



Haven Herald



Letter from the Executive Director

We often enter the season of winter with mixed feelings. It is a season that can bring great beauty and, yet, it can also be challenging with its cold weather and shorter days. This season of the night can be a stark metaphor for some of the many faces of grief.

At Haven we encourage people to continue to do their grief work and get the help they need in spite of the weather and holiday season. The holidays can be a time of struggle

and heartache for those in grief. It is important to remember that life does not feel normal in any way so decisions can be made that help with coping and simply getting through this difficult time. Haven offered a community presentation in November called “Coping with the Holidays” to address the challenging issues of loss, especially during this time of year. Haven also has a workshop in the winter called “Journey through Grief” that touches on the different types of losses as well as an overview of the grief process, which is unique for each individual.

There is no timeline for grief. Most people don’t feel better after a year or even two, but they do realize that they are making progress if they look back to where they started. The healing process can be one of great suffering and part of the healing comes when we realize that life will never be the same as it was before, but we can live with what has happened to us.

Sometimes during the healing process, people can be troubled by words. In this newsletter we will look at the “explosive” words and comments from others that can trigger great emotion for a person in grief. Insensitive comments by others, even if well intentioned, are a common issue for the bereaved and can bring feelings of anger and resentment.

There are many things that can come up, as we go through the grief process. But they can be dealt with by talking about them and, also, by realizing that things will be difficult. Grief is a time of strong emotions and traumatic change. Allow yourself to be okay with the process, as you gradually heal and move forward.

Jill Bellacicco



Digging Deep

An Interview by Mary Smith



Donna Huber and her husband, Ken, had been married for almost fifteen years in May 1990, when he died suddenly of a heart attack. Although there was heart disease in Ken's family, he seemed too young to die, having just turned 40 years old in March of that year. His death was a shock to Donna, and she felt completely "flattened," as if she had been "squished like a bug" or "hit by a Mack truck." The shock created a numbing effect where everything felt "surreal," and where she "just went through the motions" of living but was not totally present.

When the numbness wore off, Donna felt deep grief, as if she were "in a black hole and couldn't envision a future." She cried a great deal, her chest felt heavy, and she was extremely anxious. She remembers thinking of herself "as a wounded animal." She felt "cut in two" and "just plain pitiful." Because her grief was so painful, she struggled to survive.

Fortunately, Donna had a great deal of support from family and friends, but "when the last casserole dish went out the door, I was alone." To keep from feeling too lonely and isolated and to get out of the house, especially on the weekends, she often went to the grocery store, where she could see other people but didn't have to interact much. Shopping became a way to help feel better.

She often felt the center of attention, where her life became an open book as people asked questions and made comments about her situation. Because she felt so "raw," not all the comments and questions were appreciated. As an example, many of her friends and family members thought she should sell her house, but she didn't want to leave her home.

As painful as the first year of widowhood was, the second year was worse. Reality had set in and reinforced the fact that Ken wasn't coming back. She entered a therapy group that gave her a safe place to talk about her grief and loneliness.

Now, twenty-six years later, Donna says that she thinks of Ken every day. Although her grief is blunted, she will never forget him or what she went through. The pain is now part of her history, but she remembers how she had to "dig deep within myself" to survive.

What Worked for Me

by Joni Greene

When my mother was diagnosed with stomach cancer at age 54, the cancer had already metastasized, and she had only six months to live. The first thing my father said to me was, "We are not going to tell anyone, including her." I don't remember how many lies I had to tell to keep that secret.

My dad and I had planned a trip to Italy. Thinking he would cancel, I was told we were going because if we didn't, my mother would think something was wrong. So we went. My heart was heavy, believing I wouldn't get to be with her if something happened.

I had a month to spare when we got home. But it was by no means a month that I cherished. The first thing my dad did was to make the funeral arrangements. I told him, "She isn't even dead yet and you have already buried her." I kept encouraging her to eat, so she would get stronger. When people would stop by to see her, I told them she was busy. The day before she died, when in a coma, someone asked me how she was doing I said to her "fine, she is sitting up and eating." The charade was still ongoing.

When she died, I thought the lies could finally stop. No such luck. At the funeral, a friend told me that I was strong and I would "get over it." I took those words to heart. After I took a few days off work, my boss informed me that my inbox was full and I had better get to work. At age twenty-four, I didn't know better so I dove in, working long hours to get caught up. If anyone asked me how I was doing, I said "fine" and kept on going. But I had many feelings inside me that I couldn't explain. Why was my mother taken away from me? Why was I jealous of my friends and their mothers? Why was I so angry? What did I do wrong?

A friend whose parents had died a couple years before, when she was 21, helped me; basically, we helped each other. She had the same feelings I did and together we were able to explore what it was like to grieve honestly and openly.



Explosive Words, Comments and Questions by Ron McNally



Three words/expressions that bereaved people may be uncomfortable with are acceptance, closure, and “the new normal.” Some of their reactions might be: There is nothing acceptable about this. I don’t want closure because I never want to forget. And there is nothing normal about this new or otherwise.

When people are newly bereaved, they are thin-skinned. Their emotions are all over the place and close to the surface. They have only a thin veneer of normality. Kind words and innocent questions can hurt. And those in grief may cry when someone expresses sympathy, not because anyone meant to hurt them, but because of what has just happened to their life.

When my wife died, people would ask me, “How are you?” Now I tend to be literal and I am no good at lying, so I would say, “I am doing just about as well as can be expected.” Actually, I was not doing very well at all, and I knew it, but in truth, it was what could reasonably be expected. It was a good answer because people instantly understood and often would say, “I understand.” And they did understand. They were nice people. A variant on that answer that I sometimes used when someone asked how I was doing was to say, “I am doing the best that I can.”

Now, lest I be misunderstood, I think people should express sympathy. I think people should ask how people are doing. If these are people who are important to you, you need to do that. What I am trying to do is help people understand what the grieving are going through.

It would be terrible if no one seemed concerned, if no one was sorry.

Similarly, the innocent statements like “Have a good time,” “Have a good day,” “Have a good weekend” can all have the instant twinge of, “How can I? I just lost my...”

Again, lest I be misunderstood, I think people should express such wishes. It would be terrible if people avoided the bereaved because they were afraid to saying something hurtful.

Some things should never be said, however. A few examples:

- He had a long full life.
- You can find another wife.
- Given his age and condition it is for the best.
- At least she is not suffering anymore.
- You are so pretty; you will find a nice husband in no time.
- You need to get over this; it has been a year now.

A few other things that should never be said, taken from *The 10 Best and 10 Worst Things to Say to Someone in Grief*.

<http://grief.com/10-best-worst-things-to-say-to-someone-in-grief/>

- He is in a better place.
- There is a reason for everything.
- You can have another child still.
- I know how you feel

quote:

Grief never ends But it changes. It's a passage, not a place to stay. Grief is not a sign of weakness, nor a lack of faith It is the price of love."
~Author Unknown~



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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Winter Schedule

Community Workshop

“Journey through Grief”
Saturday, February 4, 2017
2:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Snow day: Saturday, February 11, 2017

Call for reservations for the presentation and workshop.

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

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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