



Haven Herald



Reflection on Loss

by Jill Bellacicco

Growth from the experience of loss is not a topic easily approached when one is suffering the death of a loved one. We know intellectually that loss is a part of life, but few of us are willing to think about it until it happens. Most human beings will experience loss in their lifetime. Death can happen in an instant or be a slow process, but it will become our reality at some point. The pain of our grief often overshadows the other side of loss, which is the opportunity for emotional and spiritual growth. Death is our most profound teacher because it lets us know with great certainty that we are not in control, no matter how much we plan for the future. Loss allows us to understand the significance of living in the moment and appreciating life as it is.

There are many aspects of grief work that help us explore our feelings and transition to a new reality. The loss becomes part of our life story and can lead to a higher level of understanding and compassion for others. Opportunities and experiences may present themselves that take life in a different direction. The willingness to move on does not mean we still don't miss our loved ones, but it reflects a decision to embrace life again. Acknowledging the truth about what happened is critical to growth, but the choice becomes ours as we come to understand that we still have much to learn from the experience of living. Life is constantly changing, and we cannot control that; however, we can reflect on what was, accept our loss and move forward to a positive relationship with life at this moment.

Letter from Executive Director

The spring gives us opportunities to enjoy the beauty of life. Spring's gifts remind us of the remarkable power of nature to renew itself and change.

Spring is a busy time at Haven as we plan for our spring support groups, in-services and community programs. We also do some clean-up in our house and yard. It's a time of lovely change. Spring allows us to appreciate the fact that life is capable of remarkable growth. We see it in nature but relaying this feeling to ourselves after a painful loss can be very difficult. Acceptance of life and death allows us to grow in wisdom and appreciation of the richness and beauty of life. The newsletter this spring explores this aspect of growth after a loss.

Growth may not be something we think about when we are grieving, but it happens just as naturally as the beauty of spring when we are open to it. The experience of loss will change our lives, but there can be positive aspects of change that fill our lives with meaningful experiences and opportunities.

Jill Bellacicco

What Worked for Me by Therese Maasch



I thought that I would never be able to climb out of my despair over the tragic death of my 15-year-old son and then 20 years later the death of my husband. How could I make good out of something so bad? What comes to mind is the emotional upheaval that healing and growth entail.

At the time of both deaths, the feeling of powerlessness was overwhelming. Although I didn't have control over their deaths, I knew I could choose how I was going to survive these losses. I remember making a conscious decision to make the best out of a what seemed to me to be the worst of all times. I also knew that I needed to reach out to other people who had suffered similar losses, and I was fortunate to meet good people who helped me along the way.

By reaching out, I began to look outside of myself in a less narcissistic way. I realized that I didn't have all the answers on sadness and that suffering wasn't only about me. I came to understand what empathy meant. Through sharing my grief and giving of myself, I was able to find the strength and courage I needed to heal.

I learned that I had to do the grief work and feel what I needed to feel and allow myself to be crazy with grief at times, but I also learned that I was strong and capable of making very difficult decisions.

My faith in God became stronger, and I was able to surrender to a higher power and be consoled with knowing that I am not alone when I feel despair.

I discovered along the way that when people come into my life, I can see true goodness in others and, in that seeing, I am grateful.

Although I am forever changed after suffering great loss, in some way, this suffering made me actually look at the world with different eyes, realizing that there is not only darkness but also great beauty in people, and this realization is truly a gift and the source of my growth.

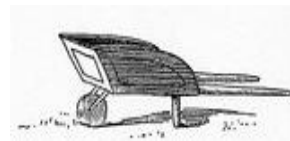
*Never cut a tree down in the wintertime.
Never make a negative decision in the low time.
Never make your most important decisions
when you are in your worst moods.
Wait. Be patient. The storm will pass.
The spring will come.*

Robert H. Schuller

Growth after Loss

We put this question to some of our volunteers: “Did you grow as a person after a loss of a loved one?” The following are some of their responses.

- One way that I grew was by becoming much more aware of the feelings friends and family may experience when someone in their circle dies. I try to make sure they are not alone all day on dates that were important to them and the person they lost. I’ll meet them for breakfast, take them out to lunch, have them over for dinner, or place a phone call that acknowledges the death of their loved one.
- I have become less impatient and more understanding of the elderly and disabled. My father was ill for some time. I often went to Richmond on weekends to take care of him and to give my sister, who was his primary caregiver, some relief.
- I was the oldest of four sons and one daughter when my mother died, two years after the death of my father. Although both of them were in their late eighties, we relied on them to provide a place for occasional get-togethers and, maybe even more importantly, to be a clearinghouse of updates on everyone’s news. The death of our parents transformed our relationships as siblings. My brothers, sister and I became closer, as we increasingly shared feelings, as well as news, more directly with one another.
- My life became less complicated and I try to simplify it in meaningful ways. I’m more appreciative of having good health and living each day to the fullest.
- My mother died when I was in my early twenties and still living at home. It was time for me to grow up; leave the nest, decide what I was going to do with my life and make my own decisions. This was a new experience for me and scary. But I forged ahead and took with me the lessons she taught me.
- Loss is change. Growth is change. Often, it was only with hindsight that I could tell which changes following my losses were growths. At the time, it was hard to know whether the changes would be growth or not. Of course, learning how to live with these changes was itself growth.
- My father died during the last year of my five-year college program. Suddenly I had to learn to take care of myself, including supporting myself financially. I had worked part time up to then, but he had been paying for my college education. After he died, working and budgeting assumed a much greater role for me. I had been careful with money up to then, but this was different. It was up to me period. Everyone was very nice, very understanding, and very encouraging. My professors cautioned me, “Don’t let this overwhelm you.” It very nearly did.



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



Haven of Northern Virginia, Inc.

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Spring Schedule

Six-week General Bereavement Support Group
Wednesday, April 6 – May 11, 2016
7:00 – 8:30 p.m.

Six-week Widow/Widower Support Group
Saturday, April 9 – May 28, 2016
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
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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