

Haven Herald



The Gift of Remembering by Mary Smith

"If you know someone who has lost a child, and you're afraid to mention them because you think you might make them sad by reminding them that they died--you're not reminding them. They didn't forget they died. What you're reminding them of is that you remembered that they lived, and that is a great gift." ~Elizabeth Edwards

When I was in my twenties, a dear friend was killed in a car crash late one night. Susan's death was my first experience of losing someone my age and of losing someone suddenly. I felt true shock and grief for the first time. But as stunned and sad as I was, her father and mother were, of course, hit hardest. I was particularly concerned for her mother, who initially appeared almost catatonic with grief. For two or three years after Susan died, I checked in with her mother, but after I married and became a mother myself, I slowly let my relationship with her drift away.

But one evening ten or more years after Susan had died, I ran into her mother at a charity event. I was happy to see her and immediately told her that I often thought of Susan. She began to cry and said, "No one ever mentions Susan. Thank you for mentioning her. It's such a gift." I will never forget her words, and I will always be pleased that I did not shy away from speaking of Susan. I learned a valuable lesson – not to be afraid of mentioning a loved one who has died. Remembering can be a gift.

Letter from the Executive Director

Summer is the season of rest and renewal. We slow down and linger with the hope of a less hectic pace, and we take time to visit with family and friends.

Haven is no different. We offer a workshop in summer and plan for the year ahead, but things are definitely quieter. Many of our volunteers take vacations.

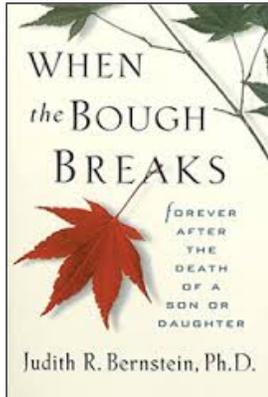
Family traditions can be very special, but the loss of a loved one can change how we feel about the memories of these times. This is painfully true when the loss is a child. Regardless of the age of the child when he or she died, as parents, we never expect to outlive our children. Summer, with its emphasis on family gatherings and vacation time, can be especially hard to deal with when mourning the loss of a child. In this issue of the newsletter, we focus on this unique and heartbreaking loss.

We hope those who are suffering the death of a child will find moments of rest and reflection this summer, as you work through this difficult time.

Jill Bellacicco

When the Bough Breaks – Forever After the Death of a Son or Daughter

by Judith R. Bernstein, Ph.D.



Judith Bernstein is a practicing psychologist and her husband, Don, is a professor of psychology. Their son, Steven, was diagnosed with cancer at age 25 and died sixteen months later. The idea for this book grew from that loss. The premise of their research, which reflects their own experience, is that parents do not “recover” from the loss of a child, but instead adapt. Their “values, attitudes, perceptions, relationships, and beliefs” change. The book is not intended as a “how to grieve” manual, nor is it an academic treatise heavy with statistics and data. Instead it offers information, insight and understanding for grieving parents.

To study the long-term effects of losing a child, the researchers interviewed 55 parents, who had lost children ranging in age from three to forty-nine. The losses were at least five years prior to the interviews. They decided that “the only way we would gain any knowledge of the moonscape of mourning was to ask those who had traveled to that barren, inhospitable wasteland.” The interviews were unstructured, allowing the parents to tell their stories in their own words, from their individual and varied perspectives.

The book is organized into categories, including factors that shape mourning—the nature of the death, differences in gender styles of mourning, family and social relationships, religion and spirituality. The author is clear that the research sample size is small and does not represent every aspect and variation of parental grief. However, the book does cover a broad and representative range of circumstances, personalities and coping styles.

I would recommend *When the Bough Breaks* to parents who have lost a child, and also to those who care about them.

Reviewed by
Linda Torezan

What Worked for Me

by Sharlene Aukofer

The little tombstone reads July 24, 1998, a single date. Lying there is a little one who never had a chance. We lost our fifth grandchild when my daughter-in-law was five months pregnant. We knew early that the baby had serious problems.

My son and his wife live near Atlanta, Georgia, so we had to support them long distance. Even knowing of the problems, we still had hope that everything would turn out okay. When the phone call came that we had lost the baby, there were lots of tears, decisions and concern about how to proceed.

Joe and Joanne decided to bring the baby up to Northern Virginia for burial. I felt helpless as they planned the event for their baby with the funeral director. The best thing for me to do was to get the family, including my other son, two



daughters and their families, involved and to take pictures at the graveside service. My family also bought the headstone.

As a mother and grandmother, I had two roles to fill. I ached for my son and his wife, but my heart also ached as a grandmother. I tried to console them with verses out of the Bible. Afterwards, I did research on losing a prenatal child, went to seminars and learned that it didn’t matter at what age the child is, it’s a loss.

I would go to the cemetery to take care of the grave and plant crocuses around the stone and wonder what the baby would have been like had it lived. When Aliya, their second child, was born, I went to the cemetery to tell her she had a sister.

When asked how many grandchildren I have, I always count the little one, Baby A.

How to Survive the Death of Your Child

The death of a child is a devastating loss. You mourn the loss of his or her life, potential and future. Your life is forever changed. But it's not over. You can get through the grief and come out the other side. Here are some tips that can help:

Embrace all of your feelings and emotions. You are entitled to whatever feelings come up. Give yourself permission to feel.

Throw out the timetable. There is no timetable to your grieving process.

Don't worry about numbness. The state of numbness could pass quickly or linger. It's the body's way of offering protection from overwhelming emotions.

Take time off from work...or not. For some, the thought of returning to work is unbearable; others throw themselves into their work. Find out your employer's bereavement policy before you make your decision.

Turn to your faith if you can. If you find comfort in the beliefs and rituals of your faith, turn to them now to aid in your recovery. If the loss of your child damages your religious beliefs, know that in time you may find you're able to return to faith.

Delay decision-making. Wait at least a year before making any major decisions, such as selling your house or divorcing a partner. Wait until the fog has lifted, and you can clearly see the options available to you.

Trust in time. The phrase "Time heals all wounds" may sound like a meaningless cliché, but the truth is that you will recover from this loss in time. Initially, memories will hurt, even the good ones, but at some point that will begin to change and you'll come to cherish those memories.

Revised by Mary Smith
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Honoring Your Child's Memory:

- Host a memorial gathering
- Set up a web page
- Create a scrapbook
- Set up a scholarship
- Make a memorial donation
- Light a candle
- Celebrate birthdays if it feels right

Getting Outside Help:

- Talk to a therapist
- Join a bereavement group
- Find an online forum



Now I Know

**I never knew, when you lost your child,
What you were going through.
I wasn't there, I stayed away,
I just deserted you.**

**I didn't know the words to say,
I didn't know the things to do,
I think your pain so frightened me,
I didn't know how to comfort you.**

**And then one day my child died.
You were the first one there.
You quietly stayed by my side, listened,
And held me as I cried,
You didn't leave, you didn't go,
The lesson learned is ... Now I know.**

by Alice Kerr
of Lower Bucks County, PA
Member of The Compassionate Friends



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

Haven of Northern Virginia, Inc.

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Summer Schedule

“Journey through Grief” Workshop
Saturday, July 26, 2014
2:00 - 4:00 p.m.
Call for reservation for the 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

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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