

Haven Herald

The Mirror of Grief

A Look at How Grief Affects Us over Time

by Jill Bellacicco



When someone we love dies, we yearn to have them back for many different reasons and this aspect of grief can last a long time. Our grief reminds us that we will always suffer this loss and it will affect our lives in profound ways. Even people who lose someone that they had a difficult or dysfunctional relationship with struggle because the opportunity to make things better is gone. What if it could have been different? You will never know. Each relationship is unique, but grief is the connection to that person after they leave this world. If we spend time with our grief and

recognize that it is part of our life, we can put it in perspective and appreciate what it gives back to us.

There is a progression to grief, and the work of grief is difficult as we must face the painful reality of how life will be different. We go through emotional, physical, and practical challenges that can go on for many years. It is exhausting and we can't stay at that level of despair forever. We get better but our grief stays with us. It becomes part of who we are and we learn to live with it.

The problems for many people after a loss come from being in denial, not truly going through the pain of the loss or not having a support system that can help. The age someone is when the loss occurs can have a tremendous effect on how they process their grief, for example, there are secondary losses that can last a lifetime if a person is very young when they lose a parent or sibling. It's important to hold on to some things that help maintain a connection to the deceased. It can be as simple as letters, photos, or stories that relatives and friends convey. A relationship still exists with the person after the loss and this should be encouraged and supported by other family members. Just talking about the deceased can keep their spirit alive and be a healthy way to acknowledge they were important to you.

Things will come up over the course of one's life that can bring you back to the pain of your grief, however, it can be helpful to embrace this pain and keep your heart open. The gift of grief is that it allows us to recognize what we have lost and to revisit our feelings at any point in our lives. Grieving is really another aspect of love.

Letter from the Executive Director

Fall approaches with changing colors and cooler temperatures, and, unfortunately, a level of uncertainty regarding the pandemic that is still with us. The seasonal changes remind us that there are some things that we can depend on, even in the midst of these uncertain times.

Haven has opened up again on a limited basis, but we are not completely back to normal, just trying to adjust.

This edition of the newsletter is about how grief looks over time. Like the seasons, we come to know that it will always be part of our lives, but as the years pass, our experience with it will likely change.

How we choose to process it can have both positive and negative consequences as we come to a clearer understanding of the reality of our loss.

Jill Bellacicco



Time Will Ease the Hurt

by Bruce Wilmer

The sadness of the present days
Is locked and set in time,
And moving to the future
Is a slow and painful climb.
But all the feelings that are now
So vivid and so real
Can't hold their fresh intensity
As time begins to heal.
No wound so deep will ever go
Entirely away;

Yet every hurt becomes
A little less from day to day.
Nothing else can erase the painful
Imprints on your mind;
But there are softer memories
That time will let you find.
Though your heart won't let the sadness
Simply slide away,
The echoes will diminish
Even though the memories stay.

What Worked For Me

by Ann Smith

Truthfully, I don't think I know how I got through the traumatic death of my husband. I'd had no practice, was numb with shock, could not sleep and the demands on my energy were high. I yearned for my old life back; I had not realized how fleeting it was and how much I loved my companion of 33 years. Perhaps it was that I took it day by day. I walked every morning and I could sort some things in my mind and cry privately if I felt the grief overwhelm me. This light exercise helped me but being in nature may also have calmed the many conflicting emotions. I would sob one minute and laugh with my daughters over a remembered experience with their dad the next instant.

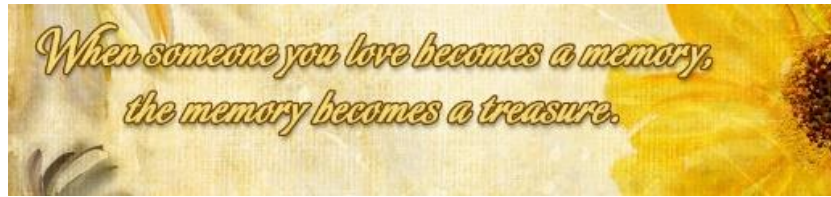
I had a mangled faith back then but I prayed. Every night I prayed for strength and wisdom. I wanted to say the right things to my family and model the behavior that would get us through this tragedy knotted together in an even tighter weave.

The support of family and friends was essential for me. I don't think I could have managed without the flow of love and care that came from so many others. And they knew it was okay to talk about him because I had given them permission. I had attended a grief group and learned how important it was to be able to reminisce and tell the stories that kept him alive for just another brief moment. I did not want to be shielded from the horror of the devastation but I didn't need to know every detail either. It was a balance.

When I couldn't sleep in the middle of the night, I would get up and write. It was a concrete way to remember our life together. It felt good to express things I might not want to say to others but I also wanted to have a small history of what was happening to me. My mind was not equipped to handle all the decisions and crazy events that were swirling around.

After a few months, I realized I was not strong enough to carry on by myself and I contacted a therapist. She was an excellent help, I think because she was able to tell me that what I was experiencing was a normal grief reaction and that I was not abnormal. She was the one who told me to talk. When you suppress your sorrow, hold it in, the accumulation of squelched emotion has the potential to make you physically ill. I knew I could not do that to my daughters so as we shared memories of our time together we brought him into the present and for that moment we caught an ounce of joy from the past.

Now the ounces of joy have turned into pounds and the weight of sadness is shared. Twenty years have passed and it's okay to write about how I am doing and I hope it brings some solace to you.



Grief is Remembering and Not Forgetting.

by Cheryl Keamy

I often tell stories about my mom or quote her advice and philosophies to my friends. I know after 13 years she is still very much a part of my daily life. I keep her memories alive and I feel joy in doing this.

I believe after all these years, I am stronger and more accepting but that depends on the day and the circumstances. Sometimes I do something just like my mom and I smile and sometimes if someone mentions my mom I can well up with tears. I have decided that it does not matter, but what does matter is that she is a part of me every day and the impact of that continues day after day despite the year or length of time. Thinking of Mom just makes me smile. Remembering her keeps her close.

Time does make the grief less. But sometimes my grief will arise on occasion and this is okay because my mom deserves a special moment of my time, my love and my thoughts. Grief is remembering our loved one and not forgetting.

Keeping Them Alive in our Hearts Forever

by Joni Greene

My mother died of cancer when I was 24 more than a half a century ago. In the beginning I was heartbroken. How was I going to survive without her? I still lived at home, so for a few years I made sure my father was doing okay. Three years later my father remarried and for the first time I was on my own. The skills my parents taught me growing up kept me in good stead. I thought about her often, wondered if she would be proud of my accomplishments, would approve of who I married, and would have enjoyed hearing about my adventures.

A big milestone was when I turned 54, the age she was when she died. I felt that I had lost my role model. Up until then I looked at a picture of her and saw me. Now once again I was on my own. I had a million questions for her but no answers on how to grow older.

When my dad died I felt that my mother and father were united but the grief of my mother came to the surface, and the same question haunted me: "Why did she have to die when I was so young?" As an only child, at age 50 I had lost both parents. Being a Haven volunteer, I knew that I would get through the grief one step at a time.

Recently I received a phone call from a friend I've known since we were one year old. She told me that her last sibling had died and because I was like a sister she never had, she wanted me to know. We talked about Mary and Pearl (our mothers) and the friendship they had. The phone call brought both smiles and tears as we reminisced about years gone by.

It doesn't matter how many years it has been since our loved one's death; remembering them is the key to keeping them alive in our hearts forever.



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.

4606 Ravensworth Road

Annandale, Virginia 22003

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Fall Schedule

Zoom Widow/Widower/Partner Group

Free Grief Support Group

Late fall 2021 group is forming

Call or email Haven to register for the group.

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 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

4606 Ravensworth Road

Annandale, Virginia 22003

Phone: (703) 941-7000

Fax: (703) 941-7003

E-mail: havenofnova@verizon.net

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