

Haven Herald



Summer: A Season for a Break in Grieving

by Joyce Hanson

Regardless of when the death of someone close happened, the seasons of the year can have a definite effect on the grief journey for many people. During the winter we may feel more in sync with nature. It may seem that the world is grieving with us in the dark and cold. Winter requires vigilance and preparation in case of dangerously bad weather. It means dressing with enough layers to keep warm. Sometimes we feel so encumbered that it is difficult to move, and similarly we may feel weighted down and stuck in what seems like never ending grief. As we look forward to freeing ourselves from this heaviness, we can begin to contemplate where we are in our grief, how it is making us feel and maybe wondering if a little relief would be a good thing.

Inevitably spring follows winter. While our first feelings may be of happy anticipation when the world starts to bloom, we may find to our surprise that grief is really out of sync with the flowering of nature in the midst of our loss. The pain may be more acute because the strength and vitality necessary to participate in this renewal are missing leaving us in a state of sorrow, longing and loneliness.

Slowly, however, the freshness of spring with its somewhat startling pace of change settles into summer. The bright, almost neon like, yellow green of early feathery leaves turns into the deeper green of maturity. We begin to feel a sense of calm without the urgency of pushing on to the next thing on the to-do or to-see list.

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Letter from the Executive Director

Summer brings us longer days and more time to be outdoors. At Haven we slow down a bit and spend time focusing on evaluating our programs and preparing for our summer workshop, “Your Journey through Grief.”

When we think about the “journey” of grief we tend to view it as an all-encompassing period of time that is filled with days of constant sadness and struggle. Grief is difficult but it does not need to be all consuming.

It can be helpful to take a break from our grief by allowing time to enjoy the season of summer.

Getting outside, going to the beach or a park, reading a good book, or just taking a few moments to relax can all be pleasant distractions from our thoughts and emotions. We need not feel guilty about taking a much needed break because grief has no timeline. It waits for us and we find our way through when we are ready.

Jill Bellacicco



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While a break from grief can be useful at any time, summer seems to invite thoughts of lightening the burden. Maybe we can begin to hear rising within us the familiar words of an old song. Just the phrase "in the good old summertime" can make us feel lighter.

So as we think of the leisurely pleasures of summer, we may feel a desire to try to lessen the weight and sadness of a constant grief. Taking a break can have beneficial effects although it might seem on some level to only prolong the pain. As we know a grief journey is not a straight line path but rather a bumpy and circuitous one in which sometimes the markings become faint making the way forward difficult to find. This may be a good time for a break to allow for a reset.

We recognize that there is no one "size" fits all in what is a painful process. There are many common experiences and feelings that can be recognized and shared and that help one realize that what is being experienced is not unusual or alarming. However, we also acknowledge that each individual has their own unique way through grief which is true of various other challenges humans face as well.

Some people attack problems head on and others prefer a more piecemeal approach and still others are somewhere in between. Regardless of which one works best in any specific situation, an individual dealing with grief may begin to feel that it is an overwhelming job which overshadows everything else and that little progress is being made regardless of the effort. When such a feeling begins to dominate, it may be time to consider a little slowing of the pace and a little less rush to finish the process.

At times a Haven client may express the need for a break from weekly meetings with a volunteer. This does not necessarily mean that it is not working, that something is wrong or that one is giving up. A respite from constantly thinking about the loss may lead to a sense of relief and provide some needed breathing room. Less obviously if one has been avoiding dealing seriously with grief, a break in a halfhearted attempt to do so might enable one to start afresh with a renewed sense of purpose. In either case, a break should not be seen as a failure.

Neither should a break be thought of as somehow seeming to be a lack of respect for or a lessening of one's sorrow for the loss. Rather it can be a helpful step in a progression to the healing that enables one to live on, never forgetting the meaning of the life lost, but able to enjoy being in a world even without the person who is still and always will be loved and missed.

What Worked for Me

by Sarah Raison



As the months wore on after the death of my husband, I struggled to find any respite from my grief. One of the best pieces of advice I received was "to always have something on the calendar to look forward to"—in other words, to actually plan and write into my calendar activities that might provide some rest or relief from the two things that were taking up all of my time: grieving and day to day necessary obligations.

At first these things were small; dinner with a friend, a trip to a book store, or a pedicure. They might also be very simple: walk through a park for two hours, sit in a library quiet room and read or write, shop for the ingredients for my favorite dinner and cook it. Actually writing these activities into a calendar helped me mentally feel like at least there might be one minorly enjoyable part of my day.

Later, I was able to add bigger commitments: a music concert, a yoga class each week, or a weekend trip to the beach. Nothing can take away the pain of grieving, but planning soothing and peaceful moments or activities you enjoy can ensure a plan for some breathing space.

To this day, years later, I still try to have something on the calendar to look forward to. It can also be helpful to make plans for days that might be especially difficult or notable, such as birthdays, anniversaries, or date of death of your loved one.

Summer Reading



Books can be a healthy distraction for a summer break. This is especially true when the book tells a story. These are not self-help books with lists of suggestions for coping or remembering but rather stories involving dying. Because of the connection with death, they can allow you to share in what is an essential part of the human journey and provide inspiration and meaning to your respite from the difficult work of processing grief.

PAULA by Isabel Allende; HarperCollins, 1995

Allende, a successful fiction writer, tells the history of her illustrious family, which she began as a letter to her comatose 28 year old daughter, Paula. This is entwined with the story of Paula slowly dying without regaining consciousness.

THE LAST LECTURE by Randy Pausch; Hyperion Books, 2008

Pausch's last lecture, entitled "Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams" was given by him in 2007 after he had been ill for some time with terminal pancreatic cancer. It is about what living meant to him and suggests that you consider your legacy and decide how to live to create that legacy before it is too late.

IT'S ALWAYS SOMETHING by Gilda Radner; Simon and Schuster, 1989

Radner, a well-known comedian and entertainer, completed this story of her courageous and hopeful struggle with ovarian cancer shortly before her death.

THE BRIGHT HOUR: A MEMOIR OF LIVING AND DYING by Nina Riggs; Simon and Schuster, 2017

This book is a depiction of her terminal cancer diagnosis by a poet, wife and mother of two young sons and its aftermath as they prepare for her death.

MAKING TOAST: A FAMILY STORY by Roger Rosenblatt; Ecco, 2002

When the author's 38 year old daughter died suddenly of a rare heart condition, he and his wife move into her home to help their son-in-law and three young grandchildren cope.

THE LOVELY BONES: A NOVEL by Alice Sebold; Little Brown, 2002

This is narrated by a 14 year old girl, who was murdered on her way home from school, as she watches from "heaven" and describes the reactions of her family and friends after the tragedy.

WHEN BREATH BECOMES AIR by Paul Kalanithi; Random House, 2016

A neurosurgeon and writer, who was diagnosed with late stage lung cancer at 34 as he is finishing his residency, writes about his experience in this book published after his death which includes an epilogue by his wife, Lucy.

THE WIDOWER'S NOTEBOOK: A MEMOIR by Jonathan Santlofer; Penguin Books, 2018

An account by a successful author and artist of the first three years after the sudden death of his wife, Joy, herself a successful food writer, while they were at the prime of their careers.

THE YEAR OF MAGICAL THINKING by Joan Didion; Knopf, 2005

Didion, a prolific author, writes of a year which sees her daughter seriously ill on life support, her husband dying of a sudden heart attack, and her daughter recovering only to die soon after from another health setback.

THE UNWINDING OF THE MIRACLE: A MEMOIR OF LIFE, DEATH AND EVERYTHING THAT COMES AFTER by Julie Yip-Williams; Random House, 2019

Born mostly blind in Vietnam she was "miraculously" spared being put to "sleep forever" and arrived as a refugee in the United States as a young child where she became a successful lawyer, wife and mother. The unwinding of the title is a terminal cancer diagnosis which is related in this book published after her death in 2018 at age 42.



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

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Summer 2019 Schedule

Summer Workshop

“Your Journey through Grief”

Saturday, July 27, 2019
2:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Call or email Haven to register. Space is limited.

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; 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