

PEOPLE

By Dane Anderson
Staff Writer

It is the merging of two stories that did not begin well. It is a new story of recovery from almost unimaginable grief, of hope and reawakening. It is the story of human spirit and love and second chances.

Two months before Westlake High School graduate Allison Daily's wedding in 1990, her brother committed suicide. When her marriage ended a few years later, Allison moved to Aspen, Colo. looking for escape in the natural beauty of the Rocky Mountain resort community.

In 1995, Art Daily, an Aspen attorney, was driving home from a pee-wee hockey game with his wife and their two young sons. While driving along I-70, a boulder fell from the cliffs of Glenwood Canyon, crushing the family's car. Art walked away from the accident unscathed; his family was killed instantly.

After the tragedy, Art received more than 400 letters from people offering support and condolences.

"It's amazing how people respond when something like this happens," he said. "They want to touch you. Most have a message or a story to tell that they think might help, and they just want to share."

Allison knew something about the pain and grief Art was going through. She wanted to do something, so she sent him an anonymous letter.

"In the letter, she said she was asking God to let her carry some of my pain, and she included a tape of songs she thought might help," Art said.

The letter touched a chord with Art at a time when not much was helping him get through the days. He wanted to find out who sent it.

Allison had left her letter with the post office, asking workers to get it to Art. Eventually, with postal help, Art tracked her down. He wrote her back and asked her to meet with him. It took a few days for Allison to answer the request.

"I had no idea how he could deal with the amount of pain he was in," Allison recalls. "The idea of talking to someone and being with someone in so much pain was something to really think about. I knew I was going to have to bring some very painful memories of my own to the table."

She met Art in a burger restaurant. They had no trouble getting a conversation started. They both remember that they talked that first night as if they had known each other a long time.

"We talked about what I had been through and the loss she had suffered," Art said. "We had a very strong common thread."

Allison felt as if she were helping.

"It was nice for Art to have someone to talk to who was comfortable with loss and wanted to talk about his family," she explained.

There was something about Allison that came across during that first meeting, Art said, something important. Within a year and a half, the couple married. They now have two sons – Rider, 12, and Burke, 11.

The Dailys offer up their story in the form of a new book on survival and hope for others experiencing great loss.

"'Out of the Canyon' is a truthful, brutal, lovingly told account as to how one man and his new partners in life can survive. This book is a teaching of the highest order," said Bob Rafelson, the director of "Five Easy Pieces."

"The story we have lived together and individually is a pretty extraordinary story," Art said. "It has miracles running all through it. We thought the story needed to be written down. We wanted our boys to know it. We were afraid, that with the passage of time, we would lose important parts."

Allison started writing the book during midnight sessions inspired by Art's first wife, Cathy. Art had a harder time getting into the writing process. Finally, he sat down one Saturday at home and tried to figure out where to start.

"I went right back to the canyon," he said. "The first few pages are pretty raw."

Art found he liked the process of writing. It brought a measure of closure to the deep grieving process he had been going through.

"I knew I couldn't really afford to close myself off or I would never fully live again," he said. "I found I could go back. I could be there again."

Through his memory and the recounting of his story, Art found he could be with his family again. There were tears, he said, but finally intense joy.

"I got to be closer to them than I had been able to be in years," he said. "It was all about the joy of being with them; I was reliving my love for them."

When you go through a hard loss, you don't know at first if it is going to kill you or not, Art said.

"You find out pretty quickly that it isn't," he said. "We are really powerful human beings. When something big happens to you, that's when you find out who you really are."

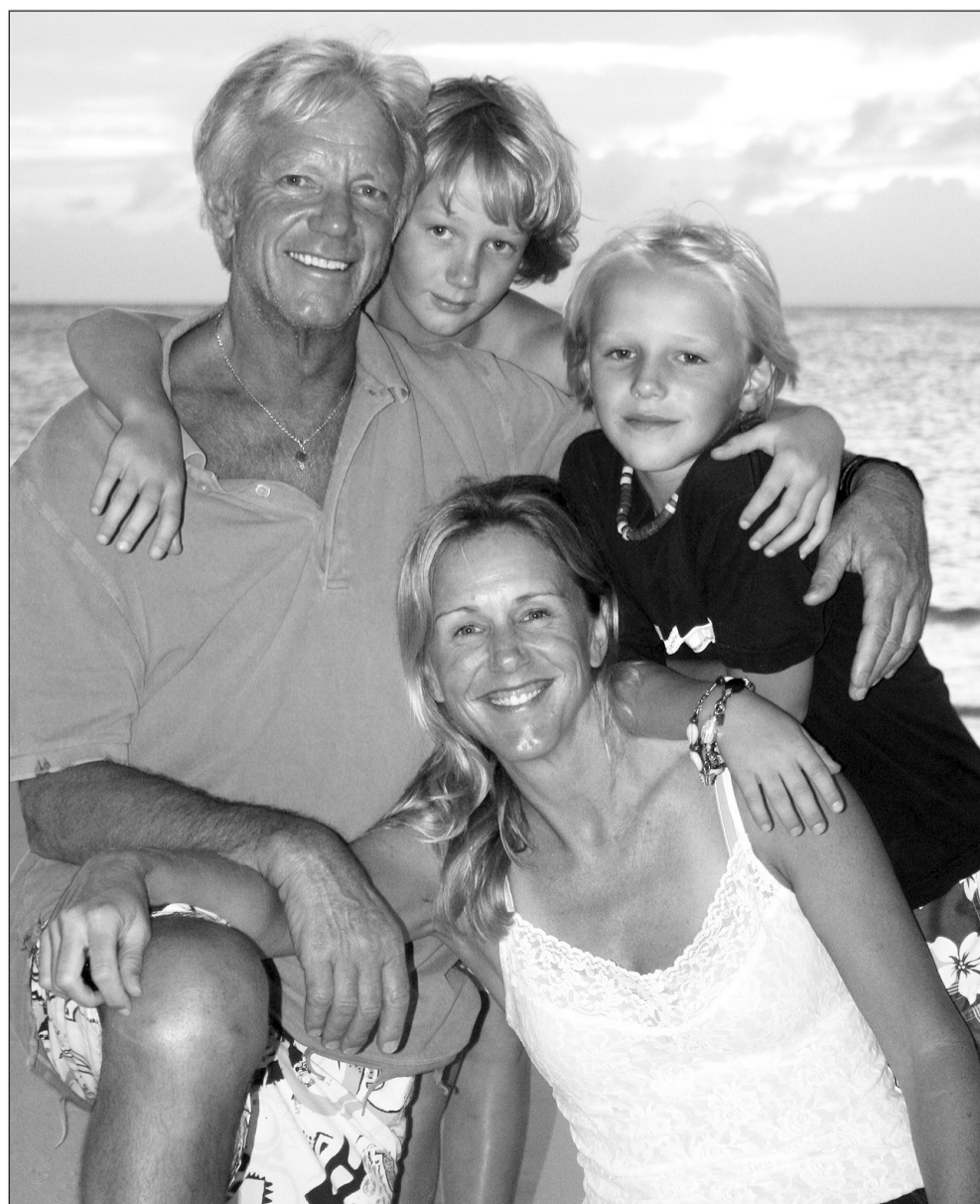
Art, an attorney with Holland and Hart, and Allison, a bereavement counselor at the Aspen Valley Hospi-

tal, want their story to help others.

"What I hope is that the book brings people hope for their own life," Art said. "I hope that they will come away knowing that they have the power to make a new life for themselves. That they can move on into great sunlight."



Westlake native, husband turn tragedy to triumph



Art and Allison Daily will visit BookPeople, 603 North Lamar, at 3 p.m. Saturday for a book signing.

Art and Allison Daily live in Aspen, Colo., with their two sons, Rider, 12 and Burke, 11.