Finding Peace Without All The Pieces: After A Loved One’s Suicide
By: LaRita Archibald (Larch Publishing, 2012)
Reviewed by: Ginny Sparrow

The search for a “self-help” book on a specific subject often leads a reader to two main subgenres: books written by professionals and books written by individuals with lived experience. With suicide survivor LaRita Archibald’s years of experience helping those who have lost a loved one by suicide, her loss and what she did with it makes her memoir a combination of both. Her new book, Finding Peace Without All The Pieces is written with the expertise only loss can give you, as well as thirty years experience working with AAS and founding her own support group, “HEARTBEAT”, which has 42 chapters worldwide.

In 1978, Archibald lost her second oldest son of five children, Kent, who was twenty-four years old. She recalls the day he took his life in their living room with remarkable clarity, which is understandable as survivors often unwillingly relive the loss; no memory goes unanalyzed. The immediate aftermath of his death added insult to injury. Her husband was questioned by the police for so long, he wasn’t even allowed to rush to the hospital; Archibald received the news of her son’s death without her husband present. And so started their family’s journey, one no one would have predicted.

Archibald writes with the wisdom that only time and hard field work in suicide postvention lends. With zero self-aggrandizing, she merges her personal family struggles with the stories of other families that she assisted in the wake of her loss. Every story is unique, yet similarities abound. The shared feelings and flashbacks give the reader a kindred feeling not only with Archibald, but the other families who have shared their stories.

Sadly, a demographic suffering a recent troubling increase in suicide rates is the military. In one engrossing chapter in Archibald’s book, many military deaths by suicide are dissected, each loss representing families in different phases of military life. Some deaths occurred before deployment, some in theatre, and some occurred during reintegration, when service members commonly suffer from survivor’s guilt as well as injuries such as traumatic brain injury (TBI), which are associated with increased suicide risk. The quest for information for military families is a long struggle, one only families in that unique situation can understand. The stories shared by parents and spouses are heartbreaking, but this chapter is a must-read for all military families, regardless of whether they’ve survived the death of a loved one by suicide.

Sometimes the heart wrenching stories that survivors share give the reader a feeling of community, an assurance they are not alone. But some readers have difficulty tolerating the details or the further traumatizing effect of the stories. For those readers, I recommend reading this book backwards. There are wonderful, easy to digest, two-page chapters that foreshadow what to expect, provide guidance for moving forward, learning to live with loss, and provide hope that it’s possible to heal to the point of enjoying life again. Advice from other survivors and professionals is succinctly given. Perhaps the most beautiful chapter is the last, written by Archibald herself, and has been used at funerals and other meetings with LaRita’s open permission policy. Joining the ranks of Iris Bolton and Carla Fine, Archibald has written a must-read for survivors, and all who wish to prevent further loss. I cannot recommend it enough.