



Haven Herald



“Even two years after the accident, I continue to experience surprises. Hard ones, like the ambushes of grief when I’m just going along and the full weight of our loss over takes me...

And beautiful surprises like the two blue jays that sometimes swoop down to our feeder, to join the flock of titmice and cardinals and downy woodpeckers...”

From *Rare Bird: A Memoir of Loss and Love*
by Anna Whiston-Donaldson

Letter from the Executive Director

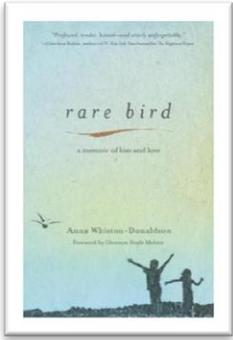
Spring brings renewal. It is a time when we are reminded of the wonder of life and all its possibilities. It is a time to come outdoors and enjoy the fact that nature does not disappoint us in its predictability.

Haven is busy in the spring, as we prepare for our spring support groups and plan for our training class for new volunteers. We also thank our volunteers during Volunteer Appreciation Week with a special luncheon. This year we will have the pleasure of welcoming Anna Whiston-Donaldson as our guest speaker. Anna, suddenly and tragically, lost her twelve year old son, Jack, and wrote a book about her experience called *Rare Bird: A Memoir of Loss and Love*. Anna’s beautiful book tells the story of her journey of loss, grief and hope in the face of unbearable pain and sadness. We are grateful that Anna will be sharing her story with us.

In this issue of the newsletter, we will address the shocking and overwhelming sadness of a sudden loss. Many people experience this type of loss and find coping very difficult. A sudden loss brings to reality the fact that life can change in an instant and nothing is for certain. Sudden loss takes away the sense of predictability and changes us, but it also teaches us to appreciate life in a different way. Taking time to work through the shock of the loss as well as its profound significance is critical to acknowledgement and healing.

Jill Bellacicco

Rare Bird: A Memoir of Loss and Love
by Anna Whiston-Donaldson



This is definitely not a “feel good” book, but the death of a child never makes anyone feel good. The author’s 12-year-old son, Jack, was killed suddenly in a tragic accident, which occurred as a result of a torrential rainstorm in September 2011. The book was written specifically as a memoir of her early grief. The accident is still fresh in her mind two years after Jack’s death.

She keeps Jack alive in memory, as she recalls every detail of that fateful day. The way she describes Jack endears him to the reader.

The author tries to cope with the loss and bares her heart and soul in telling that awful day and sharing how she felt, how she coped, and mostly, how she continues to keep him alive in her heart.

By joining a support group of other mothers who have lost children, she has a community of others “who have been there.”

As I read, and cried, through the book, her justifiable anger became apparent and her tears palpable. She continually blames herself and cries out to God for answers. But her strong faith sustains her, and she eventually is able to find moments of peace and grace. I, personally, loved this book and will treasure it always.

Reviewed by Marianne Hanton

What Worked for Me
by Joy Rowley

My 19-year-old son, Kyle, was killed by a texting driver in a horrific accident in May 2011. It is hard to believe it will soon be four years that he is gone. I think of him every day and still feel him very close to me.

As his death was such a shock to my system, I sought solace in many ways. One of them was writing. In May 2013, I took a memoir writing class at the Fairfax Public Library. Here is what I wrote at that time, as the forward to a larger story about my life with Kyle:

“It is almost two years since Kyle was killed that I sit down to write this story. Many friends gave me books after Kyle’s death. At the time, I was numb from all that was happening around me. Some books were helpful, some just made me want to scream at the author “do you think I can think about 100 things to do when I’m in pain?””

The question above was referring to an author’s premise to take a walk, pray, see a friend, etc. The only thing I could think was that the author never went through what I did. I felt so alone. Everything in life was meaningless; it was like lying down on a bed in the middle of my life and watching the world go about its normal activities. Life was surreal, and I existed in a cloudy haze. The words that came out of my mouth belonged to someone else, someone I used to be — that person was dead. The one who was alive was a zombie, half alive. My happy family no longer existed.

“Babies must crawl before they can walk. In the last two years, the process of crawling and walking back to life has taken place. I have learned to respect the time I have left on this earth, enjoying the simple pursuits of baking, making dinner, doing laundry, caring for my teenage daughter, volunteering and working less. When I tried to involve my husband in some of the things I was doing to heal, I soon realized that his healing was taking place in a completely different way. So I have found things that help me. Writing these words down is one of them.”

These days, I live a simpler life. I have learned to meditate, which has been a wonderful gift for my mind. I practice yoga and stay home much more. I received a certification in life coaching and volunteer at Haven. I am a more compassionate person and am less driven.

Sudden Loss

by Donna Huber



When a loved one or someone we know dies unexpectedly, regardless of the circumstances, their sudden death comes as a shock. Because sudden loss comes without warning, it leaves us feeling as if we have been emotionally ambushed. The event delivers an intense blow to the mind and body, and we are forced to deal with the fallout the best way we can. Where once we may have felt in control of our world, things are now very much out-of-control. Upon learning the person has died, we may be unable to comprehend that our loved one or the individual we knew is no longer physically with us. At first, we may be in denial, and angry, not wanting to face the fact that we have suffered a loss. We may feel numb, and/or we may feel as if we are going crazy, all regularly reported responses.

The person who died may be a parent, sibling, child, spouse, or friend, and we are left to pick up the pieces after the world, as we knew it, has been changed forever. There is a whirlwind of emotions, and we may feel overwhelmed, helpless, confused, and traumatized. The feeling of being sucked into a black hole is sometimes the description people use. Like a bad movie, everything is surreal, in slow motion and/or things are chaotic and upside-down, while we struggle to make sense of the unthinkable. Our surroundings close in on us, and we find ourselves living minute-to-minute, hour-to-hour, day-to-day. Where we go from that moment in time is a journey through grief.

When we lose someone suddenly, we question why it happened — one of the hardest things for us to grapple with — to make sense of the untimely death. We do not have the chance to say good-bye. Our relationship to the deceased will drive our path to recovery. As a survivor of sudden loss, we will experience many more stages and rages that will need to be worked through than the five stages of grief: shock, denial, anger, depression, and acceptance. Readjustment may take years and one may never get over the loss completely. As a society, we are not equipped to deal with loss nor are we taught how to handle death, or helping those around us who are grieving. Furthermore, there are cultural differences in coping with death. Know that your recovery is your recovery and grief's time machine is unique to every individual. Acknowledgement, rather than acceptance, is considered a better way to frame the fact we have lost someone so quickly.

Depending on the nature of the death caused by an accident, traumatic incident, a natural disaster, a terrorist attack, a suicide, or unexpected illness, grief will take you to places you could never have imagined. The experience of sudden loss, the recovery process that follows, can provide a basis for growing — expanding as a human being in ways we never thought possible. We may have lost the physical person, but we have not lost the relationship.

Haven has a Speakers Bureau that is available for presentations about Haven's work and topics related to grief and the different types of losses. One of our Speaker's Bureau members would be happy to talk to your group or organization. Please contact Haven at 703-941-7000 to request a speaker.



Haven of Northern Virginia, Inc.

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Annandale, Virginia 22003

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Spring Schedule

Six-week General Bereavement Support Group
Wednesday, April 15 – May 20, 2015
7:30 – 9:00 p.m.

Six-week Suicide Loss Support Group
Tuesday, April 14 – May 19, 2015
7:30 – 9:00 p.m.

Six-week Widow/Widower Support Group
Saturday, April 11 – May 16, 2015
Time(s) to be determined

Call or email Haven to register for the groups.

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
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