Touched by Suicide: Hope and Healing After Loss
By Michael F. Myers, M.D. & Carla Fine

Reviewed by Karen Dunne-Maxim

Dr. Michael Myers, a psychiatrist, and Carla Fine, a suicide survivor and renowned author, have collaborated on an exciting and informative volume for those while lives have been “touched by suicide.” The aim of their current collaboration, the aptly titled Touched by Suicide: Hope and Healing After Loss, is to provide survivors with practical advice and tools for relief and comfort, as well as to assist clinicians in understanding the unique experience of those touched by suicide.

Perhaps Dr. Kay Redfield Jamison’s words in the foreward of the book describe it best: “Deeply compassionate, direct and immensely practical.” I would underscore this by suggesting that this be the first book offered to the newly bereaved by suicide. We know that survivors are best helped by timely interventions and appropriate resources. This book, written in such a way as to be readily accessible to survivors, provides an invaluable first step.

The book is organized in three sections: information about the experience of surviving a suicide; practical suggestions for help and healing; and ways to find new meaning after a suicide. Each section includes a presentation by the authors from their respective points of view as either clinician or survivor. The topics are introduced as questions frequently asked by survivors, such as “How long will I need to mourn?,” “Why am I so angry?,” and “Why should I tell my child about suicide?” which gives them immediacy and relevance. In addition to their own voices, those of other survivors are also interspersed throughout this volume, including those who have written about their experiences (Iris Bolton, Oregon Senator Gordon Smith and Sharon Smith, Donna Barnes).

An extremely helpful feature of the book is its inclusion of several sidebars providing specific suggestions for many of the complicated issues facing survivors. These include recommendations for memorial services for a person who dies by suicide, guidelines for holidays and other special days, how to help someone who is threatening suicide, and suggestions for helping your child through grief. The book also neatly compiles much of the latest research on survivors, and suicide, presented in such a way as to be easily understood by the non-suicidologist.

Another highlight of this contribution are the pages devoted to the topic of the therapist as a survivor, an important issue has received scant attention in the literature.

The scope, depth, and accessibility of this book can not be overstated. While the book is exceptional, one suggestion for future editions would be to add a comprehensive index; due to the text’s rich assortment of topics, an index which would swiftly guide the reader to the specific topic they are interested in would be handy. But don’t wait for the next edition; this is one “must have” book for all survivors and people who work with them.

The American Association of Suicidology’s Publication Review Committee reviews books for the purpose of informing the membership of the latest and most relevant material devoted to the understanding, treatment, prevention, and postvention of suicide.