

# Haven Herald

DIRECTOR'S LETTER  
March 2011



When we experience the death of someone close we often look for a sign the deceased has made the transition and everything is well. Many people have dreams that are very real. Occasionally, they will feel the person's presence, think they have seen them or heard their voice.

I have often had clients start a session with, "I know you are going to think I'm crazy, but . . ." The truth is that I do not think they are crazy. I believe they truly had that experience. I have had similar experiences after the death of my husband, brother, mother-in-law and most recently my mother.

My mother died in the spring, her favorite time of year because she loved to watch the birds build their nests. She was particularly fond of robins and she had several poems she would recite about robins when I was young. About a week after returning home from her funeral, I was having my morning coffee and reading the newspaper when I heard a thump at the patio door. A few seconds later a robin appeared on the patio table, right outside the kitchen window where I was seated. She stared at me for two or three minutes as if she was trying to tell me something and then flew off. The next morning the same thing happened, and by the third morning I began to feel a connection to my mother. The robin appeared every morning between 8:00 and 8:15 for three weeks while she built her nest in the holly bush next to the patio. While she was raising her young she didn't appear on the table, but once the little ones were raised she began to appear again at the same time until I returned to Arkansas to visit my father.

My father also told me about a robin that landed at his feet and stayed even when he walked up the sidewalk.

I believe it is possible to have experiences that help us feel connected with the deceased. In fact, some studies say that fifty percent of the people who have lost loved ones have experienced some connection to those who died. So, if you have had that experience, trust yourself and know that you are not crazy – you are among the fifty percent of those who do experience their loved ones after death.

*Frankie Smith*

## I Heard Your Voice in the Wind Today

- Unknown

I heard your voice in the wind today  
and I turned to see your face;  
The warmth of the wind caressed me  
as I stood silently in place.

I felt your touch in the sun today  
as its warmth filled the sky;  
I closed my eyes for your embrace  
and my spirit soared high.

I saw your eyes in the window pane  
as I watched the falling rain;  
It seemed as each raindrop fell  
it quietly said your name.

I held you close in my heart today  
it made me feel complete;  
You may have died...but you are not gone  
you will always be a part of me.

As long as the sun shines...  
the wind blows...  
the rain falls...  
You will live on inside of me forever  
for that is all my heart knows.

## ICONS OF REMEMBRANCE

*For many centuries, grave markers have depicted symbolic forms representing loved ones and something of their essence. The weeping willow seen on Victorian headstones reflects both the soul rooted and bowed with grief and the skyward reach of every tree. Flowers speak of the fragility of life and, in bud or full bloom, the age of the person at life's end. Birds on the wing symbolize the soul in flight. For some, an icon of remembrance reflects the specific nature of the loved one, spurring memory and an experience that seems to reach across the boundary between life and death.*

*Haven volunteers share with you their icons of remembrance...*

Sitting in my backyard the day after my husband died, I was thinking about Bill and life without him. An eagle appeared just over the trees. I had never seen one in the area and had some doubts about the sighting. But the next morning the eagle appeared again, as if to provide confirmation. Why did this matter? If there were any symbol that represents Bill, it is the eagle—family and friends know why. I concluded this was a sign, a gift, a message from Bill that he was okay and that I would be okay. It has been 11 years and there have been no more eagle sightings. But that's okay. I saw the one that mattered.

- Ann Solomon

My brother-in-law had Parkinson's disease all the years he was married to my sister-in-law. In the beginning, you could hardly tell anything was wrong. As the years went by his disease progressed and he was in a wheelchair all day. My sister-in-law gave him sleigh bells to get her attention when he needed something. The night he died, as the EMT was taking him out of their home, my sister-in-law heard the bells and went to look. They were right where he left them, untouched.

-Sharlene Aukofer

Witnessing the death of my eighty-six year old mother at a Hospice facility was an enlightening experience for me. My mother's spirit worked hard to leave her body, but when she had moved on, there was a smile on her face and an incredible peacefulness in the room. After she had passed, I told her that I would remember her as a blue jay. I love birds and the strong willed beautiful jay reminded me of my mother. I spent a couple hours with my mom before her body was moved to the funeral home. I was getting ready to leave her room and I looked up and saw something remarkable. There was a single blue jay on the ground outside the sliding glass door of her room. The jay walked up to the edge of the door and stood there for several minutes. I knew it was a message from my mom. She was telling me all was well. Since then I have seen blue jays on many occasions in my life. They are always a source of comfort and remembrance of my wonderful mother.

- Jill Bellacicco

## WHAT WORKED FOR ME

By Joni Greene

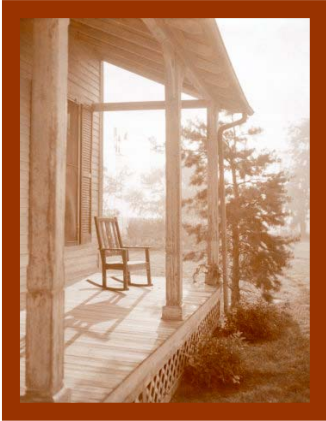
When my mother first died, my dad and I would take Sunday drives stopping at quaint churches, walking through old cemeteries or going to visit family and friends. On each of these outings, I would ask what my mother was like when she was young, but he always changed the subject. Why? Maybe it was too painful for him to talk about her. He had known her since she was 18 when they lived in a small mining town in western Pennsylvania and had been married 31 years when she died at the age of 54. So my quest to know my mother was up to me. My parents had a shoe box full of old pictures that I went through and put into an album. But pictures didn't really tell the whole story. What was I after? What was going to satisfy my curiosity?

After taking a course in "Finding My Roots," I had the tools to pursue what I was looking for, or so I thought. The birth and death certificates gave me her parents' and grandparents' names and the Ellis Island ship records, and the Nationalization Certificate confirmed when she came to America and that she became a citizen. Then I tracked her whereabouts throughout her life from census records. Now I had the facts, most of which I had heard from others.

The greatest piece of the puzzle came when I interviewed her only sibling, my aunt. My mother was the fourth of nine children, but seven of her siblings died before the age of one so she was always the baby of the family. She was spoiled and devilish until her mother died when she was twelve. After her sister married, she took care of her father for seven years until my father came into her life.

Over the years, I have pieced together information about my mother by talking to friends and relatives. I have come to realize that my curiosity stemmed from wanting to know who I am. Daughters learn from their mothers by watching them age. I was not that lucky. When my mother died, I was 24, single, and cared only about what I was doing. In later years, I have wished that I had talked to my mother about her life. My quest for answers would have been much easier.





## DISCOVERING MY MORTALITY

By Mary Smith

About twenty years ago, when my mother reached her mid-seventies, she decided that it was time for her and my father, who was eighty, to sell their large home of thirty-five years and move to a small, but roomy enough, apartment. While my mother was thrilled about downsizing, my father rebelled at the thought. He loved his home and all of his things, and he did not want to part with any of it. But my mother put her foot down. She was determined to move them to what she believed was an easier, more carefree place to be. Although they were in good health, they were getting older and less able to manage a large home. In the face of my mother's determination, my father bent to her wishes but did not acknowledge that moving was probably a good idea.

As soon as my parents decided to put their house on the market and buy a condo, it became apparent that they needed help from their five children. They were no longer as confident about their financial and legal decisions or as physically spry or as strong as they once were. They needed help to sell, buy and move. And while my parents were not hoarders by any means, they were savers. This was especially true of my father, who saved all sorts of things -- maps, brochures, conference name tags, restaurant matchbooks, and letters (by the box-load). We found his high school, college and medical school notes in the attic! He also saved most of his clothes. I do not believe he had given away any suits, ties, shirts or shoes in thirty or forty years.

Sorting through five bedrooms of furniture, a large basement, a huge attic, closets, shelves, and a packed garage took almost a year, with eleven people -- my siblings and their spouses -- sorting, recycling, packing and giving away. It was a huge undertaking, and my father did not make it any easier. He hated getting rid of his things and would often lug back in (with great difficulty) full plastic bags that my siblings and I had put on the curb for the trash truck. He would sit in his favorite chair and go through the bags, making sure we had not thrown away anything too precious.

It was an exhausting and emotional year. While I found my father's stubbornness about getting rid of things irksome, I also began to empathize with his view of things. Watching him struggle to carry heavy trash bags and to protest to no avail about what we were tossing out, I came to realize that we were asking him not just to get rid of his things but to toss away pieces of his life. He seemed to feel that he was losing control and being marginalized. He thought we were saying that his belongings and his life were no longer important. I saw how sad my father was, and I became sad too. It was clear that my parents were not the vibrant, capable people they once were. They were needy and fragile. They were growing old and would not live forever. And I began to see that I would grow old too. It was my first glimpse of my parents' mortality and my own. I would not live forever. Life suddenly felt too short and too sad. In a panic, I started going through my own possessions and getting rid of them. I thought, "I'm only going to grow old and die, so what do I need with these things?"

As it happened, my parents moved into their lovely new apartment, taking only their favorite furnishings and finding the perfect placement for everything. The apartment was bright and beautiful and just the right size. We all stood back and admired our work. Even my father loved it. With the joy of the new apartment came my parents' new life with new neighbors and the excitement of entertaining to show off their new place. Watching them enjoy a happy new life, I realized I still had plenty of living of my own to do.

My father died ten years after the move, and I mourned him deeply. Once again, I focused on my own mortality, but this time around, I was more comfortable with the idea. I have come to realize that I will die someday, but I first have to live, just as my father did and just as my mother is still doing.



### 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)



Spring Schedule

**Widow/Widower Support Group**

**Saturday, March 19 - Saturday, April 30**  
**(This group will not meet Easter weekend)**  
**2:00 - 3:30 p.m.**

**Suicide Support Group**

**Wednesday, March 30 - Wednesday, May 4**  
**7:30 - 9:00 p.m.**

**General Bereavement Support Group**

**Monday, March 14 - Monday, April 18**  
**7:30 - 9:00 p.m.**

**Call or email Haven to register for all groups.**

*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

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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

Haven of Northern Virginia, Inc.

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