

Tonya Renee Anderson

Founder of An Exquisite Life

ONE MORE DAY

Discovering the Joy in Living



ONE MORE DAY

"I am with you always even to the end of the age."
Matthew 28:20

Life is Sacred

I did not always know this beautiful reality. For a period of time, I wanted to die. This powerful idea became my whole life, a slow progressive desire.

After years of feeling tired and devastated by my life, I wanted my excruciating pain to end. My life had become an accumulation of disappointments, heartaches, failures and betrayals that I felt kept burying me deeper and deeper into a hole, out of which I could not climb. Years of struggling financially, making wrong decisions, not graduating from the United States Naval Academy, a divorce, my son living with his dad, thinking several different men were "the One" and each one breaking my heart into pieces.

My life had become too difficult to fix. I had burnt too many bridges and solutions were no where to be found. The internal battle within was literally one side wanting to die and the other side of me wanting to live.



This picture was taken of me, a week after I had planned to die. The effects of traumas and sadness are still there. The problems were still there, but I had turned a major corner in my life. I had chosen to live. I love this picture because it is the evidence, we can have everything, be in paradise and still be miserable, unhappy or know that something is missing. If you look, closely you can see a glimmer of light in my eyes.



This is me dancing in Bali. Full of life, living my dreams and following my heart. Some would say, “all lit up.” This is what Joy in motion looks like.

*With Caroline Konnoth.
Pictures by Lindsey Miller.*

That internal battle played out for years in my life, with my half finished projects, a tendency to run from my problems, moving several times in a year, going to church religiously and then not going at all. The conflict made it impossible for me to feel successful at anything I did. My relationships suffered, I was loved, but it was difficult to hear or feel the love all around me.

The one thing that was strong within me was my relationship with God. I believe in God one hundred percent. I was once told by a dear friend, Timothy “Whispering Eagle” Aguilar, loving God 99 percent is doubt. Learning to believe in God 100 percent was my gift.



Timothy “Whispering Eagle” Aguilar

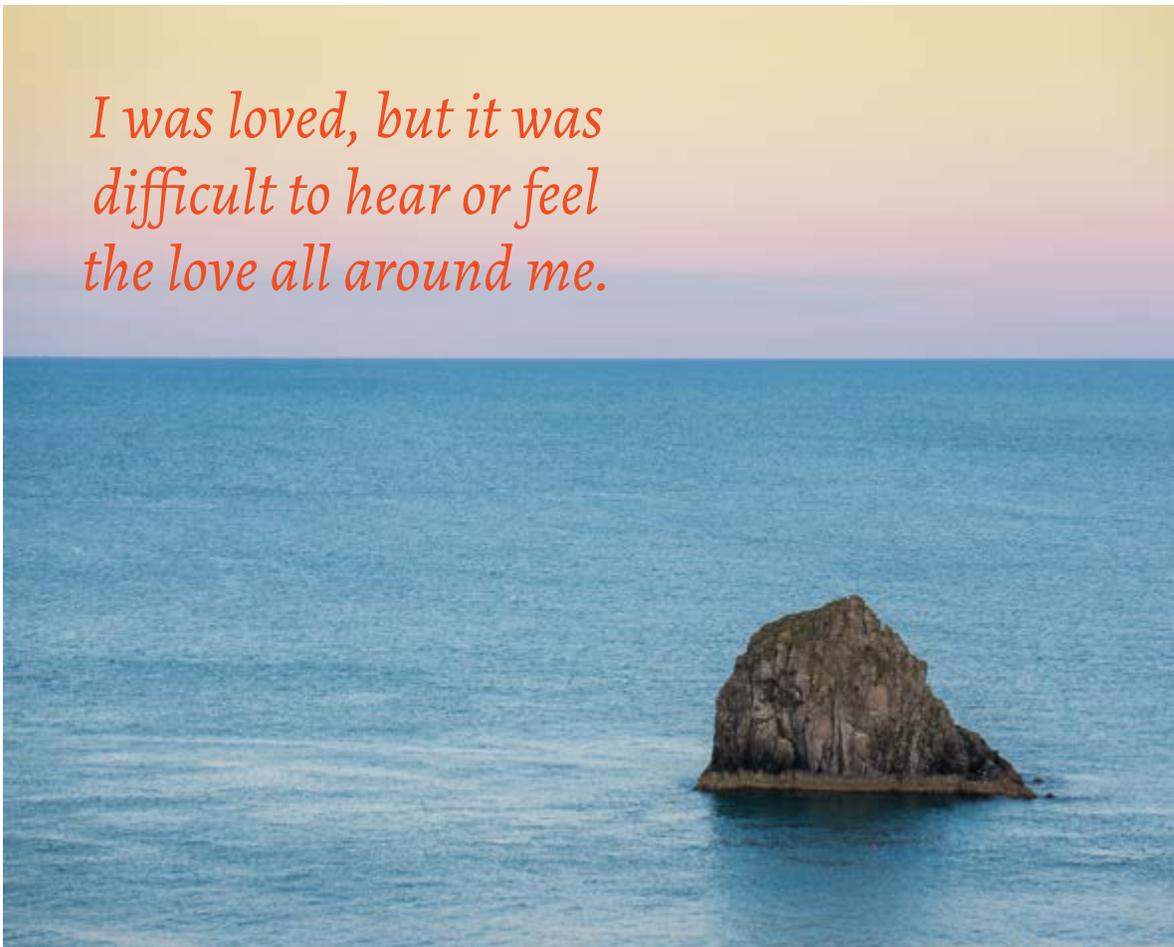
I have always known and believed in God. I felt God’s presence as a child. I saw God always working in my life and learned not to doubt this powerful presence of lovingkindness, joy and strength. The trouble began when I stopped listening to God’s still small voice in my head. That eternal stillness that would gently guide me in my life.

I remember clearly when I began to stop listening and harmed me the most.

On a gorgeous Hawaiian night, with a beautiful full moon, I attended a party filled with friends. We were the chosen ones for many reasons, young, beautiful and amazing. Friends and Friends of friends, everything was going our way and most of all, I believed I was safe. Simply put and lots of therapy, I was raped that night and everything I thought about living came crashing down. I had been drinking and was raped at a party by a man who I thought was a friend

I woke up the next morning, bleeding, people sleeping all around me. I quietly tiptoed out of the house into the stunning Hawaiian sun. The sun basked me in love and light, and all I felt was darkness and devastation. Too embarrassed for many reasons to report it, I took a shower, tried to wash the rape away and never told anyone. That feeling would continue for many years.

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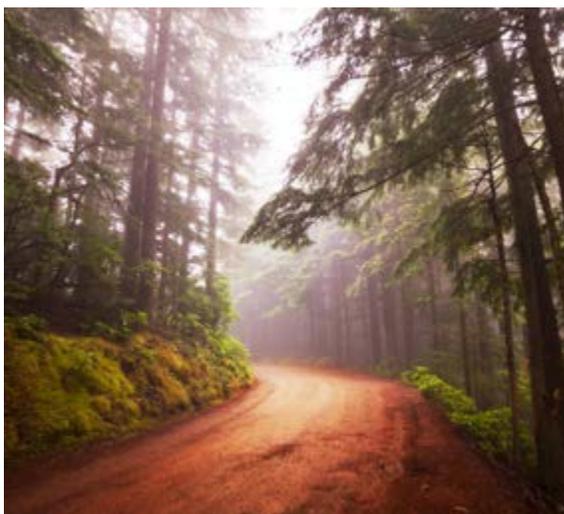


I stuffed down my feelings and emotions deep inside and continued moving through my life. The rape had become a defining moment in my life. I stopped drinking, going to parties and threw myself into a puritanical, spiritual life, as way to cleanse myself and my body . I became celibate for eight years, completely devoted myself



to a spiritual life and developed a deeper, intimate relationship with God. God became tangible to me. I went to religious services twice a week, prayed and meditated. I practiced Kundalini yoga for several years. I volunteered in the community in many capacities. I stopped going to parties, places where many people were drinking or date. It was an amazing eight years of being celibate. My father, said “I was always searching for God.” I guess that is what it looked like to him. To me, I wanted to be immersed in God, completely and I was.

During this time of my life, I truly felt at one with God and had found an internal peace with my new life. I felt like the rape and my life had been healed. I felt I was going in the right direction. Most of all, I felt I was being obedient to God and doing all the right things.



During my celibacy, I worked as a flight attendant and traveled the world. I visited many spiritual places of worship, attended churches and saw how people around the world were in need of homes, schools and churches. In my silent prayers to God, I asked to be able to help build homes, schools and churches one day. This was my life purpose.

Then, the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States happened and all of our lives changed, mine included. I remember September 10, 2001, being a most picturesque day. I lived in Los Angeles at the time. It was breathtaking with gorgeous blue skies and white clouds over the crystal blue Pacific ocean. Everything was so vividly bright and the smell of the ocean cleansed the air with perfection. That was the last day, I remember my world being perfect.

The morning 9/11 happened, I had dreamed of a building on fire, so when I awoke I did not know if I was dreaming or awake.



I went to my friend Timothy's home, and we watched the news on television. I imagined what the flight attendants had gone through. My life was rocked to its core. As soon as the planes hit the towers, my phone started ringing. Loved ones wanted to know if I was flying and where was I, was I safe? I knew people cared. I told them I was safe and on the ground.

After seeing the planes hit the towers, I silently quit. The airplanes were all grounded, so I was able to stay home for a few days. A few days later, I heard a deep male voice speaking on my answering machine. His voice, bellowed throughout my apartment, "T. Anderson, call the CREW DESK now!"

His voice felt like it was a command from God. I trembled and was obedient at the same

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time. “You are scheduled to be the purser on the first flight back into Washington, D.C.,” said the dispatcher.

”Purser?” I thought.”How can I be the purser? I am a junior flight attendant.” A purser is the flight attendant in charge and responsible for the supervision of the crew and all inflight services. It was the most extraordinary flight ever. Passengers came bearing gifts, donuts, flowers and newspapers. The entire flight from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C. was eerily silent. The tension palpable. When we landed, the people on the airplane burst into spontaneous applause. We did it. I did it. I was afraid, but I did it. We attempted to go back to normal.

Each flight afterwards became more and more difficult. With every flight, there were dozens and then hundreds more people traumatized by 9/11. It was not long before I knew I was no longer able to fly. I was developing a fear of flying. One morning on a flight, I began to pour vodka in my orange juice so that I could get through the flight. As I brought the glass to my lips, I said to myself, „I have to quit flying. I cannot do this anymore”, and poured the drink out. I asked for a leave of absence and it was granted.

I left the airlines and moved to Williamsport, Pennsylvania to be closer to my son, who lived with his father and my ex-husband. A great decision that hurt deeply. I left my beautiful spiritual community and felt alone. Even with an amazing education, I was an outsider. I could not find a job that paid well, and it was not long before I was drowning finan-

cially. My waitress job was not cutting it, I had made \$17 in my last shift. I could not pay my rent of \$500.

This kind of financial heartache I had never known. I was used to paying my bills, maybe late sometimes, but I paid them. I felt as if there was no one to turn to. I felt like everyone knew all of my bad mistakes and this would just be another one of my misadventures. I felt dead inside. Everything inside me was dark and cold. I could not eat, and had barely eaten for a couple of days. I was only taking sips of water, I could not drink an entire glass of water. The darkness in me and all around was overwhelming. I began to give my things away. My vision began to close in until I could only see through a narrow tunnel. The closest I can think to describe is tunnel vision.

On the outside, I looked beautiful and smart. I did not tell anyone what was going on in my life. People who loved me would not have guessed, and I could not feel their love. An important thing to know is that people you love going through suicidal ideation may not actually feel your love, or have the ability to let it in.

I did not feel anything for a while, except lost, devastated and overwhelmed. What surprised me at this time, was there were no drugs involved, no partying. Nothing. Just a single woman working as a waitress in a small town, with \$17 to her name and no way to pay her rent. This was the end for me. I could not take this life any more. I was done. My beliefs were, if I can't even pay my rent what good am I?

I had turned my life around and spent the past eight years being completely devoted to God, reading the Bible, going to church, praying, being the "good girl," and I could not

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even pay my rent. God had betrayed me. I was obedient to God and moved to Pennsylvania and he abandoned me here, alone.

The night before I had planned to die by suicide. I went to my teenage son's soccer game. I had to borrow my friend Rick's car to attend because my car had broken down. After dinner, I was invited to go to dinner, with my ex-husband and his girlfriend. As they happily got into his luxury SUV I said, "No" to dinner." How would I explain to them, "I only have \$17 to my name, my car broke down and my rent is due."

I felt like a loser. I would rather be dead than a loser. They did not need me in their lives. These thoughts raced through my mind. All I could say was, "No, thank you." That was pride, stubbornness, embarrassment, shame and humiliation that my life had become a shambles. You name it, I felt it. Their happiness and success felt like my failure in life. I am a loved woman but during this period of time in my life, I was incapable of feeling loved in any capacity. The rape, our divorce, financial ruin and \$17 to my name had finished me.

I drove back home in the borrowed car and decided I could no longer live like this. I decided to die by suicide. No more suffering, struggling to make it in the world. The decision brought me immediate relief. The next morning, my decision actually made me happy. I felt in control of my life again. I had a plan. Looking back, I can see that I had been planning for



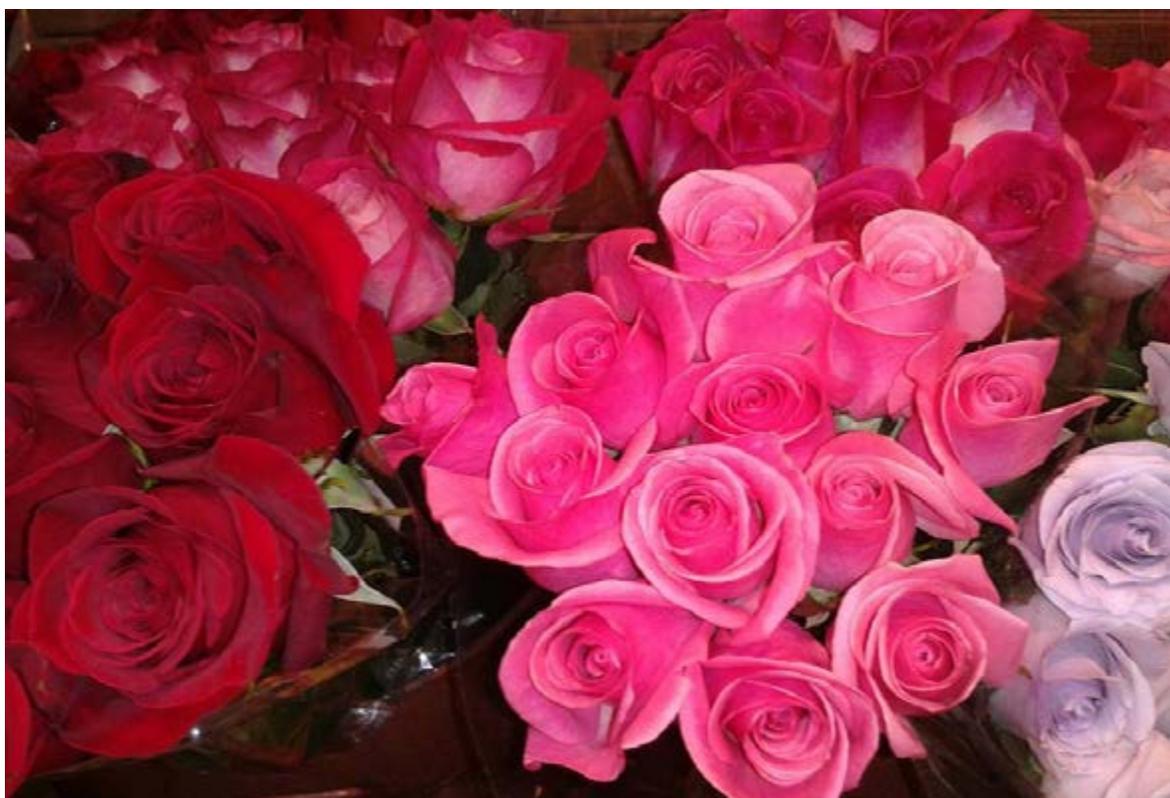
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awhile. During the past week, I had been giving my things away. I had cleaned my home, gotten as much paperwork as I could in order. I stacked my journals next to my bed. I wanted people to know exactly what had happened to me. I actually thought I could make it easier for whoever found me. I thought they would be better off without me since, I couldn't even pay my own rent and my life had been such a failure.

Seeing my son and his new family, I felt like they would be happier without me. I could not see the value I gave to anyone or the world.

Ritualistically, I had planned to die that afternoon. I went to a coffee shop to get my last meal and buy some roses with my \$17. When I returned home with my salad and roses, I would eat and then crawl into my bed and die. That was the plan.

I love red roses. When I went to the florist, I was told to come back because they were not ready, so I headed to the coffee shop to order a chicken Caesar salad.



When I went into the restaurant, I was bundled in a big winter coat, immediately looking out of place on a warm autumn day. My hair was disheveled and I was shivering.

My vision was dark and dimmed by this time. As though, I was seeing through a dark tunnel with a tiny light at the end. I could barely see. I could only see what was directly in front of me. If you ball your hands in a fist and leave a slight opening, you will see what I saw -- a blurry vision and some light.

All of a sudden, a blurry dark blue shadow entered into my vision and a man put his face directly in my line of sight. He stuck his hand out and shook it, hard and firm. His hand shake rattled my core and my insides began to become warm as if life began to seep back in.



John McKenna

My vision opened just a little more and he said, “Hi, I am John.” More questions followed: „Who is your husband? What church do you go to? What are you doing with this big coat on? It is warm outside.”

He rattled off so many questions. I answered him with my mind, but my voice answered in one word sentences. “No. Husband.” “I. Am. Cold.” “From. California.” He spoke to me like he did not know I was planning on dying. He was right in my face looking me in the eyes, right into me. He saw me. He saw that I was not okay.

As my vision became more clear, I could see he was a police officer. He invited me to his church and talked about their mission trips. He said his church went to the Dominican

Republic every year and built churches and schools. I simply nodded. He quoted the Bible, Matthew 28:19-20 specifically, word for word, and ended with “***I AM with you always even to the end of the age.***”

I thought God was talking to me.

When I walked out of the coffee and tea room with my salad, I was curious about the mission trips and wondered if I could go. When I got home, I decided not to die that night. I wanted to live one more day. I ate my salad, put the roses in the vase and crawled into bed.

I woke up the next morning, and my friend Kathy called to ask me to “Come home, to Hawaii. I am sending you a plane ticket for your birthday.” My birthday was the next week.

I told another friend, Henrietta, about not being able to pay my rent, and she promptly wrote out a check for \$500, like it was nothing. So effortless, I was struck by that, when only a few days ago it was a mountain. My friends reminded me that I was not alone. My problems did not go away, but I had help and they had been all around me the whole time. All I had to do was reach out.

How did the police officer, a complete stranger, repeat the answers to my prayer to God?

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A wish only God and I knew? I realized God had not forgotten me.

It took a few years, but I did start attending church and I did go on two mission trips, one to the Dominican Republic and one to Joplin, Mo. In the Dominican Republic, our mission trip built two classrooms, and in Joplin, we set the foundation of a home that had been destroyed by the triple tornado.

In the fall of 2015, My friend and business partner, Matt Holcomb and I created Short Mountain Group, LLC, a consulting and design-build firm, specializing in legacy projects. I am turning the prayer that saved my life into my profession, to design build projects to improve the quality of lives of people all around the world. We shall build homes, schools and churches. The prayer that saved my life. Life is sacred.



Life is Sacred.

Christian Church at Cogan Station Mission Team 2015. In the Dominican Republic, building classrooms.

RESOURCES

Your friends, Co-workers and family.
Your Church.
Someone Loves You.

Find Help: Safe Call Now

In an Emergency, Contact someone. Safe Call Now is a CONFIDENTIAL, comprehensive, 24-hour crisis referral service for all public safety employees, all emergency services personnel and their family members nationwide. Make a Safe Call Now: 206-459-3020. On the web at www.safecallnow.com.

- Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Hospital Emergency Room
- Psychiatric hospital walk-in clinic
- Urgent care center/clinic
- Call 911

Professional Organizations That Can Provide Information or a Referral

Veteran's Crisis Line
1-800-273-8255 Press 1

Find a psychologist
http://locator.apa.org/?_ga=1.257018952.27273799.1453077873

American Psychiatric Association
1-888-357-7924 and press 0

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Assistance
for Military and their families.

American Psychologist Association
1-800-964-2000

<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/>

Suicide Risk Factors

Risk Factors are characteristics that increase the chance that a person may try to take their life. The more risk factors, the higher the risk.

- Health Factors
- Mental Health conditions
- Bipolar (manic-depressive) disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Borderline or antisocial personality disorder
- Conduct disorder
- Psychotic disorders, or psychotic symptoms in the context of any disorder
- Anxiety disorders
- Substance abuse disorders
- Serious or chronic health condition and/or pain

Environmental Factors

- Contagion would include exposure to another person's suicide, or to graphic or sensationalize accounts of suicide
- Access to Lethal Means including firearms and drugs
- Prolonged Stress Factors which may include harassment, bullying, relationship problems, and unemployment
- Stressful Life Events which may include death, divorce, ending of a relationship, or job loss

Historical Factors

- Family History of Suicide
- Family History of Mental Health Conditions
- Previous Suicide Attempts
- Childhood Abuse

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Suicide Warning Signs

People who kill themselves exhibit one or more warning signs, either through what they say or do. The more warning signs, the greater the risk.

Talk

- If a person talks about:
- Killing themselves
- Having no reason to live
- Being a burden
- Feeling trapped
- Unbearable pain

Behavior

A person's suicide risk is great if a behavior is new or has increased, especially if it's related to a painful event, loss or change.

- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Looking for a way to kill themselves, such as searching online for materials or means
- Acting recklessly
- Withdrawing from activities
- Isolating from family and friends
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Visiting or calling people to say goodbye
- Giving away prized possessions
- Aggression

Mood

People who are considering suicide often display one or more of the following moods.

- Depression
- Loss of interest
- Rage
- Irritability
- Humiliation
- Anxiety

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Surviving after suicide loss

You are not alone. If you have lost someone to suicide, the first thing you should know is that **YOU ARE NOT ALONE**. Each year, over 32,000 people in the United States die by suicide, leaving behind devastated family and friends. There are millions of SURVIVORS of SUICIDE LOSS who, like you, are trying to cope with this heartbreaking loss.

Surviving often experience a wide range of grief reactions, including some of or all of the following:

- Shock is a common immediate reaction. You may feel numb or disoriented, and may have trouble concentrating.
- Symptoms of depression, including disturbed sleep, loss of appetite, intense sadness and lack of energy.
- Anger towards the deceased, another family member, a therapist or yourself.
- Relief, particularly if the suicide followed a long and difficult mental illness.
- Guilt, including thinking, "If I had..."

These feelings usually diminish over time, as you develop your ability to cope and begin to heal.

WHY did this happen?

Many survivors struggle to understand the reasons for the suicide, asking themselves over and over again. “WHY?” Many replay their loved ones’ last days, searching for clues, particularly if they didn’t see any signs that suicide was imminent.

Because suicide is often poorly understood, some survivors feel unfairly victimized by stigma. They may feel the suicide is somehow shameful, or that they or their family are somehow to blame for this tragedy.

But you should know that 90 percent of all people who die by suicide have a diagnosable psychiatric disorder at the time of their death (most often depression, anxiety or bipolar disorder). Just as people can die of heart disease or cancer, people can die as a consequence of mental illness. Try to bear in mind that suicide is almost always complicated, resulting from a combination of painful suffering, desperate hopelessness and underlying psychiatric illness.

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Coping with suicide loss

Some survivors struggle with what to tell other people. Although you should make whatever decision feels right to you, most survivors have found it best to simply acknowledge that their loved one died by suicide.

Keep in mind that each person grieves in his or her own way. For example, some people visit the cemetery weekly; others find too painful to go at all.

Each person grieves at his or her own pace; there is no set rhythm or timeline for healing.

Anniversaries, birthdays and holidays may be especially difficult, so you might want to think about whether to continue old traditions or create some new ones. You may also experience unexpected waves of sadness; these are a normal part of the grieving process.

Children experience many of the feelings of adult grief and are particularly vulnerable to feeling abandoned and guilty. Reassure them that the death was not their fault. Listen to their questions and try to offer honest, straightforward, age-appropriate answers.

Be kind to yourself. When you feel ready, begin to go on with your life. Eventually starting to enjoy life again is not a betrayal of your loved one, but rather a sign that you've begun to heal.

Some survivors find comfort in community, religious or spiritual activities, including talking to a trusted member of the clergy.

