

Haven Herald



Loss of a Father by Donna Huber

It's during difficult times like the last several months we may miss our loved ones the most. Coping with the uncertainty of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we look for sources of comfort. Among them would be our fathers who in our lives were a source of strength. He was the man we turned to for help in weathering a crisis, and we may now feel the sudden urge to check in with him to be sure he is alright and then realize he is not there.

The loss of a father is different for everyone. Losing your dad whatever your age is a painful experience. However, there may be some common emotions and issues people feel when their father dies. Perhaps it's our first journey with grief. It brings an awareness of our own mortality. It changes our relationships with siblings and/or our mother. We feel abandoned or orphaned even in adulthood. We experience secondary losses - memories for one. If the relationship was complicated, our grief will almost certainly be complicated as well and may include anger and/or regret. We realize there are no more opportunities left on earth to be the son or daughter to dad. Feeling guilty is a common and normal emotion -- wishing you had spent more time with him or had been by his side when he died.

To help keep the connection with your father, you may want to take on a quality or characteristic of his and make it your own. Or, find something that belonged to your dad that you can keep like a pair of shoes, his bathrobe, a fishing pole or tool. This is a way of honoring him and feeling attached by keeping his memory alive.

Letter from the Executive Director

The season of summer will not be quite the same this year as we navigate a world that looks much different than it did just a few months ago. Haven is in new territory as we try to serve our community in the midst of a pandemic that has caused both fear and great suffering for the entire world. We are still able to help our clients with phone support, but we have had to postpone groups, workshops and other programs. Moving forward will require careful planning and thoughtfulness, but we are hopeful for a brighter future.

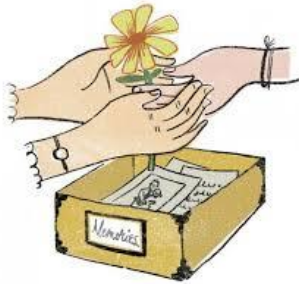
Thankfully, this newsletter is one aspect of Haven that can go forward during these uncertain times. This edition is about loss of a father. This loss can be overwhelmingly difficult as well as extremely complicated, depending on the relationship and circumstances of the loss. My father died suddenly 23 years ago and I was devastated. He had a full and interesting life, but I wish I could have had more time with him. I will always miss him, but over the years I have learned to value the peace that comes from not only accepting the loss but also appreciating the person my father was.

Please stay well and safe.

Jill Bellacicco

What Worked For Me

by Karen Swingle



In his song, “Wake Me Up,” Avicii sings, “all this time I was finding myself and I didn’t know I was lost”. In my case, I knew I was lost; I just didn’t know that I was finding myself. I grew up thinking that my family was cursed – there were so many illnesses and deaths. Most notable for me was the death of my dad. My father, Jerry, died from cancer at age 33; I was 5 years old. I was a “Daddy’s girl” and I was devastated. It’s been shown that adverse childhood experiences can lead to problems with depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, attachment styles and memory. These were all true for me – in fact, I even developed an eating disorder. I have spent a lifetime grieving: burying and running away from my pain. I built walls and pushed people away. Because I hadn’t healed, every new loss just complicated/compounded my grief.

It’s hard to pinpoint when exactly my healing began, but I would say it was about 14-15 years ago. When my cousin and best friend, Ann, was diagnosed with cancer, I knew I wouldn’t survive if I didn’t start healing from past hurts, especially the death of my dad. I don’t remember which of the following came first but they were both important breakthroughs for me.

When Ann told me about her cancer diagnosis I remember being very sad, but also very mad. Ann’s father died when we were 3, my father died when we were 5, and Ann’s mother/my godmother died when we were 16 (and the list goes on). I started thinking, “why - why did both of our dads die so young”? And, I did receive an answer of sorts: we were destined to be great friends – our mothers are sisters, we were born three weeks apart, and we have compatible personalities. But, could it be that this shared grief is what solidified our strong, unique bond? Maybe...and this new perspective did bring me a little bit of peace.

Ann and I have many many great memories. I was sad to think that we wouldn’t have future memories to look forward to, but I did know that our past memories would bring me comfort in the years to come. Another breakthrough for me was when I realized that **I don’t have any of my own memories of my Dad!** That realization began my quest to collect other people’s memories of him. I reconnected with two of my dad’s high school friends. Their letters, phone calls, emails and photos were full of love and wonderful stories! My fraternal cousins sent me a DVD of their home videos – it was so amazing to see my dad moving and talking! Unfortunately there was no sound – oh how I wish I could hear his voice again! Another wonderful treasure!

I am the planner in my groups of friends and making new and happy memories has always been important to me. I have many boxes full of mementos. As I add my dad’s memories to my boxes, I cannot help but think that my heart knew what I needed to heal before my mind did. Avicii also sings, “Life’s a game made for everyone and love is the prize.” Sadly, Ann passed away in 2014. My healing continues – there are still days when grief overwhelms me, but I am learning to live a life of love and purpose instead of fear and loss. These first discoveries were so important. They prompted me to attend a grief workshop at my local hospital, and once I started healing I knew that I wanted to help others heal as well. I started a bereavement group at my church and became a volunteer at Haven.

My wish for you this Father’s Day is that you are able to discover what you need to heal and that you are able to take the steps necessary to start or continue your healing journey.

"Most of us at some point in our lives have somebody that means more to us than anybody has ever meant before or will ever mean again".

Bill Withers, Singer/Songwriter “Lean On Me”

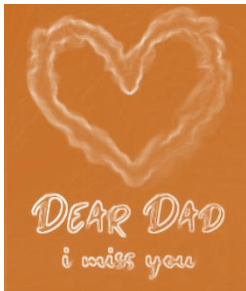


HOW HAVEN IS FUNDED

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

My Father's Story

by Rob Reuter



I had a nice normal childhood and my Dad was a large part of that. He was always available to help out and tried as best he could to provide my four siblings and me with all we needed to have fun and be happy. When I was young, I thought of him as the typical fatherly authoritarian figure, but that changed. As I got older and learned more about his life, I thought of him as a true hero. He had survived the depression, and then during the war, he was taken prisoner by the Japanese, survived the Bataan Death March, and 42 months of captivity. He was quiet and seemingly much too modest about this. In my mind, I felt that there was no way anyone could really understand what he went through, and that I could never had gone through it myself. He was so mild mannered about his experience. I grew to really appreciate and admire him and his accomplishments.

As he grew older, I would occasionally think about his passing, and it made me very sad. I thought about ways I should honor his passing, like running a marathon wearing a tee shirt bearing his name. I felt he deserved it. In reality, I really botched up his passing. As his condition grew worse, he never really complained. His heart was failing, but his mind was still sharp. The doctors sent him back to the nursing home and hospice was called in. I visited him a few days before he passed. I was planning on visiting him on the day he eventually passed away, but only after I took the day off work to clean out the shed since the next day was community trash pickup day. By mid-afternoon I was done. I hadn't heard any news during the day about my Dad so I sent a text asking my siblings if they had heard anything. It was then I learned that he was fading fast. I could tell something was different as I walked into the nursing home and did not receive a cheerful greeting from the front desk. As I reached his floor, I met the floor nurse who told me my Dad had just passed away. I was too late. The usual rush of emotions came over me, but as time went on, one unusual emotion grew stronger - immense guilt. Had I not opted to clean out the shed, had I checked on his condition earlier, had I opted to spend the night in his room, I could have been there for him like he was there for me all my life. Instead, I must live with this guilt the rest of my life. There is no way to correct it.

Fortunately something positive has come of this. I have had two occurrences where friends' parents were fading fast. Both times, I advised my friends to do whatever they had to do to go right away. I think in some small way, I helped them decide to go at once, and get to see their parents before they passed. This has made me feel a bit better, but I do hope I get more chances to help others to do whatever it takes to go see their loved ones as they are fading fast before they fade entirely.

When it comes to Fathers, I won the Jackpot!

by Judy Taibl

Everyone loved Ollie Eimermann and he returned the sentiment! He loved people - especially children - animals, birds and the great outdoors. As a child, ours was the house where kids would bring wounded critters, to be nursed by my dad - sometimes successfully; often not! Through those efforts, he taught me a valuable lesson: Death is to be respected, but not feared; it's a natural part of the cycle of life. My dad knew loss: his parents died when he was still a young man, he lost brothers, extended family and friends. I watched his reaction to grief; in his sadness, he was always compassionate and never lost the joy in living. I believe his influence is what led me to volunteer at Haven.

As an only child, I was always close to my parents and they remained an active part of my life. When they could no longer travel due to my dad's failing health, I'd travel to Wisconsin several times each year and spend quality time in their company. When - just a couple months shy of his 90th birthday and only four months after my mother's death - it became clear it was his turn, my dad faced his own death with the respect and fearlessness he had taught me. And I was blessed to be by his side, holding his hand and cheering him on to whatever comes next! I was one lucky daughter!



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Haven of Northern Virginia, Inc.

4606 Ravensworth Road

Annandale, Virginia 22003

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Summer Schedule

Please check our website and voice mail message
for changes!

Closed temporarily!

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 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

Messages may be left on our
voicemail after hours