Seeking Hope: Stories of the Suicide Bereaved
Edited by: Michelle Linn-Gust, Ph.D. and Julie Cerel, Ph.D. (Chellehead Works, 2011)
Reviewed by: Ginny Sparrow

Tell your story. Proponents of support groups would say that is the first step in surviving suicide, but it is not for everyone. It’s frightening to attend your first group meeting. It’s terrifying to reveal your feelings of guilt, regret, or pain. So, those who can’t attend a support group have to find other ways to process their pain and express their thoughts. As we know, getting it “out” in some way is imperative.

For those who fear support groups (or sadly, don’t have one accessible to them) an evening with Seeking Hope: Stories of the Suicide Bereaved feels close to the real thing. It was edited by two dedicated women in the suicide prevention field, Drs. Michelle Linn-Gust and Julie Cerel. They share their personal stories of loss by suicide and recruited 15 fellow survivors to share their journeys. An advantage of this collection is the perspective of survivors who have experienced the passage of time since their loss and it’s encouraging for a newly bereaved reader to see ahead to the “other side” of suicide grief.

Reading Seeking Hope, I felt my mind traveling to the period immediately following my suicide loss experience when I was new to the idea of sharing my story. No matter how many times we are assured that no one has the power to completely influence a person’s decision to take their own life, we still struggle with guilt and “what ifs.” It takes courage to admit what you think you did “wrong.” The courage displayed by the authors in Seeking Hope is awe-inspiring and the antithesis of denial. No one can tell you your feelings are wrong; they simply exist. To leave them unchecked, no matter how unreasonable, leaves them to fester and grow. As an example from personal experience, my grandfather was convinced that he caused my mother’s suicide because he didn’t buy her a horse she wanted.

What I appreciated most about this collection of honest essays was the diversity. Everyone from politicians to musicians are susceptible to mental health issues; this book shows that suicide crosses all lines whether social, financial, spiritual, or cultural.

Another gem about this book are the male contributors. Support groups struggle with male attendance. If they could just hear other men speak, they might feel less alone. In Atlanta, our support group leader had a quarterly “Men’s Only” group that filled to capacity. Together, the group members were a lot more open. They often told us they couldn’t express their real feelings in front of their wives, which was a huge obstacle for them in the grief process.

At first while reviewing this book, I wanted to quote some wonderful pearls of wisdom that I read, but that felt wrong. Strangely, the book felt intimate to me and left me disinclined to repeat the contributors’ stories. The intimacy of these stories is sure to leave the reader truly touched. After reading, I felt as if I had met these strong survivors and shared a bond with each of them. I encourage survivors in all stages of their journey to keep this book at hand. When you’re feeling alone or hitting a rough patch, browse through this book and find a story that speaks to you. It’s like a support group in your very own home.