



# Haven Herald



## Adjustments by Jill Bellacicco

Grief always calls us to make adjustments, but it also challenges us by how it feels. It is unknown territory and can surprise us with its overwhelming emotion. We may feel as if we are losing control and may have no point of reference for the loss we are experiencing. Grief cannot be compartmentalized or controlled. It just needs to happen. We need to feel it, and even though we may resist, the truth is, grief waits for us. Each person is unique in the time and place of his grief, but it is important to experience the pain and emotion that ultimately brings healing. Feelings matter and they need expression. Telling the story and letting tears flow can be very helpful. Emotions of anger, fear, guilt, and sadness are part of the natural process of grieving.

Regardless of the timeline, acknowledging the loss and finding a way to bring meaning to what we are experiencing are crucial to acceptance. This will be different for each individual, but it is important to value the time we take to grieve our loved one. If we nurture our grief, hopefully it will bring us to a place of appreciation and help us move forward.

## Letter from Executive Director

We arrive at fall and once again we face a change of season that can be both beautiful and sad. Letting go of the more carefree days of summer and heading into the time of year that brings cooler temperatures and shorter days can be difficult.

At Haven we go through a transition to a busier time as we prepare for our fall groups and programs. We spend time, evaluating the programs we offer and continue to look at different ways to support the needs of our community as we strive to utilize our resources more effectively. Like grief, it is an ongoing process, but worth the effort.

Haven is now in its 39th year! It is quite an accomplishment that we have remained an all-volunteer organization for almost forty years. Haven officially opened its doors on September 16, 1976 and our first client was a widow.

We continue our mission of providing caring support for the bereaved. Haven volunteers are compassionate listeners who are willing witnesses to the struggle and pain of loss. Grief is our most difficult lesson, but we don't have to go through it alone. My hope for Haven's future includes many more years of bereavement support to the local community.

Jill Bellacicco

## What Worked for Me by Donna Huber



When my husband died suddenly at the hospital, where we had rushed him by ambulance after he collapsed, the shock of it left me feeling numb the first few days. When the doctor came in to the waiting room and said, “I’m sorry we did everything we could,” I felt as if I was having an out of body experience and had just walked into a very bad horror movie. From that moment on, my life changed forever. And yet, there were no tears — it was all so surreal. The sudden shock traumatized me enough, and actually helped me keep swimming through an ocean of early grief.

When I arrived home from the hospital, my parents, my husband’s family, his co-workers, my co-workers and our neighbors were there throughout the day to comfort me and share the disbelief and sadness at the loss of a son, brother, son-in-law, friend, and colleague. I particularly remember a good friend crying that day - I can still see the tears falling down her face. I recall his boss at the funeral service giving the eulogy, tears falling, and, yet, I had no tears. Tears had always come easily for me. Whether I was happy, sad or mad - I cried at the drop of a hat.

But not when my husband died. I know now it was the “Novocain affect” that kept my tears from flowing. But, when the Novocain wore off, the tears flowed. But not in public, not at work, not with friends or family, but in the car, “crying,” as I’ve heard it referred to. My husband and I commuted to work together, and after he died, driving to and from work alone was unbearable. I turned to music for companionship.

I had seen the movie “Top Gun,” and somehow the songs from that film captured the raw emotion and pain I felt in those early, dark days. The words to two songs in particular helped me: “fly away to the danger zone” in *Danger Zone* by Kenny Loggins and “never took this road before, destination unknown” in *Destination Unknown* by Marietta. While I never enjoyed loud music, I turned the radio up as high as it would go to help numb the pain and heartache. It was in the car that I was able to release the tears, and crying helped me emotionally release the physical grief I felt, the chest pain, and helped me grab on to something tangible to fill the void. I was the driver now, and not the passenger, and I just kept moving with the music.

*There is sacredness in tears. They are not a mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition and of unspeakable love.*

*-Washington Irving*



## Sheryl Sandberg on Her Grief

by Mary Smith

Sheryl Sandberg, the Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, recently wrote a poignant letter to Facebook readers about her grief over the death of her husband, who died in an accident while exercising. She posted her letter on *sheloshim*, which, in the Jewish faith, marks the end of religious mourning for a spouse after thirty days.

I would like to simply highlight some of her observations and thoughts on grieving:

- Sandberg describes grief as “the void, the emptiness that fills your heart, your lungs, constricts your ability to think or even breathe.”
- One can give into grief or seek meaning. Although Sandberg has spent, and believes she will spend, much time in the void of grief, when she is able, she wants “to choose life and meaning.”
- Sandberg realizes that she never knew what to say to those grieving. She always tried to tell people “it would be okay.” She now believes that real empathy acknowledges when everything may not be okay.
- She liked to replace the question “how are you?” with “how are you today?” to those in grief.
- Sandberg is grateful to those with the courage to express their sympathy and share their experiences of grief with her. By not being silent, they help her feel more comfortable and less self-conscious.
- At the same time, she hopes people understand when she feels too vulnerable to accept sympathy and makes efforts not to share or discuss her grief.
- Going back to work was “a savior” and helped her feel “useful and connected.” But her connections had changed. Colleagues did not know what to say or if they should say anything. There was “an elephant in the room” feeling. Once she decided to be open about her grief, they “were able to kick him out of the room.”
- Sandberg feels she has learned gratitude for things she used to take for granted, such as hugs from her children and birthday celebrations.
- From Adam M. Grant\* she learned three things critical to resilience: her husband’s death was not her fault; she will not grieve in such a deep way forever; and her grief does not have to pervade every part of her life.

Sandberg describes poignantly and with courage her profound loss and struggles to cope. She also describes what has helped her: sympathy and sharing, reassurance, simple pleasures, work, her mother and children, friends, and the time to be silent and private.

\*A professor at the Wharton School of the University of PA and author of *Give and Take: A Revolutionary Approach to Success*.



### 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](mailto:havenofnova@verizon.net)

Haven of Northern Virginia, Inc.

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## **Fall Schedule**

Six-week General Bereavement Support Group  
Wednesday, September 23 – October 28, 2015  
7:30 – 9:00 p.m.

Six-week Widow/Widower Support Group  
Saturday, September 19 – October 24, 2015  
Time(s) to be determined

Suicide Loss Workshop  
Saturday, October 10, 2015  
10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Call or email Haven to register for the groups or workshop.

Drop-in Suicide Loss Support Group  
1st and 3rd Saturdays of each month  
11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

*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 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.*

### **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](mailto:havenofnova@verizon.net)

### **Hours of Operation**

Monday through Friday  
9:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.  
[www.havenofnova.org](http://www.havenofnova.org)

Messages may be left on our  
voicemail after hours