

# Haven Herald



"The discipline of creation, be it to paint, compose, write, is an effort toward wholeness" - Madeleine L'Engle

## Creative Expression When Grieving

by Sarah Raison

One of the questions people often ask themselves while grieving the death of someone they love is: "What can I do to feel better?" There are many answers to this, but one thing that can help is using some form of creative expression to release emotions at a time when we are so full of such strong feelings.

Developing a regular creative practice can be a helpful, healing way through loss. Choose an activity you love, are curious about, have done in the past or always wanted to try, and lose yourself in the healing power of creativity. This might be:

- photography
- poetry
- painting or drawing
- crafting
- dance or yoga
- playing or writing music
- writing
- sewing, knitting or quilting
- sculpting
- decorating or gardening

Art therapy is often used with grieving children to help them express themselves. Children may not have the cognitive ability or vocabulary to express their grief clearly. But these techniques can be helpful for adults too. Using art as a means of expression can allow people in grief to freely tell what's in their heart and mind.

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## Letter from the Executive Director

The fall brings change as the pace of life picks up, and, at Haven, we are no different as we prepare for our training class and the fall support groups.

Unfortunately, the intense emotion that a loss brings cannot be avoided no matter how busy we are or regardless of the season. Healing from a loss takes time and finding creative outlets or purposeful opportunities for expression can help us cope. There are many ways to explore this idea be it writing, drawing, playing music or working on a special project that brings relevance to what was important and meaningful to our loved ones. Grief work is both emotional and instrumental, so in finding creative ways to cope, or even relating to art, music or literature that specifically connects to the emotions of grief might be helpful. Hopefully, we find a sense of direction that eventually brings some relief to our suffering. The creative world can be a place of healing that allows us a beautiful space to be within our sadness and despair. It may also be a window of hope and grace if it helps fill the emptiness we are feeling inside.

Jill Bellacicco



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"Grief needs an outlet. Creativity offers one."  
-Hope Edelman (author of *Motherless Daughters*)

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## What Worked For Me Was To Stay Busy!

by A Haven Volunteer

The hardest thing I ever did in my life was to leave the casket of my first-born son Donald Jr., my pride and joy, in the cemetery.

For many weeks, even months, my heart screamed to slip through the hole I could feel in my chest, my soul stumbled aimlessly around in limbo and my brain struggled against giving in to total devastation while knowing there really was nothing anyone could do about death except to carry on.

The etiquette of Emily Post, having been ingrained in me since childhood, sent a little pitchfork prick to alert me that I must not succumb to the luxury of total oblivion yet. And so it became my first labor of love to honor my child by letting all those wonderful friends know how very much their flowers, cards, donations, food and continuing support helped get us through the most horrible week of our lives. It took a while but I mailed almost 100 notes and made 500 of Donald's favorite cookies to fill the empty dishes for return to their owners.

I unconsciously looked for ways to keep Donald close, even with the daily management of our lives interrupting precious thoughts. Framed photos went to his best friends. I needed a beautiful container to store all of the cards and other funeral memorabilia. I found a large silver chest in an antique shop and a trip to the National Gallery of Art produced a wonderful print to cut up and place on the lid before refinishing with 14 coats of decoupage. Velvet glued to the inside finished the box. Now onto the next project.

Our family was involved with Annandale Boy's Club sports but most deeply involved in Bailey's Little League about which we thought long and hard for a way to memorialize our son that would benefit the league. Because children love trophies, we decided to provide a memorial award for sportsmanship which would emphasize one of the purposes of Little League. Don, my husband, wrote the rules associated with the award. Designing, researching and literally "creating" the trophy for presentation by the league president was left to me.

Kids' trophies are notoriously tacky although Bailey's Little League did a better job than most. To inspire the players to earn that trophy, thus accomplishing the goal we envisioned, this award could not be tacky! It would represent that the recipient had exhibited the best sportsmanship of all the players in the league and had earned the respect of his peers and coaches alike. Highly polished Rose Aurora Marble measuring 10" x 12" x 1" was custom cut to provide the base on which a bronze player superimposed over a baseball was positioned on the upper portion. The 4" x 8" engraved bronze plaque attached to the lower portion of the base delineated it as "The Memorial Award for Sportsmanship," its recipient, the league and the year. Don recused himself of all involvement in the nomination or voting for this award and asked his assistant coach to act in his stead. After the meeting of the coaches, the president of the league called to tell us the name of the boy selected. It was Donald's best friend. Tears, tears, sad/happy tears.



Pursuant to the rules, the sportsmanship award was to be the very last trophy given. The following year, immediately after the trophies for the championship team were distributed, there was a very distinct hush of the crowd as the players and parents waited silently for presentation of the sportsmanship award. That silence, that anticipation, said it all. Mission accomplished.

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Creative practice can also help a person feel in control. The power to paint, write, or draw something concrete - at a time when a person often feels helpless and out of control - can offer a tangible and constructive product of their emotion. Also, many grieving people feel safer from judgment and opinion when communicating artistically rather than verbally.

Finally, art can be used to memorialize a loved one. Creating a display box with the person's treasured items, making a quilt from their clothes, planting a memorial garden, or writing a poem about the person are all wonderful ways to immerse yourself in a project that means something, and keeps that treasured person close to you.

## Artistic Works Inspired by Loss



*Oak Fractured by Lightning*  
by Maxim Vorobiev, 1842  
(an allegory on the artist's wife's death)



*Return to the Sea: Saltworks*  
by Motoi Yamamoto, 2012  
(interactive art exhibit honoring the death of his sister)



*Angel of Grief*  
by William Wetmore Story, 1894  
(sculpture used as grave for his wife)

*A Grief Observed*  
by C. S. Lewis, 1961  
(book written after his wife's death)

*The Painted Bed*  
by Donald Hall, 2002  
(poetry collection about his wife's death)

*Isle of the Dead*  
by Arnold Böcklin, 1883  
(painting of cemetery where he buried his daughter)



*A Crow Looked At Me*  
by Phil Elverum, 2017  
(album about the death of his wife)



*Death in the Sickroom*  
by Edvard Munch, 1893  
(painting portraying death of his sister)



### 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)

Haven of Northern Virginia, Inc.

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Annandale, Virginia 22003

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## **Fall Schedule**

Six-week Suicide Loss Support Group  
Tuesday, October 2 – November 6, 2018  
7:30 – 9:00 p.m.

Six-week General Bereavement Support Group  
Wednesday, October 3 – November 7, 2018  
7:30 – 9:00 p.m.

Six-week Spousal/Partner Support Group  
Saturday, October 6 – November 10, 2018  
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  
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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