



Haven Herald

Letter from the Executive Director

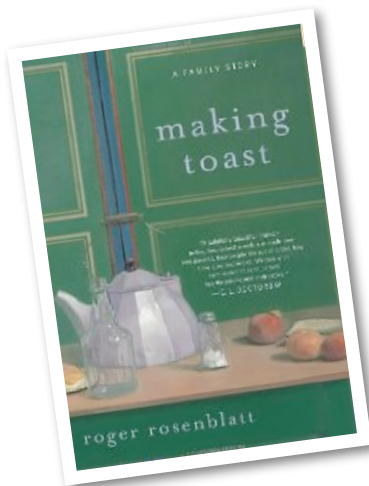
There has always been an expectation that in the summer time the pace of life slows down. The days are longer, the kids are out of school, and family vacations have been added to the calendar. Whether our daily schedules actually slow down or not, many of us feel that we are allowed to take some time for ourselves over the summer months. After experiencing a loss, the idea of the summer holidays can feel intimidating and unfamiliar. Many old rituals will have to change, and new traditions will begin to take shape. One of the summer traditions that may help those people struggling with grief is the idea of a summer reading list. This issue of the Haven Herald is focused on books and reading. We have seen how reading can help people who are dealing with death and grief. Our authors have covered a range of topics including the loss of a child, suicide, and spousal loss. Many of you may also have book suggestions for us and we look forward to hearing from you. We hope that this summer can be a time of peace and renewal for you all.



~ Frankie Smith

MAKING TOAST

by Roger Rosenblatt



Roger Rosenblatt, writer, teacher and essayist, has written a poignant memoir about the death of his daughter, Amy, who collapsed on her treadmill in the playroom of her home in December 2007. Her daughter, Jessie, seven, and son, Sammy, five, found her lying on the floor. She was thirty-eight years old, a pediatrician, mother of three young children and wife of Harris, a surgeon. She died due to “an anomalous right coronary artery,” meaning that her artery was in the wrong place and squeezed off her blood flow. She had no symptoms. Rosenblatt’s memoir begins six months after her death. It’s a memoir of his grief, that of his wife, his son-in-law, his grandchildren, his adult sons, and his daughter-in-law.

Rosenblatt is an eyewitness to his family’s grief. Immediately after Amy’s death, he and his wife, Ginny, move from their home on Long Island to Harris’ home in Maryland with plans to stay “forever.” Although the family has a nanny and Harris is a hands-on father, Roger and Ginny become the children’s caregivers too. It’s the care-taking of his grandchildren that Roger is referring to in his title, *Making Toast*. He makes the children’s breakfast every morning.

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MAKING TOAST (Continued from page 1)

Making toast also becomes a metaphor for Rosenblatt's grief process, which could be defined as "instrumental," as opposed to "intuitive." Instrumental grief is private and focuses on solving problems, making decisions, organizing, and creating, whereas the intuitive griever wants to share his feelings and to talk out his grief. Although Roger mentions that he might talk to the children's grief therapist *at some point*, he keeps his grief close to his vest. Instead, he cleans out closets, organizes the CDs, gardens, cooks for his grandchildren, makes up songs for them, builds them a playroom, and writes a loving memoir.

Yet, we feel the depth of his grief in his descriptions of Amy's life and character. Although he doesn't rant and rave, he is angry. Rosenblatt discusses

his anger when he mentions that he must be careful driving due to his "road rage." His anger issues are exposed again while picking out a plot for Amy's grave. His sons comment on "not if, but when" Roger will explode at the woman giving the tour of the cemetery. The guide is saved from his wrath only after confiding that she has also lost a child.

Making Toast is a poignant memoir of an instrumental griever. It is also a memoir of how young children, parents, adult siblings, and spouses grieve. It reminds us of the universality of grief.

Review by Mary Smith

WHAT WORKED FOR ME by Judy McDowell

In 1996 my husband died suddenly and unexpectedly by suicide, having suffered with depression for several years. My daughters, aged 9 and 13, and I, were in shock; our world had changed overnight. I, who normally loved and read all types of literature, couldn't read a thing for a month or two. Slowly, I began to scan short sad articles of death, violence, or trauma in the newspaper. Soon, I was drawn to learn about suicide, depression, and death. My knowledge was very limited. I wanted to try to understand emotionally, physically, and mentally why my husband's diagnosis of "mild depression" led to suicide. So, I began reading again and became a regular at the local library. My daughters became accustomed to my bringing home stacks of books on death, suicide, and depression. Journaling and copying passages from various books made the knowledge come alive and was very powerful in helping me heal. Simply put, I found books helped ease the pain.

Books told me that I was not alone; others had experienced traumatic death and the darkness of grief and survived. Books explained and guided me through the phases of

grief and showed me it was normal to feel so awful, to experience guilt and anger again and again. Books let me escape into someone else's world for a while -- temporary relief from my grief.

Stories about survivors were especially helpful. For example, learning that Iris Bolton, a counselor when her son died of suicide, survived, wrote a book about it, then became a suicide educator, was inspirational. Her written story of loss gave me much hope. Then, a widow's book showed me how it was possible to cope and adapt to a new life alone. Later I moved to books offering research and factual information on mental health and suicide. I realized the immensity and complexity of both topics. My education had begun.

In one of Haven's last suicide loss support groups the members were very pro-active in recommending books and authors as they supported one another. Many related that bereavement books gave them additional help, something to hold on to in a painful and confusing time. I agree. Books worked for me; they provided tremendous support, guidance, solace, and knowledge, all things that I needed and used to comprehend and reinterpret my new world.

Suggested Books

Suicide:

- *Healing After the Suicide of a Loved One* by John Guinan and Ann Smolin
- *My Son...My Son-A Guide to Healing After Death, Loss or Suicide* by Iris Bolton
- *No Time to Say Good-bye* by Carla Fine
- *Night Falls Fast: Understanding Suicide* by Kay Redfield Jamison

Grief:

- *Grieving: How to go on Living When Somebody You Love Dies* by Therese Rando
- *Seven Choices: Grief Stages* by Elizabeth Neeld

Depression:

- *Darkness Visible* by William Styron
- *The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression* by Andrew Solomon
- *An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Mood and Madness* by Kay Redfield Jamison





A GRIEF OBSERVED

by C.S. Lewis

C.S. Lewis' personal account of grief over the death of his wife will resonate with anyone whose spouse has died. This author of the Narnia books describes his grief in a very personal way, yet one can readily relate to his feelings after his wife, Joy, dies of cancer. He writes, "No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid...At other times it feels like being...mildly concussed...I find it hard to take in what anyone says...Yet I dread the moments when the house is empty." Except when working, he "loathes the slightest effort." For those in grief, these feelings are familiar.

Lewis' expression of grief is raw, uncensored. "I not only live each endless day in grief, but live each day thinking about living each day in grief." He knows that when

friends approach, that they are "trying to make up their minds whether they'll say something about 'it' or not." He hates it if they do and hates it if they don't.

Lewis asks the same questions that countless others have experienced after the death of someone close to them: "Where is she now?" But he finds the questions unimportant in relation to grief. He wants back the "old life, the jokes, the drinks, the arguments, the love-making, the tiny, heartbreaking commonplace." And grief still feels like fear, or suspense, and nothing but time, stretching before him. He wonders whether he will forever feel apathetic. And he realizes that he is thinking only of himself, not of the anguish that Joy experienced, knowing that she was dying.

Many weeks later, Lewis' heart begins to lighten because he has started to reconcile himself to Joy's death. He thinks more of her

in terms of what she meant to him rather than in terms of her absence. He recalls that she was "always...a trusty comrade, friend, shipmate, fellow-soldier...and mistress." After realizing that his memory of Joy will remain true, he begins to heal from his grief. He recognizes that "the less I mourn her the nearer I seem to her." Of course, grief comes and goes in waves, and he recognizes that sorrow is "not a state but a process." Lewis asks himself the same question that so many others have asked: Will I see her again?



Review by Nancy Ragsdale

THIS REPUBLIC OF SUFFERING

by Drew Gilpin Faust

This book, written by a noteworthy historian, describes how the experience of widespread death during the Civil War challenged people's conceptions and beliefs and imposed an enormous burden of grief upon the survivors, particularly women. While this book is not specifically written on the subject of grief, it contains a wealth of insights

regarding how people respond to the full range of the human experience with death - the anticipated death of one's self, the death of a loved one, the death of a stranger, the death of an enemy. The chapters titled "Realizing" and "Believing and Doubting" would have the greatest interest to those involved in grief counseling, although Faust's comprehensive and empathetic treatment of the subject throughout the book provides much food for thought on the topic of grieving. Although the book deals with death as a result of the Civil War, the human reaction she describes transcends the particular circumstance. In one example

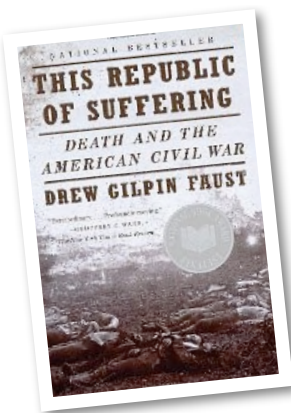
of the insight she provides, she uses the writings of the time to illustrate how people's vision of the afterlife they believed in awaited both their loved ones and themselves evolved:

The authority on which Winifred and Phelps rest their claims for the afterlife is not that of Scripture or science but of distress and desire. What humans need most is what a benevolent God would provide for them. Most important in Phelps's vision of the future is the continuation of self, of an identity that is defined by a body and by a set of relationships that seem to include both people and domestic objects.

The book contains a remarkable number of insights such as the one above, providing a historical context to perceptions and beliefs pertaining to death that carry forward today.

According to Faust, approximately 620,000 perished during the Civil War; and equivalent number based on today's population would be about six million deaths. This magnitude of loss resulted in an unimaginable experience with grief - for both individuals and for society. Consequently, there is a great deal that can be learned regarding grief from those that survived the Civil War and Faust does an excellent job presenting that experience.

Review by David Eyler





Summer Schedule

General Bereavement Workshop

Saturday, June 5, 2010
2:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Suicide Loss Workshop

Date to be determined.

Widow/Widower Workshop

Date to be determined.

Space is limited, and reservations are required to attend all workshops and groups. Please contact Haven for more information.

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.

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Messages may be left on our voicemail after hours

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