

SEVEN STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVING THE LOSS OF YOUR SPOUSE

Everyone grieves differently. Everyone who becomes a widow or widower is at a different stage in their life, marriage, and family. Our lives are as different as the circumstances of the death. I wish you didn't have to walk this journey. It may seem impossible, but you can do it.

My husband died in 2019, and these are things I learned that I hope will make your first months and years easier.



YOUR LIFE IS NOT OVER

It will feel like it at times, but you will find a new rhythm, different love, and exciting new activities and hobbies.

ACCEPT HELP

Accepting help allows people to show you love and for you to receive love. People ask you how they can help, and you may have no idea. That is ok. Keep a list – on your phone or a notepad in your kitchen – and then hit them up later. The first person who asked if she could help me was a neighbor I had met only once. I assigned her the task of telling our neighborhood why the emergency vehicles were at my house the previous day so I wouldn't have to have that conversation over and over. She did it!

ASK FOR HELP

Two weeks after Eric died it was raining, inside my house! That window Eric had procrastinated on fixing hadn't magically fixed itself. I looked at my list of people who had offered to help and texted my neighbor who is a contractor. He was at my house in under an hour with a ladder, a tarp, and a smile. He thanked me for letting him help.

PLAN



There are a lot of firsts and seconds coming up. Christmas, birthdays, anniversaries, all kinds of special times. Begin thinking about them early, and discuss your thoughts with your trusted close ones. How do you want to handle all the traditions and memories? Will the traditions continue? It is ok if you want to run away to your sister's or Mexico for Christmas. Do it. I ran away from my first Thanksgiving. It was Eric's favorite holiday. He did all the cooking. We were planning to eat on our brand-new custom-built reclaimed barn wood dining table he ordered that was delivered after he died. Instead, I took the kids and joined my aunt and uncle at a fancy Thanksgiving dinner while we watched the city's Christmas lights turn on. I cried and drank way too much, but I was so relieved it wasn't at that long table with an overcooked turkey and crying children.

DO NEW THINGS



It is so important to be brave and try new adventures. You need to grow the muscles that help you try new things. At first, I said yes to anyone who asked me for coffee or lunch. I was often comatose but it was better than being comatose alone. Later, I joined a new yoga studio where no one knew my husband had died. These and other little new things helped me be braver. Later, in year two, my adventures became bigger. I joined a hiking club, started a small group at church, and earned a wine certificate from Cornell University. As my normal married life shrunk and disappeared (I know, that still feels like a punch to my stomach), my new life of being single expanded. I now see the blessing in the shrinking and expansion at the same time. Each week, I stepped out a little, and one day I woke up and I didn't feel like the grieving widow any longer.

FIND A WIDOW TRIBE



There is absolutely nothing like sitting with someone who has walked in your shoes. Check your church or Google grief groups nearby. You will come upon friends of friends who lost their love too. Call them! Grab hold of them. Many times, after your mate dies, your longtime couple's friends feel different. Sometimes your old friends let you down and don't support you like you expected they would. You may feel so left out. Create your new tribe of widows and widowers and you will find support.

MOVE YOUR BODY



Your body grieves along with your heart and mind. I walked, trudged actually, each day. I became obsessed with getting my 10,000 steps because it was a great outlet for my grief. I walked every day, sometimes with a girlfriend, and sometimes with my favourite podcasters. My new yoga studio helped me heal, yoga and grief are closely joined. I used to cry during class and run out the door to my car so no one could ask me if I was ok!



TAKE A DEEP BREATH AND LIVE EACH DAY. THERE ARE NO MISTAKES, JUST CHANCES TO GROW. YOU CAN DO THIS!