

# 'This is Mother's Day and this is my mission'

## Mother-son bond is a story of love, trust, courage

By Stacy Jenkins  
Observer Staff Writer



Sue Serlin-Resnick, of Farmington Hills, went on a life-changing journey with her son, who was suicidal. They sought a cure for his depression and she wrote a book about the experience after he died.

JOHN STORMZAND | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

It was a challenge no mother should have to face.

Her son called her from college — desperate, afraid, and brutally honest.

"He said, 'Mom, it's gotten much worse. I'm suicidal. I have thoughts of suicide all the time and I need your help,'" said Sue Serlin-Resnick, a Farmington Hills mother who is now on a mission to raise awareness about depression and suicide prevention.

Her youngest child, Joel — who had grown into a dynamic, intuitive, good looking man who exuded confidence and warmth — was in pain.

And, she was scared.

Joel, who was 29 at the time, was a student at the University of Iowa, where he was honing his writing talents. Serlin-Resnick knew her son had bouts of depression in the past, but he had never verbalized his pain quite like this before.

"He said, 'Mom, I'm so

Please see **MISSION**, A10

# MISSION

Continued from page A1

scared that I will go crazy and end up in a mental institution my whole life. I am in horrific pain and I am in hell," she said quietly, recalling the conversation that took place 15 years ago. "I cried. But I had to be one step ahead of the game. I would not go into the pits of hell with him."

## The journey begins

They agreed they would, together, delve into research and resources to find the solution, the cure, for his pain. It was a special time of collaboration, discovery and growth between mother and son. They trusted one another, and they learned from one another.

"We were seeking a cure; something that would work for Joel," she said.

All the while, with Joel being in Iowa City, Serlin-Resnick was always on high alert to her son's tone of voice over the telephone.

"I knew that he could kill himself at any time," she said.

They each saw therapists to help them emotionally navigate the situation, and each other.

"This was a bond that was very strong," she said.

As a mother, she wanted to hop in the car and drive to Iowa to be with her son. She wanted to protect him, to find a cure, to ease his pain.

But, he said he didn't want her to visit — that he was okay just talking to her on the phone a couple of times a day. She knew she had to respect his wishes, so she stayed in Michigan and kept plugging away.

## Learning, loving

Serlin-Resnick, who has a background in educa-



PHOTOS BY JOHN STORMZAND | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Sue Serlin-Resnick remembers her son on this Mother's Day, but celebrates his life and their journey together for the 31 years he was alive.

tion, counseling and hypnotherapy, knew this was a journey she would take with her son.

Growing up with dyslexia and failing three grades in school, she knows how it feels to be challenged, to be different and to overcome the seemingly impossible.

Joel grew up with challenges, too.

"I always knew he had challenges. He was in special education as a child," she said. "When you're different, people fear it, they don't understand it. He was taunted and bullied."

Serlin-Resnick became her "Joey's" advocate, working with state agencies on programs and services for children with disabilities. He grew up to become an athlete, an amateur artist, a nature lover, a leader and a gifted writer.

She saw how much he wanted to contribute to society and how that desire clashed with his depression.

"He was extremely bright," she said. "When you are highly sensitive and live in a world of so much information, you don't know how to take it all in and bring it into balance."

She's grateful that her son reached out to her. It was a partnership that took a lot of ups and downs, but always landed with respect, love and a little more insight.

He taught her how to listen, she said, and that helped him.

"It gave him power — he was teaching me," she said.

## 'Joel snapped'

After more than a year of research, therapy and support, the road end-



Sue Serlin-Resnick holds a photo of her and her son, Joel.

ed, but the journey continued.

Serlin-Resnick recognized something in her son's voice that day in 1998.

"I knew when Joel snapped," she said. "I knew something was horribly wrong."

The pain in his voice was poignant.

"They enter this dark hole of ugliness — it's pain so severe that they don't see any way out," she said. "He really made a tremendous effort to live, and he died anyway."

Her phone stopped ringing and she knew he had done it. A chaplain and police officer visited her home and broke the news to her husband Al. She was at work.

"I came home and Al told me Joey died by suicide," she said. "I said, 'God, what do I do now?'"

They traveled to Iowa and took care of the arrangements. A four-hour funeral service in Iowa City was attended by many people, most of whom spoke of how Joel had touched their lives.

Many brought mementos in his memory and attendees released balloons into the air.

"The common theme was that he had an uncanny perception of people and what their thoughts were," said Serlin-Resnick.

His death reinforced her lifelong quest for inner peace and understanding of herself and others. She sees and promotes the positive in everything — and, she takes every opportunity to help others.

"I've looked to bring myself to a higher level," she said. "I'm always dealing with forgiveness. I brought respect to myself and respect to Joel. I relish great successes and I treasure small feats."

On the day of her son's funeral, she could hear his voice telling her that he would be back to help her write a book about their journey together.

And, they did.

In its second phase of editing, the book, *Good Night My Son, I Love You*

offers insight on the journey through depression and her experiences with coping through hope, education, courage and understanding.

"This is Mother's Day and this is my mission," she said, of the book.

"Yes, it's sad — there are times when I hear a song that Joey loved ... I wonder why it couldn't have been different."

But, she keeps focusing on the positive.

"The pain never ends, but you learn to live with it," she said. "Memories are gifts — they help me appreciate the journey."

sjenkins@hometownlife.com  
(313) 222-2369

**F·I·S·H·E·R**  
FUNERAL HOME  
CREMATION SERVICES  
Family Owned and  
Operated Since 1955

