

griefHaven Gala Oct. 7

Supports Grieving Families

After Loss of a Child

After losing their only child Erika to a rare sinus cancer, Highlands residents **Susan** and **Wendell Whitmore** were struck with agonizing grief. Just beginning a long, exhausting journey, Whitmore said she was disappointed by the lack of comprehensive, easy-to-access resources available to her. In an effort to aid her own healing, she started **The Erika Whitmore Godwin Foundation** and **griefHaven** website in the fall of 2002. The website, which receives more than 50,000 monthly visits, provides a place where parents can honor their children and connect with support groups and resources.

"Losing a child is the worst pain there is, and it was truly unbearable," Susan said. "I needed to be around people who could understand that. I was longing for someone I could just talk to, someone who had gone down the path of grief ahead of me."

In 2010, Susan turned her focus to the foundation full time, becoming a certified grief specialist. Today, she oversees grief support for families in 12 countries through a wide range of resources, including support groups and counseling at **Kehillat Israel**.

Looking forward, Whitmore hopes the foundation will eventually have enough funding to open a fully operational center where grieving parents can go for therapy and support. Her plans however, rely heavily on a need for funding.

While there has been extensive research delving into the devastating impact of losing a child, Whitmore is hoping for the chance to see just what is happening inside the grieving brain of a parent.



Palisadians Susan and Wendell Whitmore founded griefHaven.

Rich Schmitt/Staff Photographer

Presently all of the foundation's funding comes from the annual luncheon, private donations and the sale of Whitmore's handmade jewelry. This year, the griefHaven luncheon will be at the Luxe Hotel on Oct. 7. This year's guest speaker, Kim Goldman, has just released her new book *Can't Forgive: My 20-Year Battle With OJ Simpson*.

"We hope people will join us for an interesting, educational and fun afternoon as we raise awareness about what grief really is, how it works and how best to deal with it in your own lives and in the lives of those you love who are grieving," Susan said. "Oh, and did we say that we have an awesome auction?"

For tickets and more information, visit griefhaven.com, call (310) 459-1789 or email hope@griefHaven.org.

—SIERRA SHAFER