

Haven Herald



Personal Grief Rituals by Sharlene Aukofer

When a loved one dies, you may find yourself holding onto your pain as a way of remembering the person that you have lost. Letting go is not an act of disloyalty or forgetting your loved one; it is choosing the memories that you wish to keep and those that you want to leave behind. During this holiday season, you may find yourself thinking about what you did when your loved one was alive. Now, you think about the gifts that won't be given, the empty chair, and the end of traditional holiday rituals. Letting go and moving on will be difficult, but it is part of the grieving process.

Personal grief rituals are those loving activities that help you to remember your loved ones and give you a sense of connectedness, healing and peace. Creating and practicing personal grief rituals can also help you to release painful or unpleasant memories of your loved one. They can free you to make your memories a positive influence in your life.

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Letter from the Executive Director

The holiday season is upon us and with it comes expectations that may be very stressful for anyone but especially for someone in grief. Holidays are supposed to be times of joy and celebration, but they may be difficult and complicated after a loss. One may feel a sense of enormous change in the midst of events that are steeped in tradition.

Grief does not go away during the holidays, and seasonal events and the anticipation of celebrations may cause enormous anxiety. As a person in grief, you have every right to take control of the situation and do only what you are comfortable with. Accepting the reality that things are different now and doing a little advance planning can make all the difference. It's okay to change your approach. Keeping things simple and being with people you trust may be very helpful, but realize also that finding ways to cope will be challenging. The key to managing this time is to do what feels right. Though things are different and memories will be painful, finding joy in doing simple things during the holidays is possible. You may also feel a sense of relief as you work your way through this time because you will come to realize that you can survive a difficult transition.

Jill Bellacicco

What follows are a few examples of personal grief rituals. The ideas are as unique and varied as the people who invented them. Think of ways to adapt them and make them your own.



- Write an anecdote, story, poem, song, or letter about your loved one. Share it with others or keep it private in a special place. Keep a journal and write about your feelings as you journey through your grief.
- Buy a book on coping with the loss of a loved one to donate to your local library or school. Ask the librarian to place a label inside the front cover inscribed "In Memory of" your loved one.
- Plant a tree, bush, garden or flower bed as a permanent growing memorial to your loved one. Mark the site with a memorial plaque, bench or statue.
- Put together a scrapbook or box of memories containing mementoes, letters and photographs of your loved one. Ask relatives and friends to contribute.
- Make a donation to a charity in your loved one's memory.
- Give a possession of your loved one to another family member or friend to whom it would be significant.
- If you are harboring hurtful or painful memories or regrets, gather symbols to represent the hurt and pain, put them in a container and hold a private burial or burning ceremony, saying goodbye and releasing your loved one from your life.

What Worked for Me

by Nancy Morehead

When my husband died suddenly during the gigantic snowstorm in February 2010, my friends and neighbors did many things that helped me to cope with my profound shock and sadness. They walked my dog and drove me places. They shoveled my driveway and cleared piles of snow from the street to make a parking space for me. When I misplaced my front door key, my neighbor made a new key from the emergency one that I had given her to keep at her house. Another friend called me every morning if I had not called her by a certain time.

What I remember most from those harrowing days are the comfort foods friends and neighbors brought me. The same neighbor who made the key for me brought me muffins and a flowering plant on the first morning that neither of daughters had stayed overnight with me. And one day while I was at the funeral home, she brought me cheese, salami, crackers, and a cupcake.



I knew it was from her because when I returned home, it was IN my refrigerator with a soda.

When another friend called to give her condolences, she said she wanted to bring me food. I didn't want anyone fussing over me, so I tried to discourage her. But later that day, there was a knock at the door. Her husband had come with a file box full of food: five containers of ingredients for homemade chicken noodle soup; two with broth, one with chicken, one with vegetables, and one with handmade Polish noodles! Along with the soup he brought two loaves of pumpkin bread and a tray of brownies surrounded by tiny candy bars. I laughed and cried at

the same time.

On the day of my husband's viewing, my neighbor brought two shopping bags of food from the Boston Market. It was perfect because members of my family had arrived from out of town, and her food fed all of us. I am very grateful for my wonderful friends.

De-Stressing the Holidays

by Susan Marinac, LISW

For many people the holiday season can mean stress and frustration instead of peace and joy. Family issues, time constraints, finances and a sense of everything must be “perfect” can lead to feelings of depression and a sense of feeling overwhelmed. In today’s society we are so inundated with visual images of the perfect family, the perfect home, the perfect holiday gathering, that it can be difficult to set realistic expectations for ourselves. The holiday “season” begins earlier and earlier every year. Stores are creating their holiday displays well before Halloween. The season grows longer and longer every year and our patience grows shorter. Following are some strategies that can help us cope:

Accept your feelings. Feelings are neither right nor wrong. They are just feelings. We need to laugh and to cry. It is normal to express your feelings and you do not have to be in a good mood just because it is the holiday season.

Reach out to others. If you are feeling down or lonely, call a friend and go out for a cup of coffee. You may want to get involved with your church, sign up for a class or volunteer.

Get organized. Develop your holiday plan ahead of time when you are not so busy. Set aside time for all of your activities and schedule it on your calendar.

Know thyself. Learn to say no if you need to. We all have limits. Don’t take on more than you can handle or you may become angry and resentful.

Take time to breathe. Spending even ten minutes alone just relaxing and focusing on your breathing can be a huge stress reducer. You can also listen to soothing music to enhance relaxing.

Move it. Schedule time for exercise. Walking is great exercise.... Gentle stretching before going to sleep at night will promote relaxation and help you to get a better night’s sleep.

Delegate. You do not have to do everything yourself. Enlist other family members to take on tasks.

Sleep. Healthy sleep habits are essential. Try to get eight hours of sleep per night and do not consume any caffeine after three p.m.

Seek professional help if needed. If you find you have a permeating sadness that you cannot shake or if you are plagued by feelings of helplessness, anxiety or despair, you may need the advice of a professional. Talk to your doctor, who can assist you in finding a professional therapist.

Above all, take the time to remember what is important and seek support if you need it.

(Excerpted from *Grief Digest October 2006*)



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 6, 2012

7:30 – 9:00 p.m.

Winter Workshop

“Journey through Grief”

Saturday, February 23, 2013

2:00 to 4:00 p.m.

**Space is limited. Please call for reservations
for the presentation and/or 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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