

o&d's

Distribution  
Printing  
Warehousing

Helping you deliver  
in a big way.

Chicago  
Tribune

printing &  
distribution  
solutions

For more information, contact  
Ms. Fields at (312) 222-6548  
or visit  
ChicagoTribunePDS.com

Tub & Tile  
Refinishing

Don't Replace  
Re-Glaze Your Tub  
Glossy New Finish

\$200<sup>00</sup>

5 Year Warranty  
Quick Dry  
Available

TUB SPECIAL

773-656-5004

Sinks, Wall Tile,  
Regrouting

DONATE YOUR CAR

100% Tax  
Deductible

Wheels For Wishes

Benefiting

MAKE-A-WISH®

Illinois

\*Free Vehicle Pickup ANYWHERE  
\*We Accept All Vehicles Running or Not  
\*We also accept Trucks, RVs, SUVs & Boats

Call: (312) 651-4254

WheelsForWishes.org

WHAT DID  
SKILLING  
SAY?

WATCH FOR AN  
UPDATED FORECAST  
ON EVERY NEWSCAST.

TOM SKILLING

CHIEF METEOROLOGIST

WGN 9 WEATHER

MORNING | MIDDAY | FIVE | NINE

WGN RADIO • CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS

BUCKET  
LIST

Contest

✓ Win 1 of 6 experiences from the  
ultimate Chicago Summer Bucket  
List with a Blackhawks player!

✓ Visit [wgnradio.com/contests](http://wgnradio.com/contests)  
to enter through August 15!

✓ One winner announced weekly!

✓ Experiences include:

ODYSSEY

Lincoln Park  
ZOO

RADIO  
720 WGN

Listen anywhere at [wgnradio.com](http://wgnradio.com), the WGN Radio Android  
and iPhone apps, TuneIn and iHeartRadio.com

PHIL VELASQUEZ/TRIBUNE PHOTOS

Becky Olson, top, wears a bracelet that features the signature of her father, Dennis, who also is pictured dancing with her at her wedding. Jessica Hutchison, at left, holds a photo of her with her father, Robert. Lindsay Van Sickle, above, shows a family photo of her with her father, Tom, and husband, Chris. All of the women's fathers committed suicide in 2011.

# Daughters left by suicide start blog to convey hope to others

Continued from Page 1

women launched a blog, OurSideofSuicide.com, on which they share their stories and try to offer others hope.

"We've found so much support and commonality with one another," Olson said. "We want others to know that they are not alone."

Their effort comes at a time when the suicide rates among middle-aged Americans are on the rise. Over the last decade, the rate among people ages 35 to 64 rose by nearly 30 percent. Among men in their 50s, the rate jumped by nearly 50 percent. While the reasons remain unclear, experts suspect the economic recession, along with the responsibilities of caring for aging parents and the increasing availability of prescription painkillers, have produced a perfect storm that has left a generation particularly vulnerable.

Now, as the number of suicides increases, so do the ranks of survivors. Across the nation, they are husbands and wives, daughters and sons, mothers and fathers. People caught amid waves of heartache that, in the aftermath of a suicide, can last for years, if not a lifetime.

"After my dad died, it was such a roller coaster of emotions," Hutchison said. "There's so much support around you in those first couple months, which was very helpful. Then, over time, those supports start going away. People don't really want to talk to you about it anymore."

Except that, month by month and year by year, the women still wanted — still needed — to talk.

Olson, 31, a social media consultant, wanted to remember the father who was a circuit court judge in Wisconsin and president of his church council. He called her nearly every day and had always been her "biggest cheerleader." He organized big holiday dinners, celebrated every conceivable occasion — including his children's "half-birthdays" — and chronicled it all by taking photos that he organized in dozens of family albums.

Hutchison, 30, a counselor, needed to talk about her father, too. He was a retired

## Suicide rates on the rise

Suicide rates among middle-aged Americans are on the rise, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. As the number of suicides increases, so does the number of surviving family members who have to deal with the aftermath.

### SUICIDE RATES PER 100,000 PEOPLE AGES 35-64

By sex and mechanism

Sex	Firearms	Suffocation	Poisoning	All other methods
Male	14.3	6.8	4.1	2.1
Female	2.5	1.5	3.4	0.7

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

civil engineer and dedicated free spirit who kept a huge peace sign on the wall of his home office, loved the Rolling Stones, practiced yoga and who was, his daughter recalled, "a guy everyone loved."

Van Sickle, 28, a personal trainer, wanted to remember the father who was a consummate salesman, an affable guy with a big smile who made friends wherever he went. He loved Jimmy Buffett and the White Sox. "He was the life of the party, one of those guys who was always loud, always fun. Not one ounce of shyness in him," she said.

All of the men had successful professional careers. During good times, all were outgoing and gregarious. And after battles with anxiety and depression, all had killed themselves with guns.

Eventually, the women found their way to a support group called LOSS (Loving Outreach to Survivors of Suicide), a nondenominational program run by Catholic Charities. There, the women shared their feelings of frustration and sadness.

"I was really angry. It wasn't directed toward my dad. It was directed at everyone else," Van Sickle said.

"I pushed everyone away," Hutchison said. "I pushed my husband away, I

pushed my family away and I pushed my friends away. It was like I was alone on this island, and it was a very lonely and depressing place to be."

"My rock bottom was when my grief counselor said she thought I should go on antidepressants," Olson recalled. "I thought, 'I have to pull it together.'"

But at their support group and later over dinner, the women found comfort in their connections and conversation. They shared their fears (If someone doesn't pick up the phone immediately, does your mind jump to suicide?), their hopes (Do you ever feel your father's spirit is with you?), their struggles to settle their fathers' estates (How do you transfer the assets of a 401(k)?).

They talked about their fathers' last days, their final conversations, the notes they left. They wondered: Could he have been saved?

Life carried the women forward. Two of them changed jobs. Van Sickle sold her father's home. As their grief began to recede, they talked about the future and their hope to have children someday.

Shortly before the first anniversary of her father's death, Hutchison discovered she was pregnant. She and her friends wept with joy. But there was also a renewed sense of loss be-

cause, they knew, the baby girl would never know her maternal grandfather.

"How could he have not wanted to stay on this Earth to see this child?" Hutchison wondered.

The aftermath was like that. Grief would sometimes catch them off guard.

But there were other moments of comfort and grace. A Rolling Stones song on the radio that made Hutchison think of her father. The wind in the leaves of a tree planted in the memory of Van Sickle's father. The way the sky turned a soft pink during sunrise on the lakefront, where Olson jogged in the morning, thinking about her dad.

Now, two years have passed.

Hutchison wears a necklace with a silver charm, printed with an image of her father's fingerprint.

Van Sickle has a gold cross, which her father bought in Ireland.

Olson wears a silver bracelet, inscribed with words from the end of an old letter, written in her father's scrawl, that say simply: "Love, Dad."

The women have begun offering the lessons they've learned through their blog. Among them: Don't be afraid to talk; you'll be surprised how many other people have been affected by suicide. Try to accept the fact that you may never know why. Know that, although your life will never be the same, that doesn't mean life won't be filled with joy and meaning.

In the restaurant, after the waitress clears away their plates and lays the bill on the table, Hutchison tells her friends about a recent dream. In it, her baby — who is due in August — crawls across the floor. Her father holds a camera to capture the moment. He looks trim, healthy and happier than she had seen him look in a long time.

"I miss you so much," Hutchison tells her dad. He smiles and says, "I miss you, too."

In the restaurant, Hutchison's eyes fill with tears. Even though it was just a dream, she says, "it was so good to see him again."

Her two friends know exactly what she means.

[cmastony@tribune.com](mailto:cmastony@tribune.com)