

## In the wake of a suicide

*G FORCE* | DR. NANCY RAPPAPORT

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### Document Text

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Dr. Nancy Rappaport was only 4 years old when her mother took her own life after losing a public child-custody battle in 1963. The youngest of six children in a high-profile family - her brother is Republican Party figure James Rappaport and her father is developer Jerome Rappaport Sr. - she asks why in her new book, "In Her Wake: A Child Psychiatrist Explores the Mystery of Her Mother's Suicide." From her office in Cambridge Health Alliance's Teen Health Center at Rindge & Latin School, she talked about what she discovered.

Q. What prompted you to share your story?

A. After my first daughter was born, I was like many parents: You look to the past to fortify yourself for the future. I began to think about who my mother was and what did it mean that she had died by suicide. I would write letters to my mother to tell her who I was . . . not knowing who she was.

Q. Then you found her unpublished, unknown novel.

A. Only about a third of people leave a suicide note, and here I had a 350-page novel of someone who killed herself, where the narrator kills herself at the end.

Q. Not everyone in your family was happy about the book.

A. My Dad was definitely apprehensive. My siblings felt protective, saying why resurrect a dead woman after 40 years? People talk about suicide as [causing] silent grief. It's very difficult to find words to talk about it. It was something I hadn't talked much about with my siblings.

Q. What about people outside your family?

A. I want readers to know I'm not going to glorify suicide. It's brutal. Suicide demands an explanation, and in a way, the answer dies with the person who killed themselves.

Q. As a clinician, what is your message?

A. For people thinking about suicide, I would say secrets can kill. When people are depressed, they often will hide it and they don't get treatment until they're really impaired. I also want to demystify the process of therapy and destigmatize it. When we go to talk to someone, perhaps because we had something overwhelming happen in life, that's not something you need to be ashamed of.

Q. What about families left behind?

A. Every 16 minutes someone [dies from] suicide in the United States, and every 16 minutes families are left devastated. How well the family does is contingent on multiple factors. One is how available the surviving parent is. [My father] was relentless in being present for us and being a stable force in our life.

Q. What have you learned from your mother?

A. Love lasts longer than death.

### [Illustration]

Caption: Dr. Nancy Rappaport lost her mother to suicide when she was 4 years old. When her own child was born, Rappaport says, "I began to think about who my mother was." Josh Reynolds for the Boston Globe

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**Abstract** (Document Summary)

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