

# Haven Herald



## Saying Good-Bye

by Jill Bellacicco

Losing a loved one changes us. We often find ourselves in new territory as we work through the many emotions, sorrow and loneliness that grief brings. For anyone who has lost a loved one suddenly or after a long illness, you know how traumatic that can be, and, because of the current COVID-19 crisis, more people are experiencing a different type of trauma. Loved ones are increasingly more isolated as the rules and guidelines change, with hospital visits being restricted, and, after the death, funerals, memorial services and rituals being put on hold or limited to a very small number. Whether the loss is from COVID-19, or another illness or accident, not being able to say good-bye in person is especially heartbreaking. Knowing that the person we cared about was alone when they died also adds to our distress and sadness. We want them to understand that, in those final moments, they are loved. When the normal process of saying good-bye is not possible, it complicates our grief.

Being able to gather at a funeral or memorial service is an opportunity to find and give comfort to other family members and friends. During these current times of social distancing, that support is much more limited, and even if a funeral is held, travel may not be possible for many people who would ordinarily come. It is important that our loved ones lives are acknowledged and remembered in a meaningful way, but this may need to be delayed or adapted to a Zoom event online. When we cannot do what we would normally do, it adds to our stress and requires us to make accommodations during a time when we are struggling with just trying to process our loss.

Continued on page 2

## Letter from the Executive Director

As fall approaches, we find ourselves in a place of much uncertainty as we deal with a pandemic that has transformed our lives in unprecedented ways. This is a new reality and it seems the virus has the upper hand, at least for now. Haven is continuing to serve our clients by offering phone and online support, but, of course, we would much rather meet in person. We miss you.

The topic for this newsletter is about saying good-bye. That has taken on new meaning during this time of COVID-19 as many people who have lost loved ones have not been able to see them in their final hours. Even if the death was not from the virus, families have struggled with how to say good-bye because they have had to delay or limit the number of participants at funerals or memorial services. So there are several aspects to saying good-bye that we have not really had to consider in the past. The current circumstances add additional challenges for us all, but especially for those suffering the loss of a loved one.

Jill Bellacicco



Continue from Page 1

So what can we do that might help with the healing process? First, remember, you cannot control the circumstances or be responsible for what happened, but it did happen. Ultimately, you must face that reality. It can be helpful to focus more on why this person meant so much to you and to honor their life. Talking about the person you have lost is certainly possible either on the phone or virtually. You can share feelings or tell stories to celebrate a life well lived. That is something that does not have to wait. It is not a good idea to be too isolated, no matter what the circumstances, so reach out to people you trust who can listen. Writing can help with calming your thoughts or resolving past issues. You may want to write down in a letter what you would have said if you had been able to say that final good-bye. Artistic and musical expression as well as rituals, meditation and being in nature can also provide healing. There are endless possibilities that might help you cope, so be okay with what works best for you.

Grief is part of the shared human experience but it is also individual and personal. So even though there are things we can do, there is an aspect of grief that we often do not talk about, the aloneness of it. Just being with our grief can help. We each have our own journey and we should value that for ourselves. Above all, remember your emotions matter and you are allowed to feel whatever you are feeling in the moment. Grief is a difficult path, but regardless of the circumstances of the death, you will hopefully be able to find a way to come to a place of peace in your heart, even if the final good-bye was not what you hoped it would be.

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## What Worked For Me

by Jack Sanders



Four years ago, my youngest brother, Neil, and I were enjoying fried walleye dinners in a St. Joseph, Minnesota restaurant, before returning to our overnight monastery guest rooms at St. John's Abbey, when I began to realize how little I actually knew about him. There were four brothers and a sister in our family. I was the oldest and he was thirteen years younger. When I left for college, he was five. I never really returned, except for regular family gatherings, while Neil, a lifelong bachelor, always lived in or close to our hometown. Our mutual memories mostly involved family or groups of his friends.

Decades later, there we were, driving from the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota to Fargo, North Dakota, staying one night at the monastery, where he joined the Benedictine monks for evening vespers in their beautiful Marcel Breuer designed church. That service meant a lot to Neil, who was a recent convert to Catholicism and served as organist at a Catholic church in the city where he lived. We spent the next night at the dramatic artist-decorated Hotel Donaldson in Fargo. It was a trip I had planned for the weekend between his Friday and Monday chemo treatments at Mayo for advanced prostate cancer. He was a world traveler whose bucket list included visiting all lower forty-eight states, but he still had North Dakota on his list.

Two years later Neil died. My twelve years as a Haven volunteer had taught me the importance of memories, and fortunately I have not forgotten that trip to North Dakota, packed full of conversations and the experiences of the monastery, the unusual hotel in Fargo, the meals and driving together. Even the visit to Fort Abercrombie provided a casual walking and talking time for the two of us.

Like many family members with a loss during this pandemic crisis I could not be with him last year when he died nor for the memorial service. A health issue of my own kept me from traveling then. Those vivid memories became the key to a lasting connection because, in a way, we became real brothers on that Mayo to Fargo trip. Those are the memories that are working for me.

## How to cope with grief when you can't say goodbye

When you experience the death of a loved one, even if it is expected it can leave you feeling stunned. When that death is unexpected, you also have to deal with the shock of the sudden loss.

In both cases you can feel overwhelmed and your ability to function can be seriously impaired. You may be left feeling extremely bewildered, anxious and life may feel unrecognizable.

Not having a chance to prepare and say goodbye is really difficult to come to terms with. There is no gradual transition, no time to make changes in yourself or your expectations about your life. It might feel like time stopped and there is a strong sense for before and after: how your world was and 'should' be and how it is now. A sense of what was left unsaid and undone. The death may continue to feel inexplicable for a long period of time.

You may find yourself looking back at the time leading up to the death and searching for clues that you might have missed. This tendency to reconstruct events in your mind in order to allow it to feel like maybe you were anticipating it, is quite common. This retrospective construction of events makes the situation seem more manageable and retrospectively provides you with some sense of anticipation and preparation. This can become more troublesome if you start to perceive that you might have been responsible for 'missing something'.

For those who have lost someone suddenly or without being able to say goodbye, grief symptoms can persist for longer. It can make the physical and emotional shock of acute grief symptoms last longer. You can feel a loss of security and confidence in the world because you have had someone snatched away from you without warning.

The impact of any loss can last a lifetime and can change how we think about the world. It can prompt you to make more time for those that are still here. You know that tomorrow is not a guarantee for anyone, especially when you have experienced a sudden death. This can help you keep what is most important to you in mind and something positive can come from tragedy.

What is normal when we are experiencing the unexpected?

- Strong emotions or feeling numb
- Needing to move and “do” something
- Difficulties concentrating
- Yearning and longing
- Replaying memories
- Feeling angry, guilt, blame
- Feeling fear, disorientation, confusion and disbelief
- Changes to your body rhythms (e.g. sleeping, eating)

How can I cope with this?

We need to give ourselves permission to feel any way we may feel and manage those feelings in a way that feels most appropriate. There is no right and wrong. Express your emotions because it is a normal response. Stay close to those who love and support you and those who let you grieve as you need to. Keep talking to the person who has died as if they are still there. Focus on the basics: eat, drink water, sleep.

Excerpts from <https://www.hospiscare.co.uk/how-to-cope-with-grief-when-you-cant-say-goodbye>



### 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)

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## **Fall Schedule**

### Virtual Community Workshop

“Your Journey through Grief”  
Saturday, October 10 and 17, 2020  
1:30 to 3:00 p.m.

This will be a two-day *virtual* workshop. If interested, and you are able to commit to both sessions, please email us at [havenofnova@verizon.net](mailto:havenofnova@verizon.net). A facilitator will contact you regarding your participation.

Zoom Drop-in Suicide Loss Support Group  
1st and 3rd Saturdays of each month  
Please email us for instructions, if you wish to participate.  
11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

*Haven also offers individual support by phone; please call or email us to schedule an appointment.*

### **Contact Information**

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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