

Haven Herald



Marking Holidays by Helen Fitzgerald

When a loved one has died, holidays inevitably bring fresh memories and a re-experience of the pain of grief. The void appears again. If the death is recent, you might feel numb much of this holiday season, but next year's holidays may send a new wave of grief your way.

It may help you to keep the following in mind:

- *Don't be surprised at the intensity of your grief. Feelings of anger, panic, depression, despair, guilt or regrets, fearfulness, loneliness, as well as physical symptoms feel stronger during this time. This is normal. It is not a setback; it is how grief is.
- *Help yourself by gaining an understanding of the grieving process. Read a book on grief, attend a lecture or join a support group.
- *Remember what has helped you earlier in your grieving - these techniques will help you again.
- *Tell important people in your life that this is a difficult season and let them know what they can do to help. Don't expect people to remember or to know what to do.
- *Don't be surprised if others struggle, too, or if you see others hesitate to speak of the person who died. They are probably afraid they will make you feel sad, and are unsure whether you want to talk about it.

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Letter from Executive Director

The winter brings shorter days and more time indoors, but it also brings the holiday season. This can be a challenging time whether you are struggling with a recent loss or the memories of loved ones who died years ago. In November, Haven offered a program called "Coping with the Holidays" to address these very issues. We may feel sadness and longing for our loved ones even more during the holidays. Winter tends to be a season of emotion and contrast, which can add to the difficulty of dealing with a loss.

Losing a loved one during the holidays can also complicate a loss, especially if the holidays were valued and celebrated throughout that person's lifetime. Reconciling the loss with the outward joy of the season seems contradictory. Loss and celebrations don't line up well and can make things more confusing and painful. Talking, writing, a change in routine or location can help, but the truth is the holiday will hold a different significance after a loss. It will never be as it was and adjusting to a new reality will take time and reflection. It is normal to resist the change for a while but, eventually, most people adjust.

The struggle of a loss during the holidays or the sadness of missing those we have lost can be hard to cope with. Each situation is unique, and it helps to do only what feels comfortable and appropriate for you. The feelings will be there, so try to accept them and do the best you can; that is enough.

-- Jill Bellacicco



Marking Holidays (Continued)

As unpredictable as grief is, one can expect that the holidays will cause a huge wave of emotion. These events, once anticipated with joyous pleasure, are now often painful reminders that your loved one is not here to celebrate with you. The good news is that you can help yourself.

Something to keep in mind as this holiday season approaches: for many, the anticipation of a holiday is worse than the actual day. Make a plan for the holiday that is approaching. If it is difficult to decide what you want to do, think about what you don't want to do. Discuss your plan with your family. Don't fool yourself into thinking you can ignore the holiday in hopes it will go away. Everywhere you look, you will probably be reminded that this is a holiday season. Stores will be decorated; there will be holiday ads in the newspaper and on TV. People will greet you with a "happy" or a "merry" something or another. And it is not a happy or merry time for you.

Holidays are high stressors under any circumstances. If you are feeling overwhelmed, find a professional you can talk to, or have a family meeting to alter plans. You may be pleasantly surprised that the holidays turn out to be very special in spite of your concerns.

Reprinted from *Haven Herald* dated November/December 2003

An Eskimo Proverb

"Perhaps they are not stars, but rather openings in heaven where the love of our lost ones pours through and shines down upon us to let us know they are happy."

What Worked for Me

by Joni Greene

Nothing is going to change the fact that my dad died December twentieth and was buried on Christmas Eve. He died during the most talked about and joyous season of the year. I remember that the funeral procession drove fifty miles an hour instead of the usual forty because he had to be buried before noon. The church ladies had to put out the poinsettias, the grave diggers had to get home to their families and the priest had to prepare for midnight Mass. My father was just another body. I wanted to yell, "Hold it, that's my dad!"

So how do you work through that? You do not. You just hope that as time passes the pain will subside. The first couple of times I went to midnight Mass, I cried through the whole service. After twenty-one years I still shed a few tears on that night.



I usually do not remember the dates that one of my loved ones died. The anniversary will come and go before I realize it. But it is hard to forget the day I buried my father. I have thought, momentarily, that he died during Christmas week because he did not like Christmas. Rarely did he buy my mother or me a gift. He grew up without a mother and was the son of a farmer. Christmas was just another day that he had to feed and milk the cows.

On the other hand, my mother, who died years before he, loved Christmas and would con my dad into helping her with the decorations. The looks he gave her were priceless. So, to honor them, I put up a tree, place her ornaments on it and think about what it was like when we were family, my mother, my father and me.

Christmas Past and Present

by Kathleen Sebek – 1985



You knew you would die too young
 You tried to prepare us
 But you were so brave, so beautiful, so full of life
 We refused to believe you
 And in the end you waited for us to accept the loss of you
 Before letting go
 Your final words "I love you"

You suffered unspeakable physical and emotional pain
 So we thought the loss of you might be a relief
 Of course it wasn't
 Grief was a new and bitter experience
 We weren't prepared for the depth of this despair
 Who could accept
 The finality of you

You loved Christmas and you left us just days before
 The brightly lighted decorations
 Burned us with their intensity
 Every rendition of "Silent Night" was a reminder of your funeral
 For you had planned even that detail
 How could we be such cowards
 In the face of your courage

Years later we keep you close in our memories, particularly at Christmas
 With all of its joyful and sorrowful reminders
 Your life was a gift of great caring and loving
 You taught us about living and about dying; about faith
 Yes, sometimes the grief of your loss is overpowering
 And sometimes, the strains of "Silent Night" bring tears
 But we imagine you at the great celebration
 Where "all is calm, all is bright"

In memory of Kenda Beth Blackford, 12/15/47 - 12/21/80

Some suggestions for remembering your loved ones:

- * Light a "memory candle." Try to commemorate the person's life, not death.
- * Buy a live Christmas tree and afterwards plant it outside in memory of the person.
- * Give the money you would have spent on gifts for your loved one to a needy family or favorite charity.
- * Hang the person's Christmas stocking and suggest each family member put a note inside.



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.

4606 Ravensworth Road

Annandale, Virginia 22003

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Winter Schedule

Winter Workshop
“Journey through Grief”
Saturday, January 30, 2016
Snow date: Saturday, February 6, 2016
2:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Please call or email to register 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