

## Once upon a time...

By Amie U.

Once upon a time...

I started off with this line because your past is just a story and once you realize this, it has no power over you. The power that I'm choosing to give my story is the power to make a difference.

I'm a mother of three beautiful children all under the age of ten. I was a widow at the age of 32; my husband took his life back in March 2013. Suicide is a very complex thing to understand, so many unanswered questions. Everyone's first response to this devastating news was...WHY? He had everything....a successful company, beautiful acreage with dream home, 3 amazing kids, a dedicated supporting wife amongst many other things. That response shocked me. On the outside looking in it seemed perfect. We did a good job portraying that illusion. My husband suffered from depression. He was diagnosed three years prior to his death. He was prescribed medication to help balance his ups and downs. He felt labeled, ashamed, judged, and didn't want anyone to know. Shhh...it was our secret, hindsight is 20/20, that was a secret that should not have any shame and should not have been kept from family and friends. His medication made a difference and things were really good. As soon as things were good he decided that he was feeling better and that with proper diet and exercise he would be able to manage his depression. At times he was able to manage it, however everyone has a weakness and so his cycle began again. It became a very touchy subject when I would mention moods, ups and downs, medication. So I began to walk on egg shells to prevent arguments and flare ups. I got really good at getting out of the way. This is where I went wrong (or should I say I was uneducated). I chose to be quiet and avoid confrontation. We needed to have open communication in regards to his depression and his feelings. Vulnerability was hard for both of us...we experienced vulnerability as weakness but in reality vulnerability is the birth place of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy. Sometimes our first and greatest vulnerability should be asking for help. (Brene Brown).

We live in a very demanding world. We are pulled in every direction as individuals, employees, spouses, parents, and friends. These everyday stresses build up and can become overwhelming. We live in a culture where "IT'S NEVER ENOUGH". With depression on the rise sadly enough so is suicide.

I'm choosing to talk about my husband's suicide...In hopes to make a difference. When I first found out about my husband's death by suicide I began telling everyone that it was an accident. I carried shame and guilt. Having to tell lie after lie to my loved ones for multiple weeks became exhausting. I was tired of holding this secret...the truth shall set you free. I preach to my kids that honesty is key to always tell the truth and here I was lying. I couldn't keep track of the lies anymore. I sat the kids down and told them that their dad was very sad, that he did not communicate these feelings and felt too proud to ask for help. That his sadness became overwhelming and was unable to think clearly and that resulted in him taking his own life. He made his body stop breathing. As you can imagine it was the hardest thing I have ever had to tell my kids...gut wrenching! Kids and people in general need the truth to process and make sense of things. Many question's surfaced with a result of the truth coming out, at least this time *had the answers. No more lies. A weight was lifted off my shoulders by owning my story. The truth shall set you free rang true for me. Although the kids and I face many obstacles we value open communication and vulnerability.*

*The word suicide has many words that people correspond with it, some of which I have experienced are...selfish, cowardly, easy way out. I'll be the first to admit that I felt these exact same things until I was able to grasp a better understanding on depression. I believe that my husband was in such a dark place and in his mind he was doing us a favor. You're better without me so to speak. What they feel is a selfless act.*

*Many times people talk about the event itself, I would like to touch on some of the hardships that we as a family face in the after math of such an event. It's been over a year and on a daily basis one of my three children will wake up with a night terror. Often times it's that I'm next to die. It has affected our relationship with family and friends...death makes people strange. It has*

affected the community, schools, sports teams, churches. Everyone goes through the grieving process at different times. Healing is individual and one minute I could be doing well and then the strangest thing will set me back. Something as simple as a form at the gym asking for my emergency contact or a song on the radio. I find that I play the "what if" game...what if I answered his text? What if they went looking for him? This is a game that should never be played. Ultimately it was his choice and he owns that. Another obstacle that I face is my son's anxiety. He has missed many days of school...he gets so worked up that something will happen to me that he makes himself sick. My ten year old daughter chooses to be unhappy because she feels that if we were happy that we are disrespecting dad cause he's gone. She has also been so extremely mad at me for disciplining her for bad behavior that she has threatened suicide herself...she's ten. My youngest asks when he will be back from working away. She has melt downs in Walmart when she sees a daughter and dad together. When she goes swimming she tells me that she's searching the ocean for daddy and that she will bring him home when she finds him. It's heartbreaking and these are just a few of the things we have faced. Think about all the things he will miss... recitals, hockey, gymnastics, sand castles, camping, movies, cuddles, graduation, weddings...and the list goes on. My son always tells me that he misses when his dad would kiss me. Brings tears to my eyes. The emptiness and numbness that I feel is impossible to describe. I was just going through the motions for the first year. I used food, staying busy, planning, perfectionism, sex, online dating, Facebook, and anything else that I could dull the agonizing and anxiety fueled feelings of vulnerability. It wasn't until I attended a seminar for personal growth called Choices that I changed my numbing behaviors and help bring back the mom I use to be. Like I said I was numb for a year...yes I parented but I lacked love, empathy, patience, fun, joy all those heartfelt things. I faked it ...that was my motto "fake it till you make it". I'm now present I'm learning to feel my feelings, mindful about my numbing behaviors and I'm learning how to lean into the discomfort of the hard emotions. As Brene Brown would say....Sometimes the bravest and most important thing you can do is just show up. If we don't come to terms with our shame, our struggles, we start believing that there's something wrong with us. From the book Daring Greatly – Brene Brown, she states that shame derives its power from being unspeakable. This is a scary thought so many people don't talk

about depression or suicide because of the shame/stigma that we as a culture have put on it. In reality the more we choose not to talk about it the more power it has over us. Shame thrives on secrets. When people share their shame stories and become vulnerable ones physical health improves. It's important for everyone to open the lines of communication and talk about our struggles, it's surprising how many people have similar struggles or can relate in some way. The way back to each other and real connection is vulnerability as the path and courage is the light. Suicide does not define an individual. People make bad choices all the time however this one was final. My husband was an amazing father, friend, husband, business owner who suffered from an illness and could not find the courage to ask for help. I challenge everyone to really connect and be vulnerable and talk about all things even the shameful things...give them a voice watch things change. They no longer have power over us. Practice courage and reach out. Own our stories. Share the stories the good, bad and ugly. The best part about owning our story is that you get to write the ending. Let me tell you my story is going to be phenomenal!!!

IAM ENOUGH!

IAM FULL OF SPARKLE AND COMPASSION

I GENUINELY WANT TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE

I LOVE HARD, I PRACTICE KINDNESS

IM NOT AFRAID OF THE TRUTH

IAM LOYAL, ADVENTUROUS, SUPPORTIVE AND SURPRISING

IAM A WOMAN AND IAM ENOUGH!!

FEAR LESS....LOVE MORE

