

# Haven Herald



“Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”  
by Robert Frost

Whose woods these are I think I know.  
His house is in the village, though;  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound's the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.

## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Winter is my favorite season. I was born in winter, and I can think of nothing better than a brisk walk on a cold winter day or watching the winter birds at my backyard feeder. I enjoy drinking hot tea by the fire, reading books, or gazing at the outline of trees against the winter sky. Winter brings the holidays and the promise and anticipation of a new year, but winter can be a complicated season for those grieving a loved one. The shorter days, colder temperatures, and more time indoors offer a metaphor for the dark mood of grief. It can be difficult to appreciate the gifts of winter, but they are there. In Robert Frost's simple yet enduring words from his poem *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, we are reminded of the simple beauty of a winter evening in the woods. We are asked to pause in the silence and to take our time. Taking time to be with our grief is an important part of healing. We will go on, but the journey will continue at its own pace. Winter gives us time to be patient with our grief. Slowly and thoughtfully we will work our way through. So when the snow is softly falling or a day is especially cold, we can take pause and be grateful for a season that gives us the gift of time and reflection.

Jill Bellacicco

Happy Holidays!

## What Worked for Me

By Marguerite O'Connor

I vividly remember what happened to me in the fall, six months after my husband John died. A friend had invited me to spend the weekend with her at her vacation condo in Ocean City. We left together in her car, taking our time and stopping at various shopping centers along the way. We made a stop at a Christmas store, and when we walked in, Christmas was everywhere, and the music was wonderful. All of a sudden, I began to sob and carry on with tears running down my face. I thought I would die on the spot. It hit me that I would have to live through Christmas without my spouse. How was I ever going to get through it with the music and fun and good cheer when my chest was about to burst from pain? I left the store to pull myself together. It was a few years before I could enter another Christmas store.

I realized that I would have to endure the holidays by myself without my husband. We had always celebrated a nice Christmas and had enjoyed the

preparations too. My only solution was to avoid going to another Christmas store. I don't think I did much shopping that year because I was so blue. I remember that my daughter Eileen came home from Richmond and asked where my tree was. I told her to forget the tree, that I was in no mood to put it up that year. She said that she needed a tree. She said we both needed a tree. She went downstairs and dug it out and decorated it. We went to my daughter Gail's house on Christmas Eve and Day, and being there with my grandkids was great. In hindsight, Eileen was right. We somehow have to keep moving along, even though doing so is difficult in the beginning. Time helps everything; that is one thing I have discovered. I can still cry about it all, though, if I allow myself to.

I always spend Christmas with my children now, and that helps me enormously.

*Marguerite O'Connor is a former Haven client.*

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## Holiday Memories

This Thanksgiving I will prepare dinner without my mother by my side. She died in August at the age of 94. Because I will miss her beyond measure, I would like to skip the holiday. But my children want the usual Thanksgiving preparations, so I will make them happen, and I will be grateful for the hundreds of chores my mother did for me that she probably didn't want to do. She always rose to the occasion of being my mother. I want to rise to the occasion too, so I will prepare her gravy and sweet potato casserole and make the corn pudding she loved. I will hug my children tightly and remember all the hugs my mother and I shared.

Mary Smith



Sometimes a Christmas memory that has negative connotations can be a comfort after a loss. My mother, who passed away over three years ago, altered my childhood view of the Christmas tree by insisting on having an aluminum tree instead of the traditional fresh tree. The tree I remember was adorned with gold and green balls and illuminated by a color wheel. This modern take on the tree was a practical decision for my mom, no mess or shedding needles. I never liked it, but now when I see one of those vintage aluminum trees, I smile and remember my wonderful mother.

Jill Bellacicco



My wife Sarah was to me the original Christmas girl. She loved Christmas music and everything else about Christmas. One of her very most favorite parts of Christmas was decorating the tree. The whole bit on the tree was that she got to decorate it. When my daughter Anne was old enough, both of them got to decorate it. Leaving the tree decorating to them was one of my best gifts to her. Watching them decorating the tree, with a fire in the fireplace, is one of my happy memories.

Ron McNally

## When the Clock Strikes Midnight: The Art of Letting Go

By Wilma Holland



When the clock in Times Square strikes midnight and the past year is no more and the crowd goes wild to usher in the New Year, we are acknowledging the importance of “letting go.” People may not connect it with “grief work,” but it is just one of the “letting go” traditions. The basic skill for coping with life’s changes is the art of letting go.

Life has a way of throwing us curves. No matter how well we think we have mastered the art of letting go or how much we think we understand the process, as long as we live, it will be our ultimate challenge. No one ever graduates from “Loss College.”

The ability to let go is the ability to heal when we have been forced into a change we don’t want and a situation that is beyond our control. It is the ability to forgive and move on. It is the ability to withstand the emotional pain of change or losing something or someone that is important to us. It is the ability to pick up the pieces and go on when our inner being has been deeply shaken.

One of the greatest lessons we can teach our children is how to let go ... how to deal with simple losses and endings in their lives, how to maintain their faith and a sense of hope in the midst of crises. This is the “college” that prepares them for the “biggies” and ultimately, death.

Loss is uniquely personal because it is related to our individual meanings. Until I can understand what someone means to another person, I cannot understand the reaction to the loss.

Grief is the clearing process for loss. It provides closure. This is the time when every aspect of our relationship with the loss, our attachment, our feelings, our thoughts, and our past, present and future are examined and reexamined. This is why talking, and talking, and talking some more help us to place the loss in a new perspective and integrate it into our lives. This is why support groups provide the safe environment that is so helpful. The outer structures of our lives can change in an instant, but the inner reorganization takes time and the timing cannot be rushed.

What it takes to recover is a willingness to hope, a desire to go on with life, a willingness to let go of the pain, and a desire to heal and be whole again. It means mentally and emotionally acknowledging that it is over. It means giving in to the emptiness and stopping the struggle to escape it.

Letting go is the end result of the whole process of grief. Sometimes it happens as a clean cut. More often, it is a gradual back-and-forth, up-and-down process. Sometimes we are not even sure how or when it happened. In essence, we come to an acceptance ... or an acceptance of nonacceptance.

The task is finished when our feelings of loss do not control us; when we can think of the loss without pain; when we have integrated the loss into our lives and are able to move on.

We need to have faith in the healing process. We need to have faith in our ability to heal. We need to have the courage to let go gracefully.

*Wilma Holland was a volunteer with many talents. In 1976 she helped write our training manual and educated many potential volunteers. After an extended absence to raise her children, she returned to become newsletter editor and later Haven’s director. After moving to Warrenton, she started grief support groups at Fauquier Hospice. Wilma died in January 2006. Haven lost a friend, a supporter and a valuable volunteer. This article has been modified from the original published in the January 1994 newsletter.*



### 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)

## WINTER SCHEDULE

### Community Presentation

*Coping with the Holidays after a Death of a Loved One*

**Thursday, December 8, 2011**

Space is limited, and reservations are required.

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

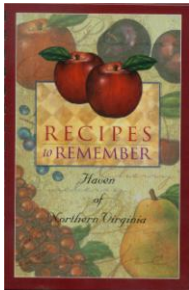
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### Hours of Operation

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

Messages may be left on our  
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