



THE SIDEBAR

How old-fashioned letters could help pull people back from the brink of suicide

Jenny Chen
Special to The Washington Post

Anita Estrada first attempted to kill herself when she was 24 years old. She survived, and the doctors prescribed medication to manage her bipolar disorder. Three years later, Estrada ended up in intensive care from a second attempted suicide. Two years after that, she tried a third time and had to be placed on a ventilator. Immediately after she was released, she looked for ways to try to kill herself again.

Estrada's multiple suicide attempts, recounted in the photojournalism project "Live Through This" in 2013, are not unusual. Repeated suicide attempts are a major problem in the United States and studies show that one in four people who attempt suicide will try it again within five years. Repeated suicide attempts is also one of the highest risk factors for successful suicide: About half of those who die from suicide have made at least one previous suicide attempt.

Hospitals have struggled for years to find effective strategies to help suicidal patients walking into their emergency rooms, but most of the established models involve personal, face-to-face visits and intensive therapy, which are too resource-intensive for many centers with large volumes to undertake.

A paper published in PLOS Medicine in March proposes a novel method of follow-up that they say appears to reduce suicide attempt recurrence by almost 80 percent. It involves having therapists hand-write letters to the patients over the course of 24 months. While the letters would be mostly scripted and focus on reminding people about the importance of safety strategies, they would also include one or two personal sentences and would be personally signed by the therapists.

The method — known as the Attempted Suicide Short Intervention Program, or ASSIP — was tested on 120 patients who had been admitted to the Bern University General Hospital in Switzerland for recently attempted suicide. The patients were split into two groups: a control group that went through the standard treatment of therapy without the letter writing therapy, and a group that went through both standard therapy and letter writing therapy.

The group of patients that went through letter writing therapy also went through three sessions with therapists. In the first session, patients videotaped themselves telling their personal stories about the events leading up to the attempted suicide to a therapist. In the second session, the patient and therapist watched the video-recorded first session together. The patients were then asked to go home and reflect on their attempted suicide. In the third session, patients and therapists discussed ways to prevent future suicide attempts by talking about long-term goals, warning signs and safety strategies.

After the three sessions, these patients received a series of personalized letters from their therapists. The letters were sent every three months in the first year and every six months in the

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Poets with disabilities find

BEAUTY ALL OVER



Poetry club co-leader Taylor Tolchin (left) assists Jessica Zernechel during Tuesday's rehearsal reading at Centenary United Methodist Church.

Photo by Darren Gibbins

Poetry club is an outreach of MSU's Good Thunder Reading Series

by Kristine Goodrich
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A local group of artists is proof that people with intellectual disabilities can accomplish most anything, including writing captivating poetry.

A partnership between Minnesota State University and Aktion Club Theatre is providing 10 budding bards the opportunity to not only learn about and pen poetry, but also to share it with audiences.

Twice a month for over a year, MSU graduate students Taylor Tolchin and Kate MacLamb have been leading a poetry club with members of varied ages and disabilities.

The Aktion Poetry Club is a subgroup of Aktion Club Theatre, a community performance group comprised of people of disabilities.

The poetry club is an outreach of the Good Thunder Reading Series, a MSU initiative that has been bringing authors and poets to the community for more than 30 years.

The club's leaders are volunteers who are studying creative writing.

Tolchin said her favorite part of leading the club is getting to know the participants.

"They're a very thoughtful and talented group," she said. "They find beauty all over. Their dedication to art is truly exciting."

From stanzas and blank verse to rhyme and alliteration, the poetry pupils learned the types and components of poetry. After hearing examples ranging from William Shakespeare to Maya Angelou, they penned their own poems ranging from sonnets to acrostics.



Ambry Brave Heart reads a poem about friendship Tuesday, a practice run before the community reading on Thursday.

Photo by Darren Gibbins

"I love poetry club because it lets me express myself," said member Heather Bell. "It's great being a part of poets club be-

cause you feel inspired and positive about yourself," said participant Nate Clark.

Tolchin said she encouraged her group to draw from their own experiences and aspirations to inspire their poems.

The results included lyrical reports about their family members and jobs and tales of walking a dog and Christmas celebrations.

In a poem about best friends, Ambry Brave Heart describes them as "my apple to my pie, my chocolate to my sundae."

The first stanza of Michelle Hermandson's poem titled "Believe in Yourself" encourages readers to "Set your standards high. You deserve the best. Try for what you want and never settle for less."

After a practice reading Tuesday in front of their friends in Aktion Club, the Aktion poets held a community reading at the Arts Center of St. Peter on Thursday. Each poet picked one or a few favorite works to read.

The poets also got to see their work in print. Tolchin and MacLamb assembled the favorite poems into books that were distributed at the reading.

The Aktion Poetry Club, which meets the first and third Tuesday of each month at Centenary United Methodist Church, is one of four such writing groups sponsored by the Good Thunder Reading Series.

According to the series' website, when Diana Joseph became its director in 2014 she established Good Thunder Presents, bringing writing workshops off campus to community groups.

There presently also are ongoing workshops at Ecumen Pathstone Living senior community, the REACH Drop-In Center

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A box of memories to remind me mom's not gone yet

On the drive from our North Mankato home to West High School the other day, I asked Sam, "Sam, what should I write my column about this week?" "I don't know," he said. "What's got you angry and all worked up that you could write about?" "Hmmm ... Good question."



ROBB MURRAY
Features Editor

"Well, I'm generally not an angry guy," I say. "I mean, there's politics and the whole Trump thing, but I'm not a real political guy. Plus, if I said what I really

think about Trump, we've got some readers who I just know would be all over me and I don't need that."

"OK," Sam says, gently stroking his beard and gazing off across the Minnesota River as we cross it via the North Star Bridge. "Then ... I don't know. What else have you been thinking about?"

"My mom," I say, "and moving her into her new place a few weeks ago."

"So write about that," he says.

"Well, I could," I say, "but all my thoughts about it have this sort of vibe that you'd have if someone just died, you know? I mean, going through all her stuff and all these thoughts I was having about it — it's like I need to remind myself first that she's not gone yet ... which would probably be a good thing to write about. Sam, you're a genius!"

"True," he said, and stroked his lengthy gray beard, stared deep into my face like a cave-dwelling Templar and said, "You chose ... wisely."

(Editor's note: Sam Mur-

ray has no beard and, in fact, will likely be doomed, like his father, to a diminutive life of sparse facial hair that, while it may try hard, will never grow to the kind of lush, manly thickness so worshiped in craft breweries and pop culture memes. He will be wise, though, as evidenced by his Knowledge Bowl team's state tournament berth. GO TEAM SCAR-LET!)

On the day we moved my mom from her senior living apartment complex to her new assisted-living

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CELEBRATIONS

**Lauren Hicks**

daughter of Mary and Jerry Hicks of North Mankato. Lauren graduated from Loyola High School in 2004, and from the College of St. Benedict in 2008 with a degree in Elementary Education. She earned her Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction from St. Catherine's University in 2010. Lauren is a 4th grade teacher at Jonathan Elementary in Chaska Minnesota.

Matthew Crandall

son of Mark and Diane Crandall of Lake City Minnesota. Matt graduated from Lake City High School in 2004, and from the United States Air Force Academy in 2008, with a degree in Aeronautical Engineering. He graduated from flight school in 2010. Matt is currently stationed in Spokane Washington, serving as a Captain in the United States Air Force, and flies the KC135 refueling jet.

A May 28, 2016 wedding is planned.

Anniversary, wedding and engagement policy

Engagement announcements should be to us at least one month prior to the wedding.

Engagement, wedding and anniversary announcements may be formatted in the style of those published in The Free Press and email to classified@mankatofreepress.com. Photos may be scanned, saved as a JPEG and sent electronically and email to: classified@mankatofreepress.com. Forms for wedding, engagements and anniversary announcements are available on The Free Press website by going to www.mankatofreepress.com and clicking on "milestones" on the left side tab of the home page. Those forms can be submitted electronically on that page.

In addition, printed forms for wedding, engagements and anniversaries are available for anyone preferring to use them. They may be obtained by stopping in The Free Press or writing to The Free Press Marketplace, PO Box 3287, Mankato MN 56001.

There is a \$28.50 charge for wedding, engagements and anniversary announcements. Five copies of the newspaper will be provided with the order and newspapers must be picked up within five days of publication.

For more information, call 507-344-6395.

Photo graphics submitted through mail with wedding, engagement and anniversary stories will be returned if a self-addressed, stamped envelop is included, or they may be picked up at The Free Press.

CLUB: Group an outreach of Good Thunder series

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for homeless teens and at the CADA shelter for women fleeing domestic violence. From 2-3 p.m. April 18, the community is invited to hear members of the Pathstone group will read some of their poetry and prose.

There have been other past partnerships as well. Before Aktion, Tolchin helped lead a workshop with adults with developmental disabilities at the Harry Meyering Center.

The Aktion poets will read their work at least one

more time.

Sponsored by The Arc Minnesota Southwest, the Kiwanis Club and Access Program, Aktion Club Theater uses theatrical performances to raise awareness about issues impacting people with disabilities.

According to Director Wilbur Neushwander-Frink, the group is preparing to present a cabaret-style show in August, inspired by "The Beloved Community" philosophy of Martin Luther King Jr. In between singing and dance numbers, the poets will take the stage for readings.

'Good Food' movement grows up, gets paid

Greg Trotter
Chicago Tribune

CHICAGO — Imagine standing on a stage in front of hundreds of strangers. You need their money to help finance your dream business. You have seven minutes to make the pitch.

You'd be nervous, right? "The trick is faking it. I was nervous as hell," said a grinning Susan Fink, founder and, for now, sole employee of Karma Kombucha.

Fink was one of a handful of entrepreneurs pitching to investors at the financing and innovation conference at last month's Good Food Festival, a three-day trade show that's dedicated to connecting business owners with investors. From crepes to craft cider, all of the businesses seeking money were aligned with the festival's definition of "good food" — somewhere in the mix of local, healthy and sustainably produced.

That such a day even exists is a sign of how times have changed. Increasingly, consumers want food they consider to be healthy and socially responsible while also affordable and delicious. The shift has forced large-scale change throughout the food supply chain, and the dollars have followed.

"There's a lot more money in the room and the deals are far more sophisticated, in part because of the (Good Food Business Accelerator)," said Jim Slama, founder and president of FamilyFarmed, the nonprofit that organizes both the Good Food Festival, which began in 2004, and the 2-year-old accelerator program.

Housed in 1871, a buzzing tech incubator in downtown Chicago, the six-month food business accelerator program connects its participants to a network of mentors and resources and helps them to refine and grow their businesses.

For some, like Ryan Jones, founder of Gotta B Crepes, the program teaches how to articulate the business side of a food passion.

"We're all makers, but how do you take that passion and make it an enterprise?" said Jones, 34, who has a tattoo of his company's logo — a bumblebee making crepes — on his right hand.

The accelerator program also provides training, delivered by improv professionals from well-known Chicago troupe Second City, on how to deliver a pitch with confi-



Phil Velasquez/Chicago Tribune/TNS

Susan Fink, founder and brewer of Karma Kombucha, holds a bottle of her Ginger Orange kombucha beverage at the Good Food Festival's financing and innovation conference at the UIC Forum in Chicago.

dence and not freak out in front of big crowds.

Shortly before their presentations, Fink, 56, and Rachel Bernier-Green, 28, founder of Laine's Bake Shop, looked at one another in a moment of shared anxiety. Then they raised their hands in the air and frantically shook their fingers. Both women started laughing.

It was a Second City-taught method to stay loose.

"It's all about telling your own story. You know it better than anyone else," Fink said. "And it's not going to be perfect. Just be yourself."

Fink used to work for Kraft Foods, leading an innovation team in the research and development department, before being laid off in 2010. Before losing her job of 26 years, Fink tried kombucha, a fermented tea, and was impressed with how it helped her stay healthy as she trained for a triathlon.

Fink began brewing kombucha in her suburban Chicago home, trying to improve upon the taste. When she lost her job at Kraft, she had a decision to make.

"Do I want to go paycheck or do I want to go passion?" said Fink, a line she would later deliver

perfectly to the crowd of investors.

Fink and her wife, Michele Dziaba, another former Kraft employee, spent about \$500,000 of their own money, retirement savings mostly, to build a kombucha brewing facility just a few blocks from their home. Fink works seven days a week, producing about 750 gallons of certified organic Karma Kombucha per month, which is now sold in select groceries in the Chicago area.

Now, Fink's looking for about \$150,000 in debt funding to hire two people to help grow the business.

From 2003 to 2014, retail sales for natural and organic food have steadily risen to represent more than \$105 billion, according to SPINS, a Chicago-based market research firm that tracks data on the organic food industry.

From an investor perspective, it can pay to get in early on such companies, which have potential to be acquired by larger food companies that may not have the talent or desire internally to develop such products, said Mark Thomann, CEO of River West Brands and a member of the Good Food Festival's steering committee.

"You won't see PepsiCo

try to develop a kombucha," Thomann said. "It's much easier for them to go buy one."

Victor Friedberg, managing director of S2G Ventures, a Chicago-based venture capital firm focused on food and agriculture companies, said the opportunities for investment extend beyond the finished products.

"Our fundamental thesis is the consumer has changed and that's created a ripple effect up and down the food supply chain," Friedberg said. "It's all fertile ground for investors."

And that's good news, too, for relatively small food businesses trying to grow up.

Chicago-based Kitchfix, already is on the brink of selling grain-free waffles and paleo granola in stores throughout the country. Josh Katt, Kitchfix CEO, was at the conference, asking for about \$1 million in equity financing to help with national distribution.

What's the end game? Selling to a larger food company someday?

"I'm just in love with growing a company with values," Katt said. "Not to sound corny, I definitely want to make money. ... But I'm just trying to keep my head to ground and make good products."

Coming to you live from Facebook, a lure back to your TV

Lucas Shaw
Bloomberg

Moments before a recent episode of ABC's "Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D." aired on TV, series star Clark Gregg appeared live on a different network: Facebook.

Gregg, who plays agent Phil Coulson, answered fans' questions from the set of the Marvel show. The glare in his glasses, his gestures off camera and the impromptu responses conveyed an intimate, behind-the-scenes atmosphere. Other cast members made appearances and then Gregg returned to remind everyone about the most important detail: the show was about to start.

Since Facebook rolled out live video for celebrities last year, the service has become a popular tool for broadcasters like Walt Disney Co.'s ABC to entice TV viewers to watch shows when they air — and sit through the ads. That's a

"It's gratifying to see that people are absorbing this and engaging in real time."

JOSH WEINBERG, WHO OVERSEES DIGITAL STRATEGY AT SEVERAL DISCOVERY NETWORKS.

real challenge in the era of Netflix and Hulu, when audiences have more options than ever and live TV viewing is declining.

"Over the course of the season we started doing it more and more," Ben Blatt, ABC's head of digital marketing, said in an interview. "We want to continue to encourage and incentivize audiences around the idea of meeting up at a time and place for a shared experience."

ABC isn't alone. The Fox network used Facebook to bring viewers backstage with country singer Keith Urban on "American Idol," while Discovery Communications asked the stars of its nonfiction shows, from snake wranglers to survival experts, to answer fans'

questions. More than 2 million watched Captain Josh Harris answer questions before the season premiere of "Deadliest Catch." The actual episode drew 2.55 million viewers, according to Nielsen data.

Facebook first approached ABC about live

webcasting last year. The broadcast network tested the service with "Dancing With the Stars," according to Blatt. ABC has since used Facebook to live-stream conversations with contestants on "The Bachelor" and a producer of its new show "The Catch."

"It's gratifying to see that people are absorbing this and engaging in real time," said Josh Weinberg, who oversees digital strategy at several Discovery networks.

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