

Haven Herald

Winter must be cold for those with no warm memories.

~From the movie *An Affair to Remember*



The Unwanted Gift by Eileen Thompson

Death arrives like a package we did not order. It sits at our doorstep while we stare at it in shock and denial as if it were a bomb which, if opened, would destroy us as well.

As we contemplate each new arrival of death into our lives, our initial fear and hesitancy give us time to marshal our resources, internal and external, for the daunting task ahead -- the task of unwrapping our new package.

Anyone who contacts Haven is asking for help in unwrapping his or her package -- a supporter to help explore the layers of fear, pain, love, regret, and loneliness of loss. As we unwrap the layers together, we also discover memories infused with joy, humor and respect. And we arrive at a new comprehension of ourselves and our loved one.

It takes courage to open our unrequested parcel. And time. But inside we may find gifts that will sustain us in the years ahead.

The loss of my father came during a time when my children were moving far from home. My mother had also recently died, and I felt very alone. But during my father's final year, we began together to unwrap his gift to me. His Alzheimer's disease had caused the loss of recent memory but reawakened old memories of a home in Ireland he had left long before my birth. His dying was bringing his past alive for me. I have since returned to his native Ireland and restored friendships, found close relations, and discovered a rich family history that would have been lost to me were it not for the sad circumstances of his final illness. Out of the loss of my parents came new family ties and a new dimension of identity.

Drawn from the work of grief comes the gift of a renewed understanding of the life of our loved one and of ourselves. What gifts will you open?

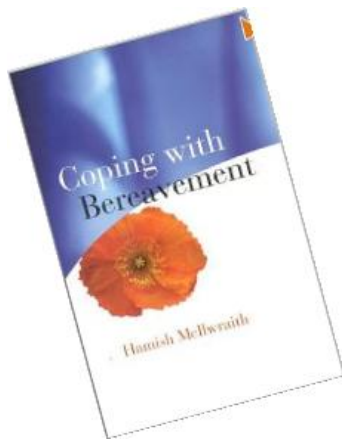
Letter from the Executive Director

In his recent presentation, "Grief: Understanding the Journey," Paul Tschudi, Director of Graduate Programs End-of-Life Care at The George Washington University Medical Center, gave the volunteers at Haven a wonderful gift. He reminded us that "grief is our friend; it is the stitch that repairs the torn fabric of life."

The holiday season is often the biggest occasion of the year for families. But when we are grieving, the holidays can make us feel as though the fabric of family life is shredded rather than simply torn. Given the opportunity, many on the journey through grief would rather ignore the entire holiday season. Since that is not always possible, it is important to think of alternative ways to help contain the tear in the fabric. One way is to recognize that the anticipation of the day is always worse than the actual day. Also, know and accept that the holidays will be painful. Allow yourself to lean into the pain. When you are invited to a party, know that it is okay to say, "I will have to take a rain check this year" or "I will have to let you know later if I will be able to attend," or simply "No thank you."

Rituals and traditions can be an important part of the holidays. This year you might try some new ones: go out to dinner rather than having it at home, volunteer at an organization in need of holiday help or take a trip. Whatever you choose to do, the most important thing is to be kind to yourself during the holiday season. As Paul Tschudi said, "There is nothing broken in grief." You are doing your best to live through the loss of a loved one.

Frankie Smith



Grief and the Holidays

by Nancy Ragsdale

From the book, *Coping with Bereavement*, Hamish McLlwraith

For someone experiencing grief, facing any special day that is meaningful is difficult. Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Hanukkah may be especially difficult because they are generally happy times when

families share laughter and fond memories of past holidays. When someone has died and is now absent from these special occasions, the holidays may be painful because you miss having that special person there to share it with you. You may not want to “celebrate” the holidays, but doing nothing generally does not work. You cannot ignore grief during the holidays, but you can try to face these special days with a positive attitude. The following suggestions include doing something with someone and doing something alone.

- Talk to someone. The holidays are an especially appropriate time to share memories of your loved one. We generally tell stories from year to year reflecting something meaningful or funny about past holidays. These stories will likely include something about the person who is no longer there. Keep telling those stories.
- If you have a special ritual, keep it up during the holidays.
- Understand that you will be emotional. Write down your feelings without stopping to think; just let them come unfiltered.
- Do something physical if you can work it into your schedule. Or take a walk with your family and/or friends after that big turkey dinner.
- Play your favorite music sometime during the day. Last, and most important, do not feel guilty if you enjoy yourself during the holidays. Your loved one would not want that for you, and neither would the rest of your family.

WHAT WORKED FOR ME

by Joni Greene

Nothing is going to change the fact that my dad died December twentieth and was buried on Christmas Eve. He died during the most talked about and joyous season of the year. I remember that the funeral procession drove fifty miles an hour instead of the usual forty because he had to be buried before noon. The church ladies had to put out the poinsettias, the grave diggers had to get home to their families and the priest had to prepare for midnight Mass. My father was just another body. I wanted to yell, “Hold it, that’s my dad!”

So how do you work through that? You do not. You

just hope that as time passes the pain will subside. The first couple of times I went to midnight Mass, I cried through the whole service. After sixteen years I still shed a few tears on that night.



I usually do not remember the date that one of my loved ones died. The anniversary will come and go before I realize it. But it is hard to forget the day I buried my father. I have thought, momentarily, that he

died during Christmas week because he did not like Christmas. Rarely did he buy my mother or me a gift. He grew up without a mother and was the son of a farmer. Christmas was just another day that he had to feed and milk the cows.

On the other hand, my mother, who died twenty-seven years before he, loved Christmas and would con my dad into helping her with the decorations. The looks he gave her were priceless. So, to honor them, I put up a tree, place her ornaments on it and think about what it was like when we were family, my mother, my father and me.

Regret, Relief, Anger, Guilt:
Greenspring Seminar and Haven In-service
by Mary Smith

In early October Haven organized an informative seminar for its volunteers and for the social workers and pastoral care providers at Greenspring Retirement Community in Springfield, Virginia. Paul Tschudi, Assistant Professor and Program Director for End-of-Life Care at George Washington University, presented a thought-provoking discussion of grief, entitled "Grief: Understanding the Journey." His first question to the audience was "what does love have to do with it?" The answer, of course, is that if we did not love, we would not grieve. Tschudi reminded us that grief is not pathology. It is normal, necessary and universal. Every person alive experiences grief, and we can grieve for any loss, for anything we are attached to -- for example, youth, beauty, innocence, or health.

Tschudi also pointed out that while grief is universal, every experience of it is unique. Even among family members, the experience of grief is unique because our relationships are unique.

Tschudi believes that grief is not the enemy. Loss is the enemy. Loss is what hurts, but it is grief that heals. Grief is not a terminal illness. All of us can grow through our grief. Grief has no time limit. It can take as long as we need.

When in the throes of grief, we are compelled to learn. And grief may be the most valuable teacher in life. In grief we try to make sense of what does not make sense. We face what we do not want to face. Grief cannot and should not be fixed. We have a right to listen to our broken parts.

Reconstruction is the goal of grief. With the death of a loved one, we lose our sense of safety and sanity, and we fall apart. We must reconstruct ourselves. We must create a new normal.

Although Tschudi believes that unlike the linear stages of grief we often read about, grief, like life, is

messy. But he acknowledges that everyone passes through certain phases of grief. The first of these is shock, disbelief or numbness. He believes these are gifts to keep us from absorbing the reality of death all at once. These allow us to take death in slowly.

The next phase is acknowledging, if not accepting, the loss. This can take seconds or weeks, but it usually happens quickly.

Eventually, we accept the loss, and with this reality, a tornado of feelings may overwhelm us. We are sad, depressed, angry, and maybe regretful or guilty or relieved. We have to work through all of these feelings by asking ourselves questions and finding answers slowly over time.

Finally, we put our life together again. We redefine who we are. We learn to live with memories of our loved one. Sometimes feeling okay again feels disloyal. We worry that we may forget our loved one and that can be scary. But as Tschudi says, forgetting is not in the cards. People die, but relationships do not. We carry the love in our hearts.



"I can release the pain that touches my memories, but only if I remember them. I can release my grief, but only if I express it. Memories and grief must have a heart to hold them."

From *The Journey through Grief* by Alan Wolfelt



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

Winter Schedule

Community Presentation

“Coping With the Holidays After the Death of a Loved One”
Thursday, December 2, 2010 7:30 – 9:00 p.m.

Community Workshop

“Journey through Grief”

Saturday, January 29, 2011 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.
Snow day: Saturday, February 5, 2011.
Call for reservations for the workshop.

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

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