

Haven Herald

Letter from the Executive Director

Given the extreme weather that we have had to endure this year we are all looking forward to a beautiful Fall season. For many of us vacations are over and work is calling us back to the office, or the school bells are starting to ring again. As you resume your duties be mindful that if you are working your way through grief many things may feel different and unfamiliar. Fall is a great time to get outside when you need a moment to yourself. Go for a long walk, rake the leaves, or simply sit on the porch with a good friend. If you are in grief, take some time this Fall to reflect and honor the loved ones that have died and recognize the new directions that your life is taking. As always, Haven volunteers are here to help walk with you through your grief. Wishing you a beautiful and gentle Fall season.



~ Frankie Smith

UNRESOLVED GRIEF

by Joni Greene

HAVEN volunteers are familiar with the journey people take as they move through the grieving process. The steps along the journey include accepting the loss, feeling the pain of never seeing the loved one again, adjusting to living without the deceased, allowing yourself to move on, and remembering the love you have for that person.

But suppose you had argued with your sister and hadn't talked to her before she was killed in an automobile accident, or your childhood relationship with your mother was not like the Walton Family's, or you had lived through a rocky marriage for many years. Reconciling with the person who has died is no longer an option. The resolution of grief under these or similar circumstances becomes complicated. The following are suggestions for dealing with complicated grief.



Claim your story. Talk to someone who will listen to the pain of being unable to tell your sister, "I am sorry," or the pain of never hearing your mother own up to her treatment of you, or hoping to find a letter of apology from your spouse. You may not need or want answers; you just need to deal with the hurt you feel inside.

Write letters to your loved one. Explain why you were angry at her and how difficult she has made your life because of her actions, or express your feelings of disappointment to your spouse. This is the time for you to express your feelings.

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UNRESOLVED GRIEF (continued from page 1)

In some cases, you may just have to leave some issues unresolved. Accept that the past is over. You can no longer resolve the issues, and carrying them around is harmful to you. If all through your life you have stuffed worries, disappointments, anger, and regrets in a sack, it becomes a burden that you are dragging around; it is time to go through the sack and remove things that are harmful to your well-being. For most of us, the sack will never be empty - make sure you can handle what is in it.

Going through the grieving process is not easy; it is hard work. You finally have a good day, only to wake up the next morning feeling awful. With each day, you have ups and downs. The nature of grief is that it takes time to resolve. Be patient with yourself.

Haven's volunteers are trained to listen to your expressions of pain, give you advice when you ask for it, and pick you up when you fall. You don't have to grieve alone.

COCOON

The words were on a poster -- I can't get them out of my mind:

YOU CAN FLY -- BUT THAT COCOON HAS GOT TO GO.

And I don't think it was talking about butterflies. But the risk of leaving the swaddling warmth of the cocoon. My cocoon. My status quo. My deadening security. To leave the known, no matter how confining it may be -- for an unknown, totally new life style -- Oh, the risk!

My cocoon changes, sometimes. But I know its restrictions. And it's scary to consider the awful implications of flight that I've always longed for. I want to fly...if I could just have the cocoon to come back to. Butterflies can't, I can't. Probably Butterflies don't even want to once they've tasted flight. It's the risk that makes me hesitate. The knowing I can't come back to the warm, undemanding status quo...about Butterflies...the cocoon has only two choices -- risk or die. What about me? If I refuse to risk do I, too, die inside still wrapped in the swaddling web?

-- Unknown



WHAT WORKED FOR ME
by Frankie Smith

My husband died of a heart attack almost twenty years ago. When I was asked to write about what helped me work through grief, I found it difficult to remember much about that first year. I realized my grief experience resembled childbirth. I know it was very painful, but the details are blurry.

About six months after my husband's death, I remember going to see a volunteer from my church. As we started to talk, she casually mentioned that it was the ninth anniversary of her husband's death. My immediate thought was, "I will never make it nine years hurting this bad!" Eight and a half years later, I was at Haven seeing a client on the

anniversary of my husband's death. Meeting with the volunteer from my church gave me hope to keep working my way through the grief and develop a new life.

Early in my struggle to make sense of a world turned upside down, a friend offered me some powerful words of wisdom. She said, nothing you can eat, drink, or buy will take away the pain. The only way out of the pain is to work through it. If you lean into the pain, in time it will ease. She was right. About the same time, I found the "Cocoon" meditation and realized that getting through my grief was up to me. There was no magic pill to take away the pain, and the only other choice was to stay in the cocoon and wither away. I put the cocoon on my refrigerator and on my mirror to remind me that to get through the grief, I had to lean into the pain and keep pushing forward.

Walking through grief is often three steps forward and two back. Some days it can feel like three steps back and none forward. Keep walking.

Over time, the pain lessened and I was able to see that a happy meaningful life was possible again. The last thing that sticks out in my mind is the response I received when I ask the widowed leader of the grief group I attended if she thought she would ever marry again. She said, "Only if I can find an eagle that wants to soar with me because I'm not going to carry anything along in my talons. I enjoy my life!" She was telling me that life can be good again if you work through your grief. Though it is hard work, in the end, you'll have the freedom to be happy again. You can remember your loved one but create a full, good life too.

ROLES IN GRIEF

by Ron McNally

For any married couple, family, group of friends, and so on, the different members may have both different and overlapping roles. When someone dies everything changes; there is no choice. Those remaining have to adapt, assume new roles, make do, get along as best they can, and over time accept a new reality. Taking on these new roles is not easy. Often there is considerable emotional pain associated with doing so, especially when it is for the first time.

There are many roles and many examples. Some are very broad and some very specific. In the following, I touch on a few examples.

I know of a family where one of the older sisters is the emotional rock, the comforter, the counselor, and the advisor for the family. If she dies, one (or more) of the other family members may take on some of her roles. Some of her roles may not be assumed and any needs associated with those roles will either not be met or will have to be satisfied some other way.

One of my friends was always the strong one in her family. Everyone leaned on her. They did not know it, but they did. When her husband died they could no longer lean on her. She was not strong enough to deal with her grief and their problems too.

An acquaintance was always the comforter in a group of

friends. When her mother died she went to them, but they did not reciprocate. She was the comforter and they would not or could not switch roles. She became very hurt and angry with them, and as she worked through her grief she ultimately found new friends.

A good friend of mine had never worried about her car. Her husband did that. One morning, a short time after he died, her car would not start. So she called AAA. They came, started the car, and said, "The battery is dead; do not stop the car until you get the battery replaced." She had no idea where or how to do that. She had not thought to ask AAA. Completely distraught, panicky, and frantic, she remembered her husband had once told her, "Take the car to Montgomery Ward for service." So she did.

My wife always dealt with plumbers and such, but not long after she died I had to do so when my hot water heater failed. I knew what to do, but I was not the one supposed to be doing it. I missed her and this was just one more reminder. It hurt.

When my eldest brother died I was both grieving and worrying that I was now the senior male member of a very large extended family. One of my brother's roles was now mine. While it was emotionally hard, I found the role itself to be easy. I only had to be what I had always been (only more so): a brother, uncle, confidant, and friend to my sisters and to my many nieces and nephews,

including great, great-great, and soon great-great-great nieces and nephews.

The grandmother of another family I know always prepared and hosted the holiday dinners. When her husband died she had a hard time, but with the help of her daughters (including daughters-in-law) she struggled to continue this tradition. It was important to her. When she died her daughters took turns hosting the dinners with help from their sisters.

Our friends and the people we love fulfill many roles in our life. There is no way in a short article to include them all. A few others include: caregiver, lover, morning coffee partner, social organizer, favorite sister, best friend, confidant, co-conspirator, and tennis partner.

The people we love can never be replaced; they live on in our memories. We or others may take on some of their roles, some we may have to learn to do without, but we must have love and friendship to be happy.



HOW HAVEN IS FUNDED

Haven is classified by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. It is funded mainly by donations from individuals in the community who wish to support our work and by those who donate in memory of a loved one. Donations are tax deductible. If you are interested in making a donation, please contact Haven at (703)941-7000 or at havenofnova@verizon.net



Fall Schedule

Six Week General Bereavement Support Group

Tuesday, September 28 - Tuesday, November 2
7:30 - 9:00 p. m.

Four Week Suicide Loss Support Group

Monday, November 1 - Monday, November 22
2:00 - 4:00 p. m.

Four Week Widow/ Widower Support Group

Saturday, October 2 - Saturday, October 23
2:00 - 4:00 p. m.

Space is limited, and reservations are required to attend all workshops and groups. Please contact Haven for more information.

Haven also offers individual support by phone and in person; please call to schedule an appointment. For immediate support without an appointment, a volunteer is available on a walk-in basis Monday through Friday between 10:30 am and 1:00 pm.

Contact Information

Haven of Northern Virginia

4606 Ravensworth Road
Annandale, Virginia 22003

Phone: (703)941-7000

Fax: (703)941-7003

E-mail: havenofnova@verizon.net

Hours of Operation

Monday through Friday

9:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

www.havenofnova.org

Messages may be left on our voicemail after hours

Haven of Northern Virginia, Inc.
4606 Ravensworth Road
Annandale, VA, 22003

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