

**HeartLight offers mourners recovery programs**  
**by Glory Weisberg, *The Villager* Newspaper, March 3, 2005**  
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The HeartLight Grief and Loss Center is a not-for-profit organization providing programs and support for the bereaved.

It was started by Rachel Kodanaz after she was widowed at age 32, twelve years ago "My husband, Rod Blythe, was 32 also. He was an athlete. "He'd said good-bye to his staff, walked out of his office one day, got into his car and just dropped his head on the steering wheel. Bystanders ran over and asked if he was okay and he said, 'I don't think so,' and that was it." The couple had a two year-old daughter.

Rachel was working at Sprint full-time in information technology management at the time Rod died of an apparent heart attack. "I had all these people working for me. Co-workers didn't know what to do. It took me a long time to get my feet on the ground. I found my energy, I did the Iron Man in his honor, a 2.4 mile swim, a 112 mile bike ride, and a 26.2 mile run. It took me three years to just to get my head back."

Then Rachel met Jennifer McBride, who was employed at Horan & McConaty Funeral Home, which had handled Rod's funeral. Jennifer was a bereavement counselor and Jennifer and Rachel got to know each other while volunteering for the AARP Widowed Person Services. The two decided to start a center for grieving people. They put together a board and started the HeartLight Center in September, 2003.

Connie Robinson too became a young widow, whose husband's funeral was handled by Horan & McConaty. There Connie learned of HeartLight, "a place (with) resources that provided support for my grieving. The events I've participated in have given me the understanding that what I'm experiencing is a normal process. Learning ways to deal with feelings, situations, and other aspects of my loss has given me comfort and confidence to move forward.

"HeartLight is people providing comfort, caring, and support at a difficult time. I can share and discuss feelings and situations with others who are in the grieving process. This has given me the comfort that what I'm feeling is normal. The sharing, the hugs, the tears, and yes, even the laughter and the smiles from others on the grieving journey have shown me that I am not alone and I can get thru those difficult moments, hours or even days."

The center has several scheduled events. Among them is an interactive support group for all ages, called "Facing the Mourning." It is a four-week course designed to help with the grieving process by using visual and thought provoking tools such as building memorials, journaling and writing letters.

They also offer a Grief in the Body workshop that meets monthly, focusing on how to identify and release the pains the body holds when mourners are grieving. Another program, a Widowed Baby Boomer's Group, meets monthly. There's also a Wounded Spirit: Post-Traumatic Stress and the Combat Veteran program run by Chaplain Edward C. Waldrop of the VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System.

Other programs include Caregivers' Support, Creating Memorial Albums, Loss of a Parent Support Group, and a Multi-Cultural Approach to Grief Support Group that offers insight into how various cultures and faiths embrace grief. For this class Kodanaz is bringing in a Buddhist expert, and Rabbi Elliot Baskin to speak on Jewish grieving, as well as an Islamic representative, an Hispanic, Christian and perhaps, a Native American grief resource to explain their various practices as well.

Rachel notes her own journey of grief recovery. "I got into helping people because I felt people got stuck. I think about Rod every single day but I wasn't going to spend the rest of my life boo-hooing. So I got involved in grief support and I really felt like I was making a difference in people's lives. My philosophy is we can boo-hoo our grief or we can take it and do something with it."

You learn to keep the memories of the loved one alive but you learn to accept the death. The grieving support group members bond and discuss things like when do you clean out the closet, when to or if to take off the wedding ring, how to deal with holidays and what's it like to take your first vacation without the deceased loved one.

Rachel remarried nine years ago and her new husband has even come to talk to support classes and talk about how to enter a grieving household.

Rachel mentions what she's kept of Rod's, like the shoes her daughter wore on the day Rod died. She's also kept the phone book that had Rod's name in it.

One grieving daughter recorded her mother's voice as she was nearing her end of life and the daughter had the recording put into a Build A Bear so she can hear her mother now.

For Connie "HeartLight is a place and even more important to me, HeartLight is people."

They can be reached at 720-748-9908. Or reach them at [www.heartlightcenter.org](http://www.heartlightcenter.org).