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By LILY TINOCO Reporter

PALI LIFE

Susan Whitmore played a huge role in her own grieving and healing process. “(GriefHaven) really became a channel for me,” she shared. “There’s a channel of love that goes back and forth between a parent and a child, and it’s a very unique channel that’s just between the two of you. When Erika died, that channel was no longer there. It’s still a channel but it had to change because it was no longer about her physical presence.

“GriefHaven became that physical presence where I could channel all the love and compassion … that I gave to her, and give it to others. It saved my life in many ways.”

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, griefHaven offered support through the gathering of private groups in the Palisades or with the help of 12 grief experts who were spread out throughout Los Angeles. The organization offers support for all losses: a child, spouse, sibling and more.

“In times of pain, it is impossible to have someone to cry with. GriefHaven became that,” Whitmore said.

Within the year, Whitmore worked with actress Naomi Watts while she was researching for her role as a grieving mother in the film “21 Grams.” As a way to give back, Watts offered to help Whitmore create a documentary for grieving parents, and Whitmore created a website to connect others who lost a child, to create a space where they could bring the practices she sought to others—and griefHaven was born.

“It is with hope that we eventually learn to embrace life again,” according to griefHaven’s website. “Because everyone deals with grief differently, we have created something for everyone: watch, listen, read, share, learn and feel embraced by the love put into this true haven of hope.”

When the novel coronavirus hit, the team quickly pivoted its operations to help individuals via Zoom—extending the current scope of their practice to the whole world and meeting a new need: grieving individuals who lost a loved one to COVID-19.

“I could never have imagined—ever—what’s happening … I never even came into my mind that we were starting something that at some point in my lifetime was going to be so deeply and profoundly needed,” Whitmore said.

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