Weekly News From Around the Columbia Union Conference

September 1, 2013

My Journey Out of Darkness
WHY I WALKED FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION

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In the September Visitor, One Member Shares Her Journey Out of Darkness

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READ MORE IN THE SEPTEMBER VISITOR

Articulo especial de Visitor: Mi travesía saliendo de la oscuridad

En el número de septiembre de la revista Visitor, Meredith Carter, feligrés de la iglesia Spencerville, en Maryland, comparte por qué participó en Darkness Overnight Walk [caminata saliendo de la oscuridad] auspiciado por el American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (afsp.org). Carter—cuyo esposo cometió suicidio hace dos años—, dijo que participando “he encontrado un propósito en medio de la tristeza— estoy sobreviviendo para hacer una diferencia”.

Hablando sobre la caminata dijo: “Al concluir el evento, me fortalecí en mi propósito, pero también creció mi aprensión. Sabía que esta caminata no sería
fácil física o emocionalmente. Estaría rodeada de personas afectadas por el suicidio, la depresión, y la enfermedad mental. Me preguntaba si debía pasar por esto y volver a todo el dolor que había trabajado tan arduamente por superar en el pasado.

Mi respuesta siempre me llevaba a Romanos 8:28: “Sabemos, además, que a los que aman a Dios, todas las cosas los ayudan a bien, esto es, a los que conforme a su propósito son llamados”. Dios nunca dijo que la vida sería fácil, pero prometió que nunca nos dejaría ni abandonaría. Meredith sigue abogando por la prevención del suicidio. Haga clic aquí para leer más en inglés.

UPCOMING EVENTS

MARYLAND

September 4-8: The Hope Channel will be taping a David Asscherick program in their Silver Spring, Md., studio. Be part of a live studio audience while experiencing Asscherick's logical, creative and candid presentations answering some of life's most difficult questions. Attend one night or all five. Admission is free, but reservations are necessary. For more information and to save your seat, go to www.hopetv.org/answers.

September 7: The Hopeside Church, a plant of the Fourth Street-Friendship church, welcomes singer Anil Kant and his daughter Shreya Kant at their 11 a.m. service. Kant is a renowned Indian gospel artist whose music touched millions for Christ. There will also be a free concert at 6 p.m. They meet at High Point High School, which is located at 3601 Powder Mill Rd. in Beltsville, Md. All are invited. For more information, visit hopeside.org/letitshine.pdf.

September 20-21: Walter Brueggemann, an acclaimed author and theologian, will be speaking at the 33rd G. Arthur Keough Lectures at Washington Adventist University in Takoma Park, Md. The topic will be "Reperforming our Best Narrative." His lectures will be in the Morrison Hall chapel. In his September 20 lecture, which begins at 6:30 p.m., he will address "Choosing an Alternative Life: Follow me." September 21, the lecture begins at 10 a.m. and he will address "Imagining Neighborliness: Love thy neighbor." For more information, contact the Religion Department at (301) 891-4033.

WEST VIRGINIA

September 7: The Johnson-Greene Family Quartet will present the 11 a.m. worship service at the Berkeley Springs church. Quartet members include Del Johnson, administrator of the North American Division's retirement plan; his wife, Andee, a parish nurse; Harold Greene, IT director for the Columbia Union; and his wife, Christine, certification registrar for the union's Education Department. The church is located at 3606 Valley Road.

VIRGINIA

September 6-21: Lonnie Melashenko will be the evangelist for a
series of Bible prophecy meetings that will be held at Sandusky Middle School in Lynchburg, Va. The meetings begin at 7 p.m. each night. There will be no Thursday meetings. The final meeting will be held at the Lynchburg church. The school is located at 805 Chinook Place. For more information, contact Pastor Mike Hewitt at pastormikeh@mac.com.

**September 14-15: Potomac Conference's Women's Retreat will focus on God's grace to us**, how we show grace to others and how to move gracefully as women of God. Come for a weekend of spiritual, mental and physical refreshment in a wooded setting, amid tranquil paths with accommodations at the Westfield Marriott in Chantilly, Va. Click [here](http://e2.ma/message/y34od/6diogi) to register.

**Deadline: September 4**

**VIRTUAL**

**September 11-14: The North American Division's Adult Ministries is hosting a virtual Festival of the Laity** to equip church members for ministries for Sabbath School, Personal Ministries and Prison Ministries. Registration is free. To find out more information about this event, visit the Festival of Laity [website](http://e2.ma/message/y34od/6diogi) and then [register online](http://e2.ma/message/y34od/6diogi).

**October 1: The alumni association for Takoma Academy in Takoma Park, Md., is collecting stories** of how the school has impacted your life. Send your stories to Susan Laurence Cooksey, alumni association president, at [susan.cooksey@ta.edu](mailto:susan.cooksey@ta.edu), or Ronnie Mills, director of institutional advancement, at [rmills@ta.edu](mailto:rmills@ta.edu) by October 1. The goal is to publish and present this book to alumni during the 2014 Alumni weekend. All proceeds from the book will benefit the Worthy Student Fund.
My Journey Out of Darkness

Story by Meredith Carter Published 8/27/13

I remember the moment I got the call:

“No, no, nooo he didn’t!” I screamed. He couldn’t have, I thought, as my body went numb and my mind spun in disbelief. I tried again to digest the emergency responder’s words: “I’m sorry, ma’am. I have some bad news for you. Your husband has died.”

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The night was torturous and long, but I finally got home where I was met with a barrage of loved ones, neighbors and co-workers. As we wept together, I realized I simply wasn’t ready to face my daughters, Mylah and Madalyn, only 4 and 2 at the time. In an instant, their lives had been forever changed and they didn’t even realize it yet. Later, as I gazed upon them napping peacefully, I fell to the
floor and wept again. The reality hit me like a bus—the life that we had together as a family of four, the one I was so proud to call my own, no longer existed.

A Look Back
During the following weeks and months, the question that continued to run through my mind was, “Where did it all go so terribly wrong?” McCants and I were happy. Sure we had our ups and downs, but we were committed to making it work. We were both raised in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and went to Adventist schools. In fact, we met in 1998 while attending Washington Adventist University, located in Takoma Park, Md. From that moment on, we were inseparable. We dated for seven years then blissfully married in 2005. That was the happiest day of our lives, besides the later births of our daughters.

As I look back over our last year together, there were signs my husband was suffering from depression. He isolated himself from family, slept more than usual, easily became irritable and sullen, and made erratic spending choices. The one time I confronted him about possibly being depressed, he got extremely defensive. Every day brought new challenges. At times, he was on top of the world. On other days, he distanced himself completely. I became resentful and ashamed for constantly making excuses for his absence at family gatherings. I was bitter that I carried the load of watching over the children while he left the house to do as he pleased. He simply wasn’t himself, and our marriage suffered as a result. But, never for a second did I think he would take his own life.

Nothing could prepare me for the physical, emotional and spiritual pain that crippled me in the following months. Having to tell my children that their father would never come home again left me empty and aching. I spent many nights rocking Mylah to sleep after hours of searching for daddy or sobbing uncontrollably by the door. Only then would I also surrender to sleep on my tear-stained pillow. There were seemingly endless nights of wonder and guilt, and the what-ifs engulfed me: What if I had just stayed home from my trip? What if I had called to say “I love you” one last time? Did he think of me, the girls, his mother? If so, how could he go through with it?

My questions were endless, but even worse, the answers were not there. I had nowhere to go but to God, but I was angry with Him. How could a loving Father allow such a tragedy to happen to us? Yet, through this anger, I clung to Him with every ounce of my soul. I knew in my heart I could not take one breath or one step without Him by my side. When I challenged God with, “You said you would never give me more than I can handle. What have I done to deserve this?” He gave me verses of comfort, like “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13, ESV), and “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5, ESV).

Learning a “New Normal”
As the months rolled on, the girls and I developed a “new normal.” We resumed daily activities, but I still barely felt like I existed.

When I returned to work and church, I was met with mixed reactions. Some shared an awkward glance as they passed me silently in the hall. Some asked more questions than I cared to answer. Others offered their opinion about his thought process or his spiritual outcome. I tried desperately not to take anything they said or didn’t say personally, but it was difficult. Some days I just wanted to be left alone; other days I wanted someone to let me unburden my thoughts and feelings. I was thankful to those who offered a simple “I’m praying for you” or “I’m here for you if you want to talk.”

While I continued to search for purpose in all of the grief, I began to think about what Jesus would do. Would He wallow in self-pity? Would He detach Himself from those around Him? The answer was undeniably “no.” It was then I knew God had a special plan for me, and I began to feel that He would use this tragedy for good.

Finding Purpose in the Pain
The most significant part of my healing started to take place on a typical morning drive into work at the General Conference building in Silver Spring, Md. I was listening to the radio, which I rarely did in those days, and heard an announcement about the annual charity event Out of the Darkness Overnight Walk sponsored by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP). I learned that participants walk 16-18 miles overnight to raise money and awareness for suicide prevention research, education and advocacy. I immediately knew this was something I had to do. I rushed into work and logged into the AFSP website (afsp.org) to register for the upcoming walk in Washington, D.C. Within 24 hours, I exceeded raising the necessary $1,000 to participate. I knew I’d found a purpose in all this sadness—I was surviving to make a difference.
As the event drew closer, I felt stronger in my purpose, but my apprehension grew as well. I knew this walk would not be easy, physically or emotionally. I was going to be surrounded by others who have been affected by suicide, depression and mental illness. I questioned if I should put myself through this and bring up all the pain I had worked so hard to move past. My answer always came back to Romans 8:28 (ESV), “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for the good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” God never said life would be easy, but He did promise He would never leave us or forsake us.

As I arrived at the event, with two of my closest friends by my side, I was overwhelmed by the feelings that washed over me: excitement, a sense of kinship with the other walkers, indescribable sadness for the loss so many of us had experienced and strength from deep within. I knew that God guided me to this point and had used my pain to mold me into the person He wants me to become. It would take strength and courage to complete this walk, but I remembered God is “close to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (Ps. 34:18, ESV).

As we walked that night, I shed many tears passing historical landmarks that my family had visited. I longingly gazed upon the spot where the four of us sat, under the cherry blossoms, for a picnic lunch. As we approached the Washington Monument, my stomach churned as I recalled the first time we took the girls to visit the tall structure. But with each weary and painful step, my determination grew. I thought of my beautiful girls, and how grateful I am to have them—they are a light in my life. I thought of my parents, who have been my rock. And, I thought of McCants, who I loved and missed so dearly. That night my anger toward his decision was replaced with sweet memories and sadness for the unimaginable pain he must have endured to want to end his life.

As we crossed the finish line, the adorned luminaries that lined the sidewalk took my breath away. Each one told the story of a lost person. Then one by one, exhausted walkers fell down in the grass to wait for the sun to rise and the closing ceremony to begin. There was a peaceful silence, and I tearfully reflected on the previous 22 months. I could never have imagined such growth, and, at that moment, I thanked God for leading me here. When the sun broke the horizon, I felt a new chapter begin. No, the pain had not vanished nor the sense of loss, but my faith was strengthened.

I will continue to advocate for suicide prevention, if only to save one life. I simply pray that my testimony might offer others peace. If I can conclude with one thought, it is to quote the mantra, “Only God can turn a mess into a message, a test into a testimony, a trial into a triumph, a victim into a victory.” God’s plan is not always our plan, but it is perfectly divine.

*Meredith Carter attends Chesapeake Conference’s Spencerville church in Silver Spring, Md.*

Click [here](http://www.columbiaunion.org) for Meredith’s 8 tips for Survivors of Suicide Loss.

Want to see more *Visitor* articles? See a full PDF of the September issue [here](http://www.columbiaunion.org).

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**Please limit your comments to 500 words or less. Only one comment per person will be published.**