

**Tonya Rene Anderson**

*Founder of An Exquisite Life*

# ONE MORE DAY

*Discovering the Joy in Living*



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"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 to end my life.

After years of feeling tired and devastated, 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, ma-

king 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.

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 my other side wanting to live.

This internal battle played out for years, with half finished projects, a tenden-



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### Happy to be home.

*This picture was taken of me was taken on my parent's balcony, 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, have the love of my parents, be in paradise and still be happy. If you look, closely you can see a glimmer of light in my eyes. That light is hope.*

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**This is what Joy in motion looks like.**

*This is me dancing in Bali at the Ultimate Money Goddess Retreat, hosted by Morgana Rae. I'm dancing with Caroline Konnoth, full of life, living my dreams and following my heart. Some would say, "all lit up."*

Photo by Lindsey Miller.



cy 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 feel or hear the love all around me.

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

I have always known and believed in God. I felt God's presence as a child. I saw God working in my

life and learned not to doubt this powerful presence of loving kindness, joy and strength.

The trouble began when I stopped listening to God's voice, the eternal stillness that would gently guide me in my life.

I remember clearly when I began to stop listening and that's when it 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. We were young, beautiful and amazing. Friends and friends of friends gathered. Everything was going our way, and



Timothy Whispering Eagle Aguilar

most of all, I believed I was safe.

But I wasn't safe. I was raped that night and everything came crashing down. I had been drinking, and was raped at a party by a man who I thought was a friend

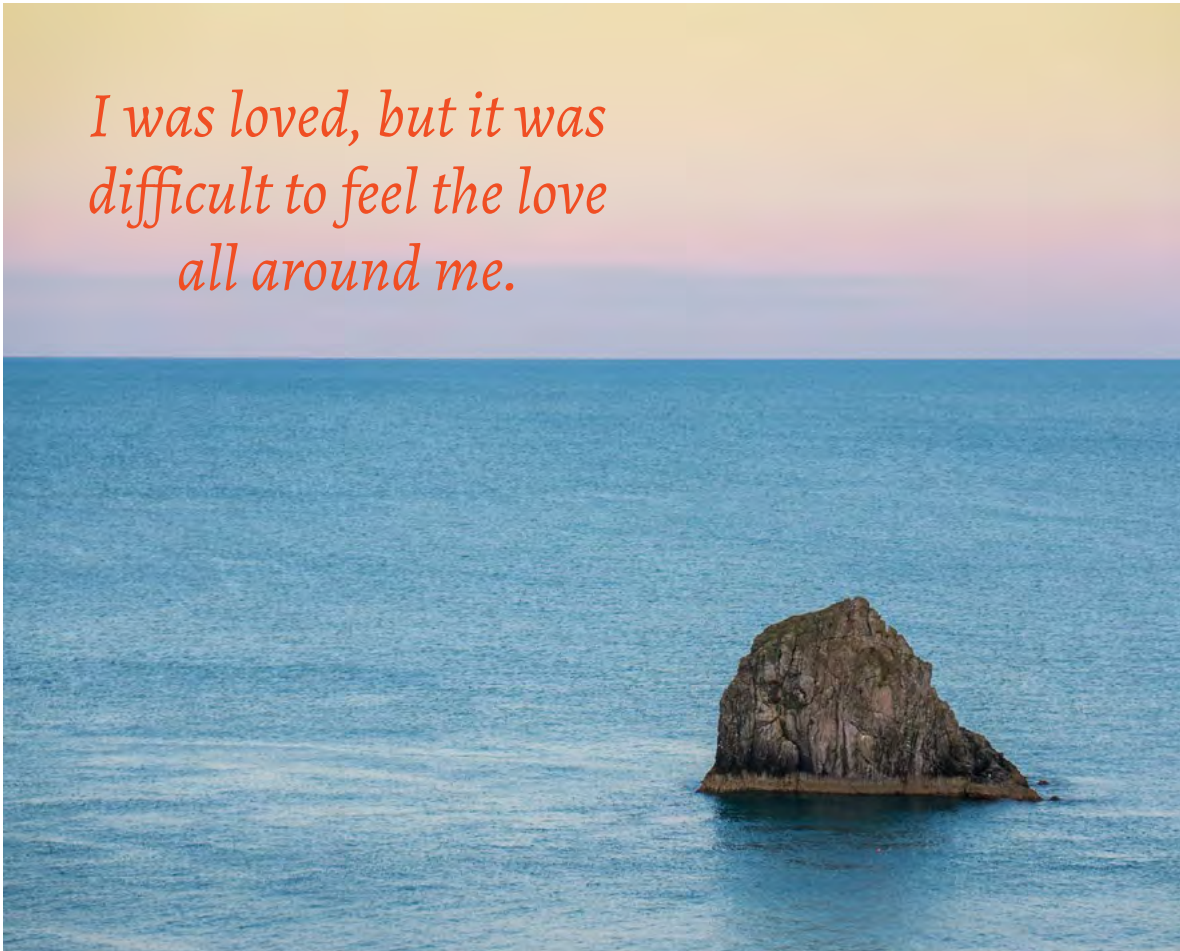
I woke up the next morning, bleeding, and people sleeping all around me. I quietly tiptoed out of the house into the stunning Hawaiian sun. The sun basked me in love and light, yet all I felt was devastation. Too embarrassed for many reasons to report it, I took a shower, tried to wash the rape

away, and never told anyone until years later. The feeling of devastation would continue for many years.

I shoved my emotions deep inside and continued moving through my life. The rape had become a defining moment.

I stopped drinking, going to parties and threw myself into a puritanical, spiritual life, as a way to cleanse myself and my body. I became celibate for eight years, devoting myself to a spiritual life and developed an intimate relationship with God.

*I was loved, but it was  
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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 and places where people were drinking.

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, I truly felt at one with God and had found an internal peace. I felt that 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 of the right things*.

During my celibacy, I worked as a



flight attendant and traveled the world. I visited many spiritual places of worship, 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 these sacred places one day.

This became my life’s 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 picturesque day.

I lived in Los Angeles at the time. The day was breathtaking, with exquisite skies over the crystal blue Pacific Ocean. Everything was vivid. 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 a lucid dream of a skyscraper on fire, so when I awoke I did not know if I was still



dreaming, or awake.

I had plans to meet my friend Timothy that morning, and when I arrived at his home, he was watching the live broadcast.

After seeing the planes hit the towers, I silently quit. I imagined what the flight attendants were experiencing. 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 was I safe? I knew people cared. I told them I was fine, and in Los Angeles.

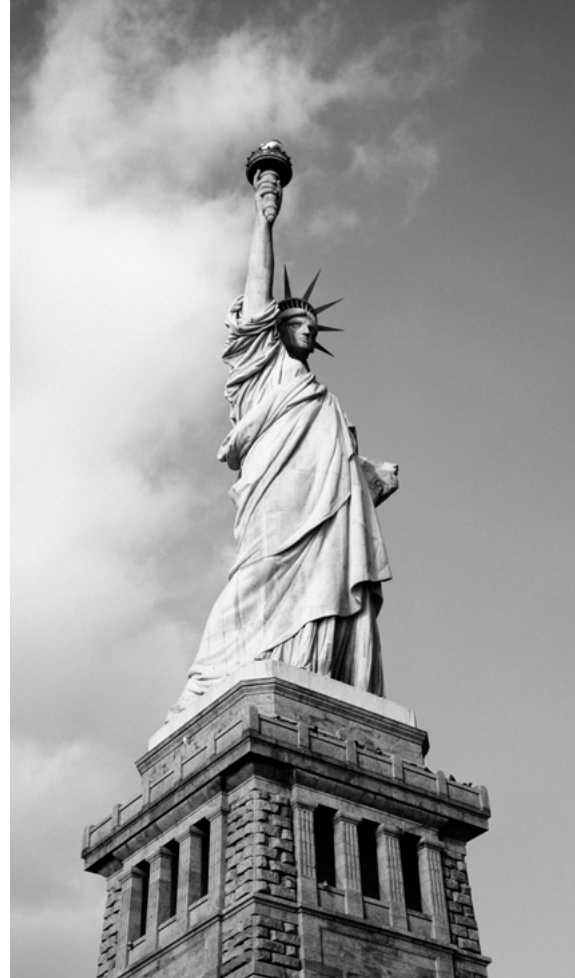
The airplanes were all grounded, so I was able to stay home. A few days later, I heard a deep male voice speaking on my answering machine. His voice bellowed throughout my apartment, "T. Anderson, call the CREW DESK now!"

I felt his voice was a command from God. I trembled and was obedient at the same time. "You are scheduled to be the purser on the first flight back into Washington, D.C.," the dispatcher said.

*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.

I felt called to lead this flight, so I paid special attention to the details when prepa-



ring, and prayed the entire time.

It was the most extraordinary flight. Passengers came bearing gifts, donuts, flowers and newspapers. The entire flight from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C. was eerily silent. The tension was 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, however, be-

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**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.*



came 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 realized, *I have to quit flying. I cannot do this anymore.* I poured the drink out.

I asked for a leave of absence and it was granted. I left the airline and moved to Williamsport, Pennsylvania to be closer to my son, who lived with his father, my ex-husband.

I thrilled to be with my son again, but it was a decision that hurt. I missed my beautiful spiritual community and felt alone. Even with an amazing education, I was an outsider in Pennsylvania. I could

not find a job that paid well, and it was not long before I was drowning financially. My waitress job was not cutting it, I had made \$17 during my last shift. I could not pay my rent.

I had never known this kind of financial hardship. 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 worried that my family and friends would think that is just another one of my misadventures.

I felt dead inside. Everything inside me was 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. The devastation 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.

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 hid it well.

An important thing to know is that people you love, who are going through suicidal ideation, may not feel your love, or have the ability to let it in.

I could not feel their love. I did not feel anything for a while, except lost and overwhelmed.

What may surprise other people is that at this time, there were no drugs involved, no partying. Nothing. I was just a single woman working as a waitress in a small town, with \$17 to her name and no way to pay her rent.

It's important that people understand that suicidal ideation is possible without drugs or alcohol. Circumstances can overwhelm people.

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 even pay my rent.

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God had betrayed me. I was obedient to God and moved to Pennsylvania to be with my son, and God abandoned me here, alone.

The night before I planned to die by suicide, I went to my son's soccer game. I had to borrow a friend's car to attend because my car had broken down. After the game, 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"?

It was a missed opportunity to be honest. They would have happily paid for dinner, but I felt like a loser. I believed



that I would rather be dead than a loser. I thought that they did not need me in their lives. These irrational thoughts raced through my mind.

All I could say was, “No, thank you.” That was pride speaking. That was stubbornness, embarrassment, shame and humiliation that my life had become shambles. You name it, I felt it. Their happiness and success felt like my failure.

I am a loved woman, but during this period, I was incapable of feeling loved in any capacity. The rape, our divorce, financial ruin and not knowing where my next paycheck was coming from, 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, no more struggling to make it in the world. The decision brought me immediate relief.

The next morning, my decision 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 to die by suicide for awhile.

I had been giving my things away, I had cleaned my home, and gotten my paperwork in order. I stacked my journals next to my bed. I wanted people to know

what had happened to me. I thought I could make it easier for whoever found me. I thought they would be better off without me since my life was a failure.

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 dimmed by this time, as though, I was seeing through a 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 blue shadow entered into my field of vision and a man put his face directly in my line of sight. He stuck his hand out and shook mine. His firm handshake rattled me to the core. My insides began to warm. I felt jolted back to life.

My vision opened a little more as he spoke. "Hi, I am John," he said. More questions followed: "Who is your husband? Where are you from? What are you doing with this big coat on? It is warm outside. What church do you go to?"

He rattled off 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 into my eyes. He saw me. He saw that I was not okay.

As my vision became more clear, I could see that 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."



**John McKenna**

I thought that God was talking to me. How did the police officer, a complete stranger, speak the answers to my prayer? A prayer only God and I knew? I realized God had not forgotten me.

When I walked out of the shop, 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 put the roses in a vase, ate my salad, and crawled into bed.

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

I told another friend about not being able to pay my rent, and she promptly wrote a check for \$500, like it was nothing. So effortless. I was struck by that, when only a few days ago, this was a mountain.

I was not alone. My problems did not go away, but I had help. My friends and family had been around me the whole time; all I had to do was reach out, and then accept their help.

I did start attending church again, and I did go on two mission trips. In the

Dominican Republic, our mission trip team built two classrooms. In Joplin, Mo. we built 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 and philanthropic projects.

I am turning the prayer that saved my life into my life’s purpose, to design build projects to improve the quality of lives of people all around the world. We shall build homes, schools and churches. This is the prayer that saved my life.

Life is sacred.



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**Life is Sacred.**

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

# RESOURCES

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

## FIND HELP: SAFE CALL NOW

I am a lead advocate for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. The following resources have been provided by the AFSP and 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.safecall-now.com](http://www.safecall-now.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

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

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

American Psychologist Association  
1-800-964-2000

[Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Assistance](#) for  
Military and their families.

[Find a psychologist](#)

### **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
- 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

### **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.

Survivors 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.

### **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.

*Content provided by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention*

Contact Tonya Anderson through [www.AnExquisiteLife.com](http://www.AnExquisiteLife.com)

## One More Day: Discovering the Joy of Living

