



# Haven Herald



## Loss of a Spouse

by Sarah Raison

A husband or wife—for better or for worse—is the only member of your family that you choose. When that person dies, the surviving spouse is left with a flurry of emotional and logistical complications that are highly impactful. The loss of a partner can affect almost every aspect of life.

For many people, their relationship is a large part of their identity. I am x's wife; I am y's husband. You are used to being part of a couple. You are used to living with someone else. You are used to managing life with a partner. You are used to having your spouse's friends, family, job, hobbies, and interests be a part of your life as well. When your spouse dies, those things are unwillingly taken away. *You* are also no longer a spouse. You were once a wife or husband and now you are a widow or widower—a major identity shift.

Husbands and wives play many roles in each other's lives. Confidant, lover, co-parent, best friend, financial partner, travel companion. Cook, breadwinner, caregiver, handyman, gardener, helpmate, hobby partner, encourager, and counselor. Dining, television show and movie companion. With a spouse's death, you lose everything they were good at, whether that was repairing things around the house, helping you solve problems, tracking the finances, cooking the meals, making you laugh, or managing friendships.

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## Letter from the Executive Director

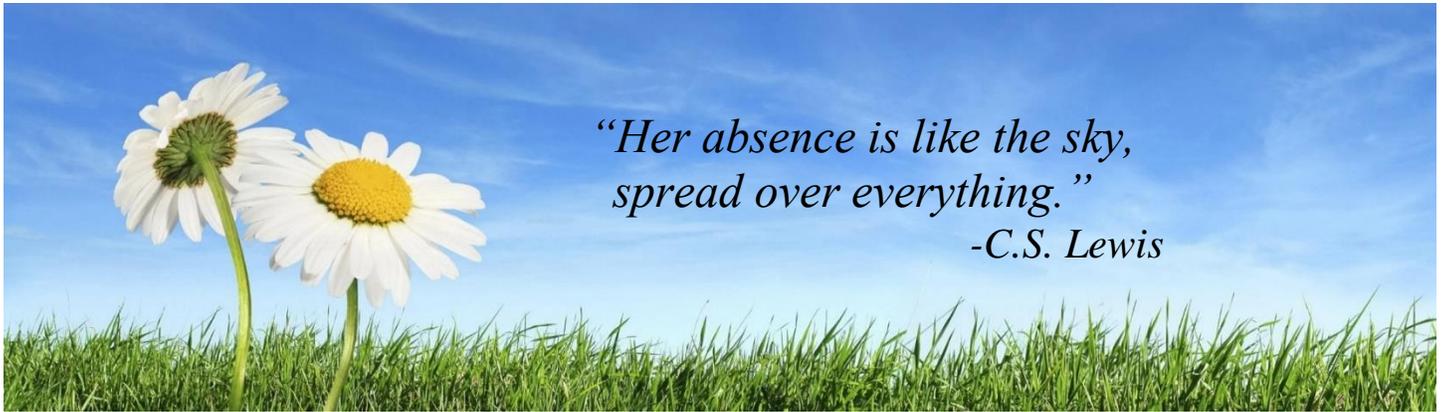
Spring brings hope which is something we could all use right now. There is a bit of light in front of us as we reflect on the many challenges that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought to our lives.

An aspect that has been especially difficult for many people is the loneliness and isolation they have experienced over the past year. The social aspect of our lives has changed and we long for in-person connection. Haven has managed to stay in touch with our community, but we look forward to the day when we will no longer be reliant on the virtual world to see our clients and run our groups.

The topic of this newsletter is loss of a spouse. The loss of daily contact with a beloved partner can be devastatingly lonely, intensely emotional and life-changing. It requires adjusting to overwhelming and painful new realities.

It is a time when it is important to get the support you need as you cope with this heartbreaking loss.

Jill Bellacicco



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## What Worked For Me

by Lorna Totman

I was shocked when my beloved husband Dan died, but I knew that it is profoundly shocking, no matter the circumstances, when anyone dies. Dan was 90 years old, much older than I, so I should have been prepared, but one never is. He was older, yes, but many younger men in my life had died before he did or soon after. What did I do as I healed? What “worked” for me?

It was important for my healing to acknowledge and allow myself to feel the pain his death caused me, even if it meant crying or screaming. We were emotionally very close but had separate lives in many ways. It helped for me to continue with my usual activities. It took a while for me to become accustomed to Dan not being there, as he usually was, at his computer and to prepare dinner only for one. Instead of holding on to how we always did things, I found it helpful to develop new traditions, especially for the holidays. I went by myself or with friends for pancakes on Christmas morning and then to a movie. (That was, of course changed by our current pandemic.) I traveled to such places as Italy and Central America that would have been challenging for him, and I had been reluctant to go without him, but now I was “free” and took advantage of those opportunities.

But I still miss him very much during certain sports events—no more Grand Marnier toasts—and New Year’s Eve, when we usually danced. But when the pain came, I let it come. That included reckoning with relationships he had had and things he had done before I knew him.

In the meantime, there are many necessary things that must be done, and their doing can also help. These include making arrangements with a funeral home, filing for insurance and annuities, and dealing with probate if necessary. I continued to take care of myself physically, keeping my medical appointments and faithfully taking the medicines I had been prescribed. I found that regular exercise was mentally helpful.

I benefited greatly from my volunteer work at Haven. I found new meaning in sharing in the grief of Haven clients who were recovering from the death of a spouse and found a new appreciation for widows’ grief. Spending time with grieving widows gave me balance in my new life.

Since we had no children, I could be very selfish in my grief. I didn’t need to avoid honestly referring to our commitment to one another. I was free to share his vast professional accomplishments.

I am fortunate to have caring family members and friends, even including Dan’s extended family. I am very much treated as an individual and haven’t suffered, as some do, from no longer being half of a couple. I value my friends and family who listen when I need to vent about my missing Dan, which I expect to do the rest of my life.



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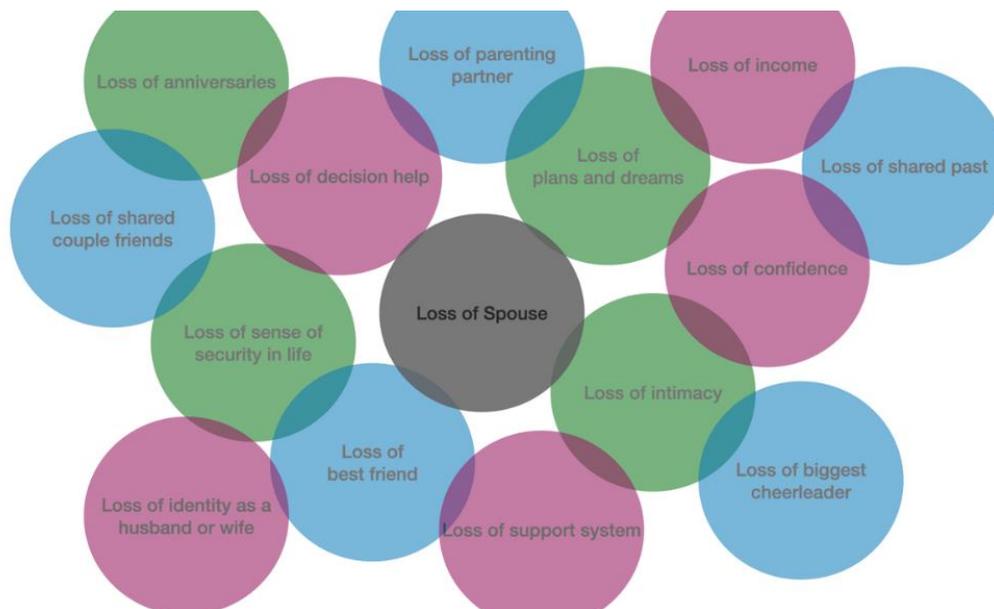
You have lost the person you have shared so much of your daily life with. Whether you were together six or sixty years, couples share many important memories. You have lost the other witness to so many important shared experiences and life events: weddings, vacations, births of children, anniversaries, and family get-togethers. You have also lost a future of more memories, a specific future that you expected to have and which now will be different.

After the death of a spouse, relationships with the people you know may change. Couples you are friends with might feel uncomfortable or uninterested in spending time with you, now that you are no longer part of a couple. People who felt an obligation to your spouse may not feel the same obligation to you. Others may become uncomfortable with or exhausted by a widowed person's sorrow and grief. Hopefully most relationships won't change, but sadly, sometimes they do.

With the loss of a spouse also often comes a loss of direction in life. The person you made decisions with is gone, and plans for your future are (often drastically) altered. Perhaps you live in a house, neighborhood or city that no longer makes sense to live in without your spouse. Perhaps your plans for retirement centered on doing things with your husband or wife. Perhaps your financial means changed dramatically. Couple's lives are often shaped around the needs and desires of both people, and life decisions that made sense for a couple may not make sense for the widowed individual.

Many widowed people find that going from sharing their life with another person to being alone is extremely lonely and isolating. Your spouse may have been your primary companion in life, and now you must fill the role of companionship with other people. And at first, many widowed people describe not being lonely for others, but being lonely specifically for their deceased spouse.

The loss of a spouse ranks number one on a scale of life stressors noted in the Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory. It is important to seek compassionate support, take care of your physical and emotional health, and give yourself the time you need to grieve this extremely important person in your life.



**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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## **Spring Schedule**

ZOOM Four-week General Bereavement Support Group  
Spring 2021 groups are forming

ZOOM - Four-week Widow/Widower Support Group  
Spring, 2021 groups are forming

Email Haven to register for the groups.

Zoom 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; 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