUT LIFE”

UNKNOWN

Losing a loved to suicide is one of life's most painful experiences. As a suicide loss survivor, you may have feelings of shame, guilt, blame, and anger. Furthermore, survivors of suicide loss are at higher risk of developing major depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal behaviors, as well as a prolonged form of grief called *complicated grief*. Added to the burden is the stigma and shame associated with suicide. These factors can keep survivors away from much needed support and healing resources. Suicide loss survivors may require unique supportive measures and targeted treatment to cope with their loss. Please remember that there is no specific time frame for grieving. Sometimes grief will come at the most inopportune time.

You can be in a good mood one minute, then out of nowhere, tears will begin to flow – and that is totally okay! Do not judge yourself or criticize your reaction to what is normal. GRIEF IS NORMAL. You must allow yourself the time and space needed to be happy again. It is possible to be happy again after losing a loved one to suicide. I often feel sad, but I also recognize how lucky I was to have a dad who loved me. I am thankful for the time we shared together here on Earth. The lessons he taught me have left an indelible mark upon my heart. Being in a state of gratitude has really shifted my perspective. I now realize that it was not my job to save my dad because we all have our own life journey. This revelation has released the loss survivor guilt. I want people to understand that suicide is NOT a selfish act. It is a desperate act to find peace. My dad died by suicide, but in all actually – he lost his battle with mental illness.

Death by suicide not only affects the person who died, but also “suicide survivors,” or those who cared about the person. Suicide bereavement is the deep sadness and grieving that is often experienced after the loss of a loved one to suicide. While grief is a normal response to losing someone important to you, when someone dies by suicide you may experience many complex feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Many of these relate to the person no longer physically being in your life. Some may relate to the fact that the death was by suicide. These feelings can be particularly intense, overwhelming, and confusing.

For every suicide there are often many family members, friends and colleagues who are affected. While individuals work through their personal grief differently, some experiences of suicide bereavement are similar due to the stigma often associated with suicide. Suicide loss can affect your physical and mental health, and sometimes includes dealing with thoughts of suicide.

It is important that as individuals and communities we respond to people affected by suicide with compassion and continue to support them through their mourning process. Losing a friend or loved one is never easy. However, when you lose someone to suicide, it can feel different from other types of loss. Several circumstances can make death by suicide different, making the healing process more challenging. Listed below are some of the major differences.

Stigma and Isolation: Talking about suicide can be difficult for those who have experienced the loss. Different culture's view suicide in different ways, and sometimes discussing it can be hard. This can also be made more challenging when the act of suicide conflicts with religious views. Suicide can be isolating as communities of friends each struggle differently to make sense of the loss they all have experienced.

Finding the right people in your support network who are able to help you experience your loss is important. Sometimes, this may mean seeking professional help in order to help you cope with your loss. In those situations, you can make an appointment with your doctor or find a therapist in your community.

Mixed Emotions: When a death is by suicide, you may both mourn the person's passing while also hold intense feelings about the circumstances of their death. Feelings such as anger, abandonment, and guilt commonly occur after a suicide as well as positive feelings about the deceased. Sorting through all of these diverse feelings can make the healing process more difficult.

Needing to Understand Why: Understanding the circumstances of a death by suicide can sometimes lead you to asking "Why?" You may second guess your relationship, wish that you had noticed signs earlier, or wonder how you could have acted differently.

This need to understand "why" may be hard on you, as the circumstances surrounding the loved one's death could be unclear or not easily known. Some questions may never be answered, while you may find other answers that make sense. Sometimes you will find answers to your questions, while other times, you must learn to accept the fact that there are some things no one can know.

Risk for Survivors: People who have recently experienced a loss by suicide are at increased risk for having suicidal thoughts themselves. After experiencing the loss of a loved one, it's not uncommon to wish you were dead or to feel like the pain is unbearable. Remember that having suicidal thoughts does not mean that you will act on them. These feelings and thoughts will likely decrease over time, but if you find them too intense, or if you're considering putting your thoughts into action, seek support from a mental health professional.

Some common experiences of grief following suicide loss may include:

Shock, numbness, denial, anger, and blame

Searching for an explanation, asking “Why?”

Guilt, responsibility for not preventing the suicide

Loneliness, social isolation, and disconnection

Difficulty trusting others, feeling abandoned

Depressive symptoms and heightened suicide risk

Helping someone who lost a loved one to suicide...

If you know someone who has lost a friend or family member to suicide, the most important thing you can do is reach out and listen. Be an active listener as they talk about their loved one. Give them the freedom to express the confusing emotions they are experiencing. You do not need to offer answers, just be willing to listen with compassion. Express your condolences and offer support the way you would to anyone who has lost someone close to them. Offer to help with meals or other.

tasks. Ask them about the way the person lived, not just about their death. Ask what the person's name was if you did not know them personally and refer to the individual by name when conversing. Allow the person to cry and wipe their tears (literally). Crying cleanses the soul and aids the healing process. Urge them to wait before making any major life changes such as moving, giving away possessions or quitting a job. Working through grief can take years and the pain is never forgotten. Taking life one day at a time is also a good suggestion.

Talking to a Child About Suicide ...

It may seem gentler to avoid the conversation or to conceal the actual cause of death, but more often than not children understand more than we realize. It is important to have a conversation that is age-appropriate but also honest to avoid undermining their trust and potentially creating a legacy of shame and secrecy that can persist for years.

Children grieve differently from adults and may have a different understanding.

Support After A Suicide Death...

Many people who have lost someone to suicide are helped by connecting with others who have been through this experience. Reaching out to a suicide loss support program can alleviate the isolation that many survivors may experience. The shared experience and wisdom of others can offer hope as you find your way through this experience. Losing a loved one to suicide is a devastating and stressful event. It might feel like your world is turned upside down, and you don't know how you will survive. The combination of stress, grief, trauma, and exhaustion can have a negative impact on mental and physical health. People who have recently experienced a loss by suicide are at increased risk for having suicidal thoughts themselves.

After experiencing the loss of a loved one, it's not uncommon to wish you were dead or to feel like the pain is unbearable. Remember that having suicidal thoughts does not mean that you will act on them. These feelings and thoughts will likely decrease over time, but if you find them too intense, or if you're considering putting your thoughts into action, seek support from a mental health professional.



My dad was proud to be a Wayne State Warrior Alumni. He was often recognized for his outstanding contributions to the basketball team.

CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION

“TO GRIEVE IS HUMAN. TO SUFFER, HOWEVER, IS OPTIONAL.”
— ANGIE CORBETT-KUIPER

Based on my personal experience and knowledge, here are some techniques that I personally found to be helpful after my dad passed away. These suggestions can help you cope with losing someone to suicide:

Educate yourself about suicide and its causes. Take a mental health first aid course. This education will help you along your journey of healing. Prior to my dad’s passing, I knew very little about the subject of suicide. I have learned that suicide is a mental health crisis, and it does not discriminate. Suicide can happen to anyone. Being a suicide loss survivor can be a lonely journey. I joined a support group and it really helped me.

You might need professional therapy – it’s okay. Facing your grief alone will make the healing process more difficult. Talking with someone can play a vital role in sorting out your emotions and pain. Do not isolate yourself. You can even call me. I love you!

Engage in acts of self-care. Grief can be damaging to your immune system and overall health. Go to the gym, fix your hair, put on earrings, order a coffee, go for a nice walk, or get out of the house. A shower and fresh pajamas can make a huge emotional impact on gloomy days. Once a month, I take a 30-minute drive to TJ Maxx and I reward myself with some retail therapy. Now, I am not talking about splurging on expensive items. I usually allow myself a \$25 budget. The drive, the shopping experiences and the solitude changes my mood positively.

Do something, on a consistent basis, to honor your loved one's memory. My dad loved radio broadcasting. He was a former radio show host. My dad loved public speaking and he was so good at it. As a way to honor him, I created my podcast. This helps me stay connected to my dad through his physical absence. I also use every opportunity possible to speak in front of large audiences. My dad never hesitated to use his voice to bring love to the people around him. Whether it's a funeral, family gathering, community event – go on the stage and speak to the audience. You can also plan an annual balloon release or candlelight vigil in honor of your loved one.

Do not let your loved one die in vain. Become an advocate! Support local suicide prevention organizations in your area. Join the American Foundation For Suicide Prevention. Take part in media publications and engage in podcast interviews regarding suicide prevention.

Participate in walks and activities within the suicide prevention community. Be a voice for the voiceless. Turn your pain into a greater purpose.

Speaking of Love – Be an instrument of love. Open your heart to spread more love to those around you. People who feel loved are less likely to take their own lives. Participate in random acts of kindness. Help a neighbor with their grocery shopping, bake a pie for your co-worker, call a sick friend and offer to do their laundry. Sprinkle love around like confetti! Tell someone you love them. I love you!!

Allow yourself to feel all of the emotions associated with grief; shock, anger, bargaining, denial, acceptance, etc. By allowing these emotions to surface, you will open the door to your healing process. Dealing with grief can be a whirlwind of emotions – and that's okay!

Share precious memories of your loved one with others. Show photos and videos of the good times. Make a photo collage of your loved one and display it in your home – with LOVE!

Write a “Goodbye Letter” – Your loved one will always hold a special place inside of your heart. When a person dies by suicide, they leave with so many unanswered questions. Perhaps writing a letter to your loved one can aid your healing. You can then read it aloud in front of someone you trust! I am planning to do this soon with someone I trust, in a safe place, with lots of Kleenex and LOVE!

Play Music! I once read that music has a fourth dimensional quality and it releases the soul from imprisonment. It makes difficult things seem easy to accomplish.

As I stated at the beginning of this book, my dad was crazy about Eddie Kendricks and “The Temptations.”

I often listen to his favorite songs, with the volume at the max! It really helps me stay connected to him. Dancing is also a beautiful way to release endorphins and happy chemicals in the brain. Dance in front of a mirror like no one is watching! Then say to yourself, “*Hey baby, I love you!*” ...

Tap into your inner creativity! Give yourself permission to express your imaginative powers and become open to happiness again. When we open our hearts to grieving through art, we process our emotions outside the moments of loss and grief. You can make jewelry, paint on canvas, or make a keepsake honoring your loved one. Research shows that art can be therapeutic.

SPEAKING OF LOVE



In this photo, my dad and I were at a holiday gathering.

The loss of a loved one can be extremely difficult to overcome, especially when it involves a murder-suicide. Coping with life as a suicide loss survivor can be a struggle. I want you to know that you can rise above your pain and live a quality life in honor of your loved one. My purpose for writing this book is to provide tools and resources to help others heal after losing a loved one to suicide.

What I learned about myself during this experience is that I am a strong woman. I have struggled with low self-esteem for many years. Yet, losing my dad so tragically has taught me that I am, indeed, strong. I also learned that I am a woman who is determined to impact the world. I used to be afraid to share my voice, but now I speak loud about what matters to me the most, like suicide prevention. I have learned that my voice has value. I believe the world needs more love, and I was born to be the love that the world needs.

Thank you for taking the time to read my book, Speaking of Love – A suicide loss survivor’s guide of hope, healing, and love. This has been a journey in pursuit of the strongest magnetic force on the planet earth, Love!

I love you!

CHAPTER 8 – FAMILY PHOTOS

Here are a few photos of some of the people my dad loved the most.



(Front Row) my dad, his sister Renee, his mother Jeannette, his sister Lexine (Back row) his brothers David and Wayne



My dad and his older brother, David McKalpain

SPEAKING OF LOVE

My dad loved being a father and a grandpa!



My dad's only son, Kevin, and grandson Corey



My dad's 3 daughters; Tiffany, La Toya, and Shadae



Shadae and grandson, Ryan



My dad and his oldest granddaughter, Crystal

SPEAKING OF LOVE

More family photos...



Omar, Vincent, and Annette

Alden Jr. & Alden Sr.

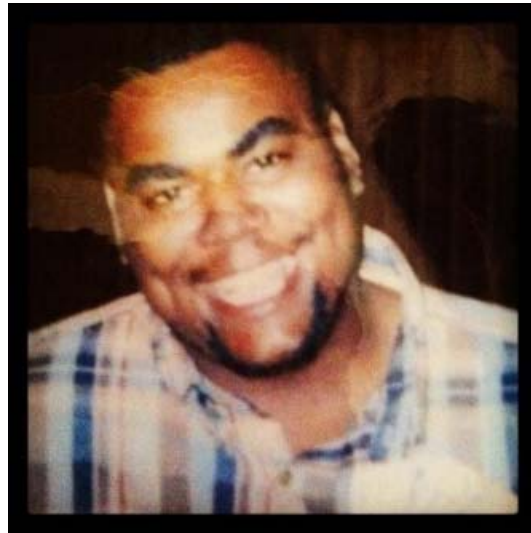


Fred Jr, Omar, Vincent, Damon

Damon and Dion McKalpain were the apple of my dad's eye.
He loved his nephews so much.



Damon



Dion



Monique, Annette, and Kim
(my dad's favorite nieces)



My dad and one of his favorite nieces, LaQuana



Nephews - Fred III, Fred Jr., & Armani



Cousin Tish, and my dad



David, Kim, My Dad, and Wayne



My dad's brother Wayne and his wife, Denise



This book was written in loving memory of:

Herman McKalpain, Jr.
May 25, 1953 – March 2, 2020

May he continue to rest in eternal love...

Resources:

<https://www.aetna.com/health-guide/suicide-myths-and-facts.html>

<https://save.org/about-suicide>

<https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/>

<https://www.aetna.com/health-guide/suicide->

About the Author

“LOVE IS THE HEARTBEAT OF LIFE” – LA TOYA BOND



La Toya Bond is a legal support professional, international bestselling author, radio personality, and a small business owner. She is the host of *Speaking Of Love Podcast* created in honor of her father who took his own life in a murder-suicide.

Since the tragedy, La Toya has become an advocate for mental health and suicide prevention. Her mission is to help save the lives of people who are struggling with mental health challenges, which often leads to suicide. To date, La Toya has recorded over 125 life-changing podcast episodes. She interviews people from all around the world with the sole intention of spreading love. As a minority woman, La Toya is nationally recognized by Black Women In Radio (BWIR) for her outstanding and influential contributions to Black radio culture and digital media around the globe.

Before switching career paths, La Toya worked as a school office administrator for nearly two decades. She was awarded the National Life Changer Of The Year Award for positively impacting the lives of her students. La Toya is also the Executive Board Secretary for the Down Syndrome Guild of Southeast Michigan.

Additionally, she also serves on the Board of Directors for Kevin's Song, a non-profit dedicated to ending suicide. La Toya has been featured in several media publications for her advocacy efforts, including Fox 2 News, Macomb Daily News, The Michigan Chronicle, The Pittsburgh Courier, The Oakland Press, Authority Magazine, Detroit Praise Network, Beasley Media, Detroit Public Television (PBS), and more.

La Toya is a Jane Of All Trades. She was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan. She has a passion for serving humanity. She currently works as a legal support professional in her hometown, a job she truly adores. In 2018, she landed the role of radio *co-host* for The Michael Van Tull Show in Detroit.

She proudly runs a cottage bakery and wooden craft business, both out of her home. During her spare time, La Toya enjoys reading and collecting books and magazines. She comes from a big family where food is the glue that strengthens her family “BOND”! She is highly sought after for her unique ability to prepare delicious soul food meals and homemade desserts – all from scratch. She is an avid lover of red lipstick and Coca-Cola Products.

La Toya is the mother of one adult daughter, Crystal, who recently graduated with honors from the University of Michigan. Her daughter also happens to be the editor of this book. The apple of La Toya’s eye is her beloved tuxedo cat, Faith, with whom she rescued from an animal shelter 13 years ago.

La Toya is a respected community leader who believes that spreading love is the secret to her success.

**SPEAKING OF
LOVE**
A Suicide Loss Survivor's
Guide of Hope, Healing and Love

BOOK LAUNCH!
Paperback and Kindle
Books Available now
on AMAZON!

La Toya Bond
Suicide Awareness Advocate
self-publishes a powerful book
about her experience as a
suicide loss survivor!

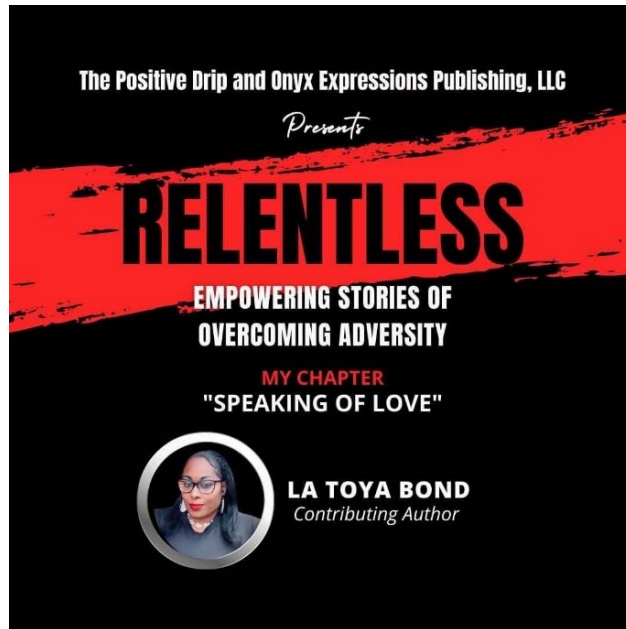
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(Additional copies of this book are available on Amazon.)

Other books by the author include:



**Relentless:
Empowering Stories Of Overcoming Adversity**

Authored By:
Dr. Nelson Beltijar, Visionary Author
La Toya Bond, Co-Author
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A SUICIDE LOSS SURVIVOR'S GUIDE OF
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RELENTLESS: EMPOWERING STORIES
OF OVERCOMING ADVERSITIES

La Toya Bond

Creative Artist & Baker



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My mission in life is to sprinkle a little love
everywhere I go!

To learn more about me,
check out my website...

<https://www.beautifultoy.net>

For more information about La Toya Bond,
visit her social media pages:

Facebook:

www.beautifultoy.net/speaking-of-love.html

YouTube Channel:

<https://youtube.com/@beautifultoy>

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