

Mind Health Matters

"Grief is the Hardest Work You'll Ever Do..."

AMIE CAJKA | COLUMNIST

I remember it like it was one yesterday because it was one of my first experiences with a survivor. I was at a middle school health fair to share information about mental health and alcohol/drug abuse issues for the Mental Health & Recovery Board of Portage County. The school's roving reporter, a curious sixth grader, was asking questions for her next article in the school newspaper. Her mother was at an information table next to me and came over to introduce herself.

The mother noticed our information on suicide prevention. As I started to talk with her about it, she quickly moved between me and her daughter and then asked her child to go look for her friend.

The woman turned back to me and said gently, "I don't talk about suicide in front of my children. My father committed suicide when I was my daughter's age and I don't want her to know that about him."

I think much to her surprise I kept talking with her about her experience. I also explained that some of the work we are doing is to train people to be gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are people who, through their jobs get to know others and with prevention knowledge might be able to identify someone at risk. At the Mental Health & Recovery Board, we also want to be a resource for those who are left behind and call themselves "survivors."

In my own life, I have lost three people to suicide. Two were very close to me and my family; the third was the child of a long-time business associate. I do not look away when they want to talk about their family member. Being present for them to remember their loved one with a friend is a gift that I or anyone can offer.

Sometimes survivors want to talk and act and protect others from the emptiness. One such person is Iris Llewellyn Angle of Aurora, whose son has been gone for almost 20 years. The year after his death by suicide

she walked into our office in Kent and asked us to help her prevent more suicides. Iris has sought out training, education and support networks to become an expert in prevention.

She brings the bittersweet voice of experience to the monthly meetings of the Portage County Suicide Prevention Coalition. During those early years, she established a monthly support group at Townhall II in Kent where survivors could meet with others who knew exactly what they were feeling. She helps facilitate the current group that meets at the Mental Health & Recovery Board in Kent the last Wednesday of each month from 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.

She has also written a book about her journey; both the spiritual path and the physical trek she made. For the 10th anniversary of her son's death, she walked from Chardon, Ohio where he was born to the place where he died near Phoenix, Arizona. The book is a journal of her struggle to stay rooted in reality after his death but it is also an amazing record of the conversations she had with people she met along the way, many with loved ones dealing with mental illness, suicide and suicide attempts.

The book is titled, *Tell Your Story Walking: One Mother's Legacy*. It is full of the questions that survivors ask themselves over and over. Why? Why didn't I see it coming? What did I do wrong? Why wasn't my love strong enough? How will I survive?

Iris often says that she eventually realized that she could survive from the many conversations she had with "survivor" mothers, fathers, siblings and spouses who made it through. And believe me, she is a tireless conversationalist. But there are others who don't find it easy to share these trembling emotions, lest the dam break again and the tears become a torrent. Or they fear the answers to the questions.

Please know that if you are the friend of someone who has lost a loved one to suicide, the

risk of taking his or her own life is greatly increased. Don't look away when you ask your friend or family member, if she thinks suicide is the answer. Promise to be there; help him see a mental health professional or talk with his pastor.

Survivors, like Iris, are also speaking out; to find support and end the stigma. In Portage County, survivors and advocates will come together on Saturday, Nov. 17, for the International Survivors of Suicide Day. The session is sponsored by the Portage County Suicide Prevention Coalition, the Mental Health & Recovery Board and Coleman Professional Services. The location is Coleman Access, 3922 Lovers Lane, Ravenna. Sign-in starts at 12:45 p.m. It will end at 3 p.m.

Participants will watch a broadcast put together by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. After, there will be a discussion and time for questions. Dr. Joel Mowrey, Mental Health & Recovery Board executive director, who leads the monthly survivor group and is a psychologist, will be the facilitator. There is no cost and walk-ins are welcome. It would be helpful if interested persons could call the board at 330-673-1756 to pre-register.

Attending the session, could be a critical first step for a survivor, though the road ahead will still be difficult. As Iris writes, "Grief is the hardest work we'll ever do, but we must do it if we want to heal."

For more information about International Survivors of Suicide Day, go to www.mental-health-recovery.org or www.afsp.org. To contact Iris, email her at wildiris@walkingpoetry.com.

Amie Cajka is the Director of Community Relations for the Mental Health & Recovery Board of Portage County.

The Mental Health & Recovery Board is a county agency that funds, plans and monitors public mental health and substance abuse treatment services for Portage County residents. Last year, the board invested in services that helped more than 7,000 children, teens and adults. The board also funds the 24-hour crisis intervention services which handle more than 39,000 contacts each year. The agency is primarily funded by local levies. To contact the board, call 330-673-1756.

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Puppy Tails

MIALIE T. SZYMANSKI | CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

*As the moon goes to bed, the sun comes up
And here we meet a sleepy pup,
Who was walking through G-ville
one bright sunny day,
Then saw The Villager and decided to stay.*

Wait for me, wait for me! Doodle Dog's little legs ran as fast as they could and his little paws pattered very quickly along the sidewalk. The ends of his favorite blue scarf wrapped tightly around his neck were whipping in the wind behind him. Today was a very exciting day and Doodle Dog wasn't about to miss all the fun! He reached the bus stop just in time to see the last of his favorite humans about to pile in, all the little kids lined up in eager rows, chattering with anticipation like the birds Doodle Dog had seen gathering to fly out of town for the winter. But it wasn't the big yellow bumblebee school bus they would be riding today – it was a giant open wagon filled to the very top with hay! All the little kids lined up in their eager rows were sitting on crisp yellow straw arranged in fluffy piles like the mounds of leaves Doodle Dog had seen covering the flower stems in the meadow. Just as the last little child climbed into the hay wagon, one of the parents still on the pavement reached down and gently scooped up Doodle Dog, dumping him into a soft pile of hay in the wagon before climbing in too and closing the gate behind them all. Ahh, made it! The floppy-eared puppy happily nuzzled his nose into the hay to keep warm from the wind and he could just barely peer over the edge of the wagon to see all the fields of browning grass and colorful leaves and haystacks and cornstalks as they passed by.

Soon they reached a field that was not full of brown grass or colorful leaves or hay stacks or cornstalks. This field was covered from end to end with an orange lumpy blanket. When the hay wagon pulled to a stop at the edge of the lumpy orange field, all the little kids piled off the piles of hay they had been piled on and Doodle Dog was gently scooped up and deposited on the only piece of green grass there was as the field in front of them stretched out orange everywhere. Closer now, Doodle Dog could see a dot of green here and a dot of green there, stretching out in lines between the round lumps of orange. The floppy-eared puppy followed the vines into the patch and started sniffing around. Mmmmm! Fall always smelled wonderful with its crunchy leaves and warm apple cider and pumpkin pies. The little kids and Doodle Dog weren't going to be making pies out of the pumpkins they were picking out of the patch today, but Doodle Dog could enjoy the smell anyway!

The floppy-eared puppy sniffed and whiffed his way from one pumpkin to the next looking for just the right one to take home. There were so many – how would he decide!? Doodle Dog watched as the little kids had spread out with their big human helpers trying to make the same decision. They seemed to be having the same trouble as the floppy-eared puppy and some it appeared wanted to take home the whole field of orange. There were big pumpkins and little pumpkins, round pumpkins and pumpkins that were shaped so strangely Doodle Dog wasn't sure what shape they would be but it certainly wasn't round! At different spots in the patch were areas where the pumpkin pickers could take a seat and reflect for a minute. Doodle Dog meandered over and climbed up on a pile of hay bales stacked in a pyramid so he could see more of the field and that meant more pumpkins at once. From way up there all the pumpkins looked like orange apples bobbing in a giant ocean of grass. There, smack in the middle of the sea of orange, one particular lump caught Doodle Dog's eye. It was perfectly round with a tiny square green stem and it seemed to be calling out to Doodle Dog. Take me home, take me home!

Doodle Dog knew THAT was his pumpkin – he just had to figure out how to get to it. So the little floppy-eared puppy turned on his paw to pounce down the hay bale pyramid and... tumbled all the way down! One of the hay bales fell off the stack just as Doodle Dog turned and he wound up rolling right to the bottom. The hay was soft and cushiony so Doodle Dog landed just fine, but at the bottom of the hay bale pyramid was already an orange lump with a scary face carved into it. Doodle Dog's nose went right into the open end of the carved pumpkin! He tried to stand up, but suddenly the floppy-eared puppy's ears weren't quite so floppy anymore and his head was quite a bit heavier. He was stuck in the pumpkin! The pumpkin-headed puppy didn't want to scare his favorite humans so he wiggled and wiggled until one of the big humans came over to help him out. Whew! No longer a pumpkin-dog, Doodle Dog made his way to that perfect orange lump that he had spotted from way up high and dragged it back to the hay wagon just in time as all the little kids were doing the same.

On the bright side, all Doodle Dog needed was a black garbage bag for a cape and he'd have the perfect Halloween costume, though it would probably be a few days before he'd get the pumpkin pie smell out of his nose. That would be another story...

The floppy-eared puppy had successfully picked a pumpkin from the patch but now he had to take it back to the office and pick a perfect place to put it!



Ask The Librarian

CAROL BAKER | COLUMNIST

"Is there only one 307th in the United States Army?" The Newton Falls Public Library staff was not exactly sure for what our patron was asking, so we asked for additional information. She needed to know if there was only one 307th designation in the Army, whether it is a regiment, battalion, etc.

We began with the U.S. Army's homepage, www.army.mil. Searching this site using the term 307th, we found about 429 results. The list of articles included the 307th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, 307th Airborne

Engineer Battalion and 307th Airborne Medical Company which were part of the 82nd Airborne Division during D Day, 307th Infantry Regiment and others. Wanting to know if we were looking for the correct information, we spoke with the patron again. She explained that she is looking for the 307th that was in North Japan during World War II.

Sometimes successful searching is a matter of happening to select the correct term. When we Googled the term "307th regiment", we found the Department of the Army Lineage and Honors 307th Regiment [www.history.army.mil/html/forestruc/lineages/branches/regt/0307rgt.htm]. This history said that it was constituted August 5, 1917 in the National Army as the 307th Infantry and assigned to the 77th Division. It was both active and inactive over the following decades, and was ordered back into active military service March 25, 1942. March 15, 1946 it was inactivated in Japan, and then activated again December 17, 1946 in the Organized

Reserves with Headquarters at Bronx, New York.

Baxterbulletin.com has an article titled, [3-Wars Veteran Recalls Battles on Island Just Off Okinawa](http://www.baxterbulletin.com/article/20120213/NEWS07/302100026/3-wars-veteran-recalls-battles-okinawa) by Frank Wallis [www.baxterbulletin.com/article/20120213/NEWS07/302100026/3-wars-veteran-recalls-battles-okinawa]. Wallis states "The 307th Regiment was the third segment of 13 77th Infantry battle groups to land on the west of Okinawa for the battles of Kerama Retto and Keise Shima. The Battle of Okinawa would produce more American deaths — 12,513 in 81 days — than any other battle in the Pacific." We gave our patron these links, and told her if she needed more information, we would be happy to continue searching for her.

For answers to your questions, visit the Newton Falls Public Library, 204 S. Canal Street, Newton Falls or phone 330-872-1282. For information about all the free library programs or hours, also visit our website at www.newtonfalls.org or our Facebook page.

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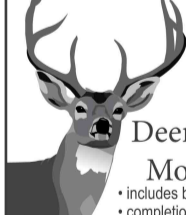
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