

# The Healing Power of Story

By Donna Oiland

On a trip with my son to the Grand Canyon I remember standing on the edge of one side of that vast, deep, dark space and barely being able to see the other side. I was told that there were guided trips you could take all the way down to the bottom and up the other side. It was possible to get to the other side but you had to go down to the bottom and climb back up the steep wall of the enormous

When my husband and daughter died I felt like I was again standing on one side of a huge vast chasm, often teetering on the edge. I could picture that day at the Grand Canyon. I tried to imagine ever getting through the pain of those losses; how I would ever get to the other side of the cavern of the pain, of grief?

Well meaning people would tell me it just takes time. I have learned that "time doesn't heal" all wounds. I think time helps but it doesn't heal. Everything I read about significant life losses talked about "grief work." That didn't sound like I could just sit and wait and expect to begin to heal. Sometimes I felt that just putting one foot in front of the other took more energy and determination than I could even consider. I did discover that there were things I could do that really did make a difference in my healing.

I began reading stories of the experiences of others and their losses. In their stories they not only shared their experiences and feelings of loss and how they coped, but also their memories of the people who they lost. The stories made the people who had died bigger than their death. The stories gave hope that the last page of their loved one's life had not been written. The stories were a witness to who they were and the difference they had made. The stories kept their loved one's memories alive. I began to share my own experiences and memories of the people I had lost through writing about who they were and what their lives had meant. What I began to realize that sharing stories about the people I loved who had died was helping me come to incorporating the reality of my life without them. What it also did was give me the opportunity to give hope to others.

Sharing the stories of how one has traveled through their life, their unique experiences, life lessons and nuggets of wisdom can help get to the heart of what really matters. The listener and the teller gains a greater sense of purpose and direction for the journey of life. Through stories we can honor our loved ones who have died, find meaning, and a new awareness of what is really important. We can begin the climb to the "other side."

## **Donna Oiland Bio**

*Donna Oiland was the Director of the Lions Eye Bank (which eventually became SightLife) for 25 years leaving that position in 1997. In 2013 she retired from Evergreen Health as the Coordinator for Community Outreach for the Department of Spiritual care. She now spends her time as a "professional volunteer" working with groups focused on improving end of life care. She also has served as a guest lecturer, speaking on the topics of "Advanced Care Planning, The Serious Topic of Laughter" and the Power of Storytelling. Donna Oiland co-authored a book, "Legacy...Reflections Along the Way", an heirloom quality workbook to encourage storytelling.*