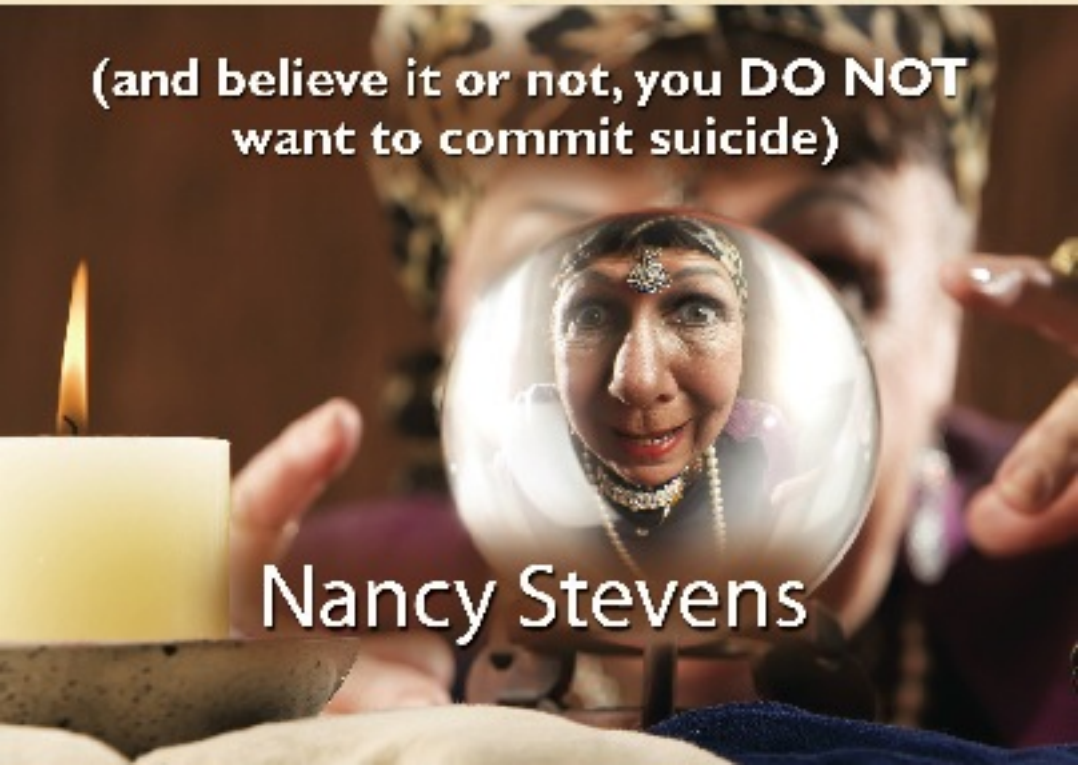


Your Crystal Ball is Whacked

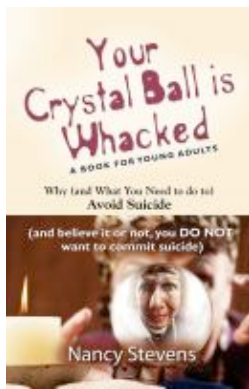
A BOOK FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Why (and What You Need to do to)
Avoid Suicide

(and believe it or not, you **DO NOT**
want to commit suicide)

A woman in a purple sari is looking into a crystal ball. The crystal ball shows a close-up of her face with a surprised expression. In the foreground, there is a lit candle in a dark holder. The background is dark and out of focus.

Nancy Stevens



Your Crystal Ball is Whacked is a book for young adults that asks them to choose life rather than commit suicide. Provides practical methods to get through life's crises, whether symptomatic of mental illness or situation-based brought on by the death or other loss of loved ones, or by prejudice, abuse or neglect. References the author's experiences with depression, anxiety, a stillborn baby, incest and drug abuse. Does not advocate any form of drug treatment.

Your Crystal Ball is Whacked

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**YOUR CRYSTAL
BALL IS
WHACKED**

**A Book for Young
Adults -**

**Why (and What You Need to do to)
Avoid Suicide**

(and believe it or not, you **DO NOT** want
to commit suicide)

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NancyStepsIn@gmail.com
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INTRO



"He who lives by the crystal ball
soon learns to eat ground glass." - Edgar Fiedler

THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU if you are contemplating ending your life by committing suicide. This book is for you whether you suffer from depression and its cousins or whether you are just a normal sullen/bubbly, grouchy/sweet, ornery/pleasant young adult who's had a major setback in life. Wherever you fit, or if you feel like you don't fit anywhere, **I want you to live.**

Until you have walked someone else's path, you cannot tell another person what to do. For each of us, there are falls we must take and things we must learn in the process of rising up from the fall. My friend Rebecca says this and if anyone knows the truth in

Nancy Stevens

these words, she does. She has had her children taken away from her. She has been homeless. She has struggled with chemical dependency and a bi-polar disorder for years, and yet she has chosen life at every turn because she lives in the moment in her wise mind and has created a life worth living for herself. There are no dead ends in her thinking. She knows that everything that feels like a roadblock is really just a sign that she needs to consider taking another path to reach her destination.

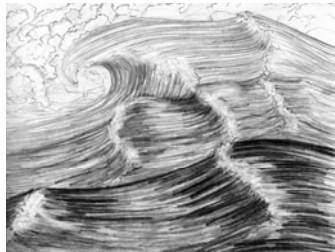
I do not presume to tell you how to live your life; each of you must find your own way. But I have been involved in this process (both the falling and the getting up again) a long, long time, so maybe you will find something in here to help you. And this small book is not all-inclusive. I am not a doctor and I have no clinical training. I cannot talk about medications because I am not qualified to do so. That's what psychiatrists are for. (I will only say that *The New York Times* in April of 2012, reported that though depressed patients generally didn't have consistently lower levels of serotonin, suicidal patients often did. Consider this when your doctor suggests you try an antidepressant.)

I am a survivor and I'm here to tell you that there are many avenues available to you to find relief from your pain and that suicide is not the answer. I hope the

Your Crystal Ball is Whacked - A Book for Young Adults

thoughts and ideas I talk about here are of help to you.

DROWNING IN A SEA OF SORROW



"When people are suicidal, their thinking is paralyzed, their options appear sparse or nonexistent, their mood is despairing, and hopelessness permeates their entire mental domain. The future cannot be separated from the present, and the present is painful beyond solace."

- Kay Redfield Jamison

I AM A MELANCHOLY PERSON by nature. I suffer from a deep, pensive, and never-ending sadness that no combination of antidepressants and anxiety medications can really touch, and I bottle up my emotions. I hold my sorrow and my fears (and my anger) in a lockbox behind my heart and present to the world a bright and friendly face. At the same time, there is virtually no filter between what I am feeling deep inside the box and what I say. So I can tell you

Nancy Stevens

that you are a complete idiot and I detest you while smiling a big smile. And this is how comedians are born.

It's not like I never have moments of real happiness. Nothing compares to watching a baby being born or even getting soaked in a fountain at Disney World on a 95-degree day. Reading my husband's poetry or just sitting on our front porch at day's end is indescribably delightful. Finishing putting the laundry away is very satisfying. But on a day-to-day basis, hidden inside each moment is an edgy sadness not far below the surface, along with constant worry about something or other I can't name. (That's called free-floating anxiety or dread.)

Sorrow. How totally debilitating it can be. That awful feeling that you are worthless, that your life is hopeless, that the situation you find yourself in will never end, and that you will never be happy. And no matter how much you love your family and friends, when you're drowning it's hard to think about how your death might impact them.

I never realized how much worse sadness (substitute despair, gloom, misery, or any other term that equates with paralysis of feeling, emptiness and a hole in your heart) could get than the kind I had been used to living with every day of my life, until the spring of 2009.

Your Crystal Ball is Whacked - A Book for Young Adults

I "hit the wall" in May of that year. I had what they call a severe depressive episode (and what I call a complete emotional meltdown) that led me into a world without light and sick with fear. I never realized a human being could enter into such hell. I realize now that I never truly understood the depths to which depression can take a person.

I didn't know what was happening to me. My emotional lockbox had sprung its hinges. People at work didn't know what was wrong with me, but they knew I was in trouble because the happy, smiling Nancy was nowhere in sight. My office manager and several of my co-workers offered me plenty of opportunities to "talk about it," whatever "it" was. But what was I to say? All I knew was that I was terrified and felt like death warmed over -- I didn't know why.

My former psychiatrist suggested that I either begin electroshock therapy or go into something called "Partial Treatment," which, he explained, would require me to be in therapy all day at a hospital and home on nights and weekends. This was after he'd spent the previous six months testing out six or seven antipsychotic drugs on me subsequent to incorrectly diagnosing me as bi-polar. Can anyone here say malpractice?

In any event, I opted for Partial Treatment and made arrangements to enter the program at the

Nancy Stevens

hospital covered under my insurance plan, but only after returning in ten days from a trip my husband and I had planned months before. We had these non-refundable airplane tickets to Seattle, you see, and the trip was an important one for my husband. I figured I couldn't feel any worse there than I did here so I decided to go on the trip before starting treatment in the hopes that it might even cheer me up, and because I couldn't bear the thought of being alone during those nights and weekends away from the hospital. I was feeling very suicidal.

In retrospect, my decision to go to Seattle was a bad one. I should have checked myself into the hospital's psych ward immediately and never given the price of that airline ticket another thought. I would have been safe and I would have had the opportunity to begin the recovery process.

But, as it turned out, I flew to Seattle and silently threw my sorrows on the doorstep of our unsuspecting and endlessly compassionate hostess who put up with me for ten days with good humor and no complaints. The woman is a saint.

Mornings were the worst by far. Each dawn brought with it the yawning emptiness of another day of living hell. I completely lacked the ability to take in any of the beauty around me; I had crashed and burned for no discernible reason and life held no

Your Crystal Ball is Whacked - A Book for Young Adults

promise and no joy. As Finnick says in Mockingjay, when Katniss asks him how he bears being broken, "I don't ... I drag myself out of nightmares each morning and find there's no relief in waking. . . . Better not give in to it. It takes ten times as long to put yourself back together as it does to fall apart."

Ten times as long. And I was falling apart as fast as a Lego Castle when you remove that long block holding up the moat wall. My husband was patient, oh so patient, but he could not fathom what was going on with me. In the morning, I wanted to hold on to him in that bed forever but, although sympathetic, he was unable to indulge my despair. He had things he needed to do.

So I had to get up because the rest of the world insisted upon going about its business and I had been enlisted to participate. I would stand staring down at my clothes on the floor and pick the warmest clean items I could find (I was always cold), put them on (I wore the same clothes day after day) and crawl up the stairs to the bathroom to face my toothbrush. I rarely bathed; it took too much effort. Brushing my teeth was a major job.

In the middle of our visit, we took the ferry to our host's cabin on Lopez Island, one of the San Juans, with the hope that this formerly wonderful side trip would work its magic on me. And I really tried to enjoy

Nancy Stevens

the flower markets and little roadside stands we stopped at along the way to the ferry, and the ocean and the sea air blowing through my hair on the boat, and the enchanting cabin on a little hill where we could see all manner of wildlife right outside the window. Their cabin was cooled by ocean breezes and warmed at night with a cozy fire. There were wonderful books to read and an array of colored starfish to investigate on the beach when the tide went out. I did two of my normally favorite things. I took a long walk knowing that walking until my feet give out usually makes me feel exhausted, a wonderful feeling, and we played Scrabble, a game that I love.

I felt nothing except fear and despair even in the presence of such beauty and surrounded by what I knew was love. I just wanted to get off that island as quickly as possible and we ended up leaving for the mainland on the first ferry going back in the morning, earlier than planned. I must have looked like a refugee from some war-torn country who had seen a hundred deaths and cried a million tears. I know I felt like that. I knew I could not go on much longer in the wasteland that my life had become. I felt trapped, trapped inside my head. I felt as though I had come to a dead end and that I had no options, no way to get out of my nightmare.

Your Crystal Ball is Whacked - A Book for Young Adults

My husband and friends tried everything to bring me out of my slump. My husband put together a long tape of religious readings he thought might be inspirational. Friends would call long distance almost daily to tell me something positive to think about. At home in better times I loved to go out to eat, so we went out to eat. We went to church. All to no avail.

Then ten days from our arrival, the day came when I had to put one foot in front of the other and get on that airplane. I seriously didn't know if I could do it, but I did and we made it home without incident and I entered the Partial Program at the hospital the next day. More on that later.

MENTAL ILLNESS



"The mentally ill frighten and embarrass us.
And so we marginalize the people
who most need our acceptance.
What mental health needs is more
sunlight, more candor, more
unashamed conversation." - Glenn Close

I WOULDN'T WISH the period in my life I just told you about on my worst enemy. Stephen King couldn't draw a clearer vision of hell. I have suffered with depression my whole life and since that episode in Seattle, I am now loaded with anxiety as well, and I am technically mentally ill. What a loaded phrase that is! If you knew I was mentally ill, would you want to sit next to me on the bus? Would you move away from me in class? Better not move too fast, my friend. If you

Nancy Stevens

decide to move, you might end up sitting pretty much by yourself with just a handful of your more fortunate classmates.

If you are mentally ill, you have a lot of company. A lot of very "normal" looking people are depressed, or anxious, or bi-polar, or suffer from a borderline personality disorder or some other malady of the mind. You usually won't be able to tell them on sight. The majority of us won't be wearing badges; only a handful might be talking to ourselves rather loudly or repetitively stomping our right foot nine times. The sharpest pain is often the most silent.

One thing about people who are mentally ill is that suicide is more common among us. It's a fact. And you certainly don't have to be a mentally ill young adult to take your own life. My dearly departed great, great grandfather was mentally ill. Although they didn't talk about depression and anxiety using those words back in the 1800's, I'm sure he would have qualified. He slit his throat with a sharp bread knife after first making lunch for the family. (The town newspaper reported that he had been a considerate soul to make lunch before he died and that he had been a godly man.) He was deeply in debt. He was about to lose the family farm. He had five children and a wife to support. His obituary reported that he had been melancholy in the days before his death. And most importantly, he was

stuck in that moment of despair when he picked up that knife and ended it all. He was incapable of remembering that there were any good moments in his life. He was incapable of believing that the particular moment of hopelessness he inhabited would evolve into another moment when his thinking might be different and solutions might present themselves.

His mind was muddling its way through the equivalent of a modern-day construction zone where all the roadblocks had finally led him to a dead end and he didn't know how to get out; he didn't see any options. But time is like a stream running through a field, going through rough patches of stones and twigs and clear currents of smooth sailing, multi-faceted like a diamond. The more you recognize that there are multiple pathways out of a danger zone, the better chance you have of surviving a disaster in your life. If you will allow yourself to rest and take good, loving care of yourself at all times and give yourself the chance to "gather your wits together" during the bad times, you will find the possibilities to get where you need to go. The solution might be a radical change of direction or a series of slow and steady baby steps retracing your route to find where you've gone off track. Either way, the goal is to do the very best you can to create a life worth living in your situation as it currently exists.

Nancy Stevens

My great grandfather's crystal ball was whacked. He didn't know what lay ahead for him. None of us does. He saw only disaster. He never saw his children grow up; he never got to know my great grandmother who was a talented painter and the first member of our family to go to college. Maybe if he'd talked to somebody about his fears, a solution could have been found for his economic problems, but he lived in a time when you didn't talk about such things, especially if you were male; you just shut up and lived with your despair, or you checked out. Fortunately, we live in a somewhat more enlightened era where help is at hand if you know how to find it (see the back of this book for resources). But he didn't need to commit suicide then and neither do you now.

If you're reading this you might be mentally ill. You might not want to announce your condition to the people sharing your lunch table at school, although a fair number of them are most likely mentally ill, too. But being mentally ill doesn't mean you're a lunatic or insane, it simply means that your mind is not functioning well, for one reason or another.

There's nothing shameful about being mentally ill. Many of the greatest minds in our society have been mentally ill and some of them have, unfortunately, committed suicide, and that's tragic; that represents a tremendous loss of talent for us and an irredeemable

Your Crystal Ball is Whacked - A Book for Young Adults

loss of companionship for their friends and families. More have stuck around and it's a good thing for them and for us that they decided to live because great things have developed from these great minds.

Do you think the people who check out early really want to die in most cases or do you think what they want is RELIEF, relief from the pain and despair that overwhelms them? Well, you don't have to kill yourself no matter how unbearable the pain may seem. Say to yourself, "I'm in terrible pain and I accept that. I have a right to be in pain, but I don't need to suffer. I need to do whatever I can do for myself that will allow me to move beyond the pain." There are so many people who want nothing more than to keep you alive and help you develop a life worth living. You owe it to yourself to let someone help you, and to help yourself.

Whether you are sick in your mind or simply sick of this world, I'm asking you to remember just one thing that's given you joy in the past and know absolutely that something will give you joy in the future. PLEASE stick around.

THINGS LIKE THIS WILL HAPPEN TO YOU THROUGHOUT YOUR LIFE



"Life can only be understood backward
but it has to be lived forward." - Soren Kierkegard

NOT EVERYONE WHO contemplates committing suicide is mentally ill. For some people who are otherwise pretty well adjusted, suicide can be an impulsive move; a permanent solution to a temporary problem. Sometimes there is a loss so devastating, a challenge so seemingly insurmountable, a shame so overwhelming, guilt so deep, that it feels like the pain will never end, and suicide feels like the only way out. Drugs and alcohol often play a leading role in impulsive suicides, especially where guys are concerned.

Nancy Stevens

We are about to travel a winding road here. I wish that I could simply unscrew the stopper from an imaginary drain in your back (like the drain in a kiddie pool) and pour in the wisdom of the ages; the chief bit being that with the passage of time, wounds may not totally heal, but the pain will decrease considerably. The wounds will heal enough that you will find yourself once again enjoying your life. It's true!

But I can't do that because you don't have a stopper or a drain and you wouldn't believe me anyway. You don't have enough life experience yet to believe in something like that when the pain is so raw and unendurable. And, unfortunately, Mr. Spock isn't around to perform the Vulcan mind meld. You're just going to have to trust me. I've been through an inordinate amount of heartache and healing in my life and if I'm still around to talk about it, it should give you hope. Hope. What is life without hope?

Maybe you have experienced the loss of something or someone that is irrecoverable; maybe you've been dumped. Maybe someone you love has had to move far, far away and you fear that you may never see them again. Maybe you have fears that people you love will die and that you will be not be able to survive without them or possibly a person that you love very much actually has died and you're choking on your grief.

Your Crystal Ball is Whacked - A Book for Young Adults

Maybe, like the shooters at Columbine, you are being incessantly bullied because you're not a jock, because you live on the wrong side of town, or you're just "different" in a way that makes you not fit in within the very narrow scope of acceptability as it's defined at your school. Maybe someone has started a Facebook campaign to smear your good name, complete with pictures. There's a whole lot of ways to feel like the world is crumbling down around your ears.

Vincent Kartheiser, the actor who plays Pete Campbell on "Mad Men" told interviewer Andy Mannix in the June 13-19 issue of Minneapolis' City Pages magazine that his high school had a social hierarchy dominated by jocks and cheerleaders and he was just a lowly drama dork. He says, "It's pretty much the shittiest thing in the world. I grew up with a bunch of steroided-up hockey players and blond cheerleaders who thought they ruled the world, and I was a little nerd who wore stage makeup and clothes that my mother made for me."

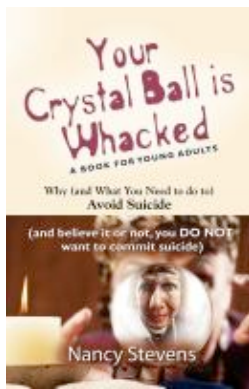
Being rejected and excluded is a powerful hurt. Feeling isolated and alone is a powerful hurt. Being betrayed by someone you thought that you could trust is a powerful hurt.

There are so many possible ways to be crushed. And how can you ever live beyond this moment?

Nancy Stevens

You can. No matter how bad it is, you do not live in a black hole. You are not trapped in this moment. Time flows over every rock (read that heartache) in its path and in doing so, it wears those rocks down. You are not trapped. You have a whole world of options available to you if you will allow yourself time. It would be a huge waste of your very worthwhile life to end it.

As my granddaughter said to me one night when she was about eight while she was taking a bath and I was sitting beside the tub deep in grief over the loss of a beloved cat, "Nana, things like this will happen to you throughout your life; you need to finish being sad."



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