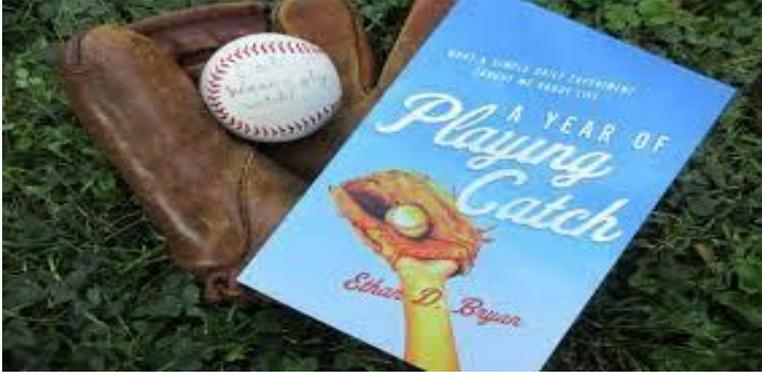


# Haven Herald



## The Role of Sports in the Process of Grieving by Janice Moody

*“I’d give my best day to play ball with you one more time.”*  
Anonymous

Whether playing a game your loved one enjoyed, or finding solace in a game you enjoy, activities involving sports can be therapy for the heart and soul of the one grieving.

Sports can be a strong complement to the grieving process. In studies it has been shown to help victims of trauma. It can help reduce stress, increase our emotional control, and improve our mood and self-esteem.

Getting involved in a sport can help create a sense of freedom and help enable the expression of various emotions. Studies suggest that outdoor activities, team or solo sports, and relaxing exercises provide physical and mental health benefits to those in mourning.

Ethan D. Bryan in his book, [A Year of Playing Catch](#), takes us on a journey to play catch with someone every day for a year. In doing this he discovers what it means to play, to find connections, and to be fully present in life.

Dan Bryan of Terre Du Lac, Missouri is the father of a son, Ethan, (who has the same name as the author) who at 16 was killed in a car accident, coming home from baseball practice. In 2020 he received a copy of Ethan Bryan’s book and the story of playing catch helped him cope with the loss of his son. It encouraged him to catch a baseball again, something he and his son often did. And so to honor his son, Dan is playing 365 games of catch. Playing catch has allowed him to meet many people, young and old, and talk about his son and the profound grief he has experienced. As of June, he has played over 200 games of catch. When asked, he said it was the sound of the pop of the glove that stirred his heart and soul.

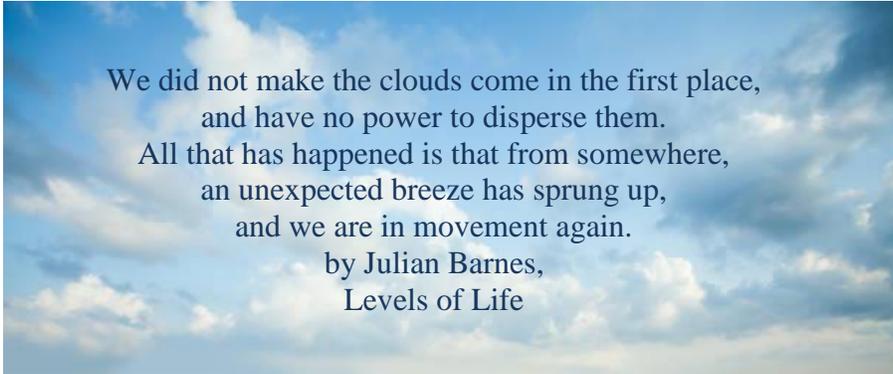
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## Letter from the Executive Director

We enter the season of fall with the expectation of change and hope for better days ahead. The pandemic with all its challenges and disruptions is still with us, but we are finding ways to cope and move forward. At Haven we continue to adjust and have incrementally made progress with our re-opening. We have started to offer some groups and workshops in-person again while also maintaining our virtual and phone support.

The topic of this newsletter addresses the idea that sports and exercise can help people through their grief. We all find unique ways to cope with loss and participating in sports activities or a regular exercise routine that we enjoyed with our loved one, or on our own, can be a healthy way to find some balance while grieving. Perhaps we too easily dismiss the importance of physical activity during grief, but it can help us feel better even in the midst of great sadness.

Jill Bellacicco



We did not make the clouds come in the first place,  
and have no power to disperse them.  
All that has happened is that from somewhere,  
an unexpected breeze has sprung up,  
and we are in movement again.  
by Julian Barnes,  
Levels of Life

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## What Worked for Me

Casting Through Grief

by Janice Moody

My wife, Betsy, and I had planned to spend a weekend on a fly-fishing trip, complete with a guide and first-class accommodations in a yurt along the Shenandoah River in late fall. It did not happen. Betsy passed away the weekend before we were to leave.

Two years later I found myself invited on a day trip to fly-fish with friends. It was a bittersweet moment when I realized this would be the first time without her. She was the expert, I just a rookie. What was I thinking as I stood by the river, donning the waders, the boots, the vest, the hat, the sunglasses! Next came assembling the rod, threading the line, trying to remember how to tie the fly to the end. Although I must have seemed calm on the surface, inside my mind was racing. I felt anxious, not sure I was emotionally up for this activity. All I could think about was Betsy's absence and my grief.

However, once I stepped into the water and got into the rhythm of casting the line, my body and mind relaxed. I felt at peace. The conditions were perfect, slightly overcast, cool, a gentle breeze. Just me, my line, and memories of Betsy and our life together.

As I fished that afternoon, I began to realize that the process of casting your line is very similar to the process of dealing with grief. You strip some line, let the rod extend out in front of you, then raise it and draw the line back and as it loops behind you, there is a slight pause before the line moves forward and comes to rest on the water in front of you. You repeat these moves over and over, pulling the line up, over, and behind you, pausing before casting it forward a little farther each time. In the process of grieving, one does the same things, but the focus is on time - present, past, and future. As we grieve, we are standing in the present with our emotions, but also reflecting on the past, and finally looking to the future. Like the fishing line we move back and forth among these time frames, hoping to land safely in the future.

We wait for the tug, whether it is the tug of a fish or a tug of our future while we grieve the loss of a loved one. I realized that the best way to honor Betsy was to continue doing something she loved. It brought peace and happiness to me as well.



Continued from page 1

In another article in *Self* magazine, “How Mourning Runs Have Helped Me Grieve My Dad’s Death”, the author, Rachel Travel, explains how although grief is a beast, and despite how it feels unbearable at times, she has learned that grief is survivable. She had always turned to running to cope with stress in her life, whether it was a romantic breakup or exams during grad school.

The morning her father died she began running, crying frequently along the six-mile route. When she finished the run and sat down with a final sob, she felt comforted by her own physical exertion. As she states in the article, “I had an overwhelming sense that my dad was there with me, holding my hand as I ran smiling at the sky through my tears. I felt better, relieved, grateful, like I had temporarily purged some of the heartache from my body.”

According to science, she just might have. Studies published in the *Journal of Psychiatric Research* support the concept that running releases brain chemicals that help relieve both physical pain and emotional stress.

For the author running has helped her process her grief and gain a sense of empowerment at a time that otherwise made her feel powerless. In conclusion Rachel says, “By facing my sorrow head on, I created an opportunity to remember and reconnect with my dad. Maybe I can’t run away from the grief. But, thankfully, I can run with it.”

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### Notes and musings from an article “Can exercise help with grief” by Lydia Smith

Exercise and playing a sport may not extinguish grief but it can help people adapt to loss. Activities of any intensity, from walking, yoga, bicycling, jogging, to running a marathon can help prevent depression while grieving, according to a 2017 study by the Black Dog Institute.

“Exercise is a very good and positive tool that people can use while grieving, mainly because it triggers the release of neurotransmitters and the release of endorphins,” explains counselor, Sharon Stallard, who is trained in helping people cope with bereavement.

Stallard cites the example of a woman who lost her 23 year old daughter in an accident. The mother began yoga, something she had never done before, to help her process her grief. She told Stallard, “Yoga has been my solace. I am doing exercise and learning a new physical skill that is keeping me physically fit and releases happy hormones.” She finds this a safe place to exercise her grief. Realizing how beneficial this exercise was to her, she has set up a foundation in her daughter’s name to provide free yoga to others struggling with loss and grief. We know we are making progress when we reach out to help others. How remarkable!

When we are grieving, we often find it difficult to focus. Stallard goes on to say that exercise allows people to have focus, whether it is a class, a gym, or swimming, it brings a feeling of calmness. It also can be a motivation to do other things, to just get moving. It helps bring you back into society and integrates you back into life.

Whether you are playing catch, kicking a soccer ball, hitting a golf or tennis ball, casting a line, these activities allow you the opportunity to focus. Your concentration may be on the sport, on yourself, or on your loved one. It may give you the opportunity to share your thoughts with others. Feeling better about yourself may help you celebrate the person you lost. It may be introspective, a chance for you to reflect on your feelings, your progress, and your loved one. Or it may provide a chance for dialogue with others while you play.

Exercise and sports provide a different way to face grief and move forward at a time when it is most challenging.



#### 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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Haven of Northern Virginia, Inc.

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Annandale, Virginia 22003

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## **Fall Schedule**

**Parent Loss Workshop**  
Late fall workshop forming.  
10:00 am – 3:30 pm

Call or email Haven to register.

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.*

## **Volunteer Opportunities**

Please visit our web site for information about our training class.

## **Contact Information**

Haven of Northern Virginia  
4606 Ravensworth Road  
Annandale, Virginia 22003  
Phone: (703) 941-7000  
E-mail: havenofnova@verizon.net

## **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