

THE NEXT STEP

A Mountain Valley Hospice & Palliative Care Publication

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Dating & Remarriage: When Is It Okay after the Death of a Spouse?

Patricia Morris, Bereavement Coordinator (Stuart, VA)

I'd like to share a love story with you. A gentleman lovingly cared for his wife for several years. Her illness slowly took over. His life centered on the care he provided for her. Never did I ever hear a complaint from him as he cared for his wife. He still thought she was the most beautiful woman in the world and counted it a pleasure to care for her at home. He was so devoted to her. He made sure that she had all she needed to be comfortable.

But her disease took her to her heavenly home.

Yes, he grieved deeply for her. He received bereavement

services and actively participated in the services offered.

Months later, he became friends with a lady friend whom he had known all his life. She, too, had lost a spouse. They started seeing each other as friends and enjoyed each other's company. After several months, they married.

Never would I question his love for his first wife. I was glad he found someone he could spend the rest of his life with. He has so much love to give and enjoys being active with his new wife.

This story is not specific to one person. It is a story that I



have actually seen several times as I have been a part of hospice – honestly! While not for everyone, some people do find love a second time, and they embrace it.

During the last several years, I have been blessed to listen to many widows and widowers. Often, we

talk about the hard work of grief and learning to live alone. Sometimes, people express anger as they tell me about friends who have tried to set them up with someone after their spouse has been gone for less than six months. Friends are well-meaning but often misguided in thinking that you should start dating. Over the years, I've assisted many people with bereavement who went on to marry again. The decision to start dating and/or marry again is one that only you can make.

A good question to ask
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A Different Kind of Valentine's Day

Rhonda Smith, Social Worker (Hillsville, VA)

Most people would recognize Thanksgiving and Christmas as difficult holidays to get through after the loss of a spouse or significant other, and they undoubtedly are. These holidays, along with special days such as birthdays and anniversaries, can trigger memories that cause difficult emotions for those who are grieving. However, one holiday that is often overlooked is Valentine's Day. For a new widow or widower, the day that seems reserved for couples only can be especially hard.

Just when the Christmas trees and decorations are

being taken down in stores, the Valentine's cards, flowers, and candy are coming out. You may want to forget the day, but our culture makes it difficult to avoid. It's a tough holiday to escape, and it's a little different than the others.

Perhaps there is a fear that acknowledging Valentine's Day at all and starting new traditions is somehow disloyal to your loved one who has passed. It is normal to feel that way. However, letting go of those traditions doesn't mean forgetting your spouse or significant other. Starting something new

simply means you are choosing to keep the memories, leave behind the sorrow, and allow love to be expressed in new ways.

In the book *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom, Boom's father says to her, "Do you know what hurts so very much? It's love. Love is the strongest force in the world, and when it is blocked, that means pain. There are two things we can do when this happens. We can kill the love so that it stops hurting. But then of course part of us dies, too. Or, we can ask God to open up another

route for that love to travel." Of course he wasn't talking about forgetting the original love; he was speaking about opening our hearts to different ways of spreading love.

On a day that was probably designated to traditions with the one you loved deeply, it may be hard to start something new. It may even be hard to receive something new. While it's true that you won't celebrate the same way you always have, Valentine's Day doesn't have to be about romantic

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Dating & Remarriage cont.

when deciding if you should start dating is, “Will I feel whole if I start a new relationship?” If you answer yes, then it is not time to start dating*. Have you ever heard the saying about being comfortable in your own skin? Being ready to date and start a new relationship – no matter whether it results in marriage or not – should not be an effort to become “whole”. A person should feel comfortable with himself or herself first. Rushing into something will just result in an unfulfilling relationship.

Make a conscious decision to start dating. Don’t be afraid to let friends and relatives know your feelings if they are encouraging you to date when you do not feel ready. Some people will never feel ready, and that is okay. Think about



what you can contribute to the relationship, not what you need from having a relationship.

Do you feel guilty when you think about dating? It’s perfectly normal to feel some guilt at the thought of going out with someone and having fun. You may even feel a bit guilty at the beginning of a new relationship, but you are not betraying your loved one by dating again. For most of us, our marriage vows are

“until death do us part”. Many of you showed your love for your spouse, as you gave so much of yourself when you were caring for them while they were sick. Being a caregiver is hard work. It is humbling to see so many of you beautifully fulfill the “in sickness and in health” part of your marriage vows.

Remember, you have been grieving longer than you may think. Your grief started when your loved one was diagnosed with a terminal illness. You were grieving while you were caring for your spouse. Many people have told me that they cried a lot while their spouse was living, but did not cry after their spouse died. It is different for everyone.

Be aware that some friends and family members may not like if you decide to start

dating again. People may disapprove and be judgmental of when you start dating again. Only you truly know your relationship with your spouse who died. If you are at peace with dating again, then try not to let negative opinions bother you.

If you have found someone and are considering marriage, consider pre-marital counseling. Even though you may have had a successful first marriage, counseling can help make sure this new marriage starts with a firm foundation.

Consider your children, who may or may not be in favor of a marriage. Make sure documents such as your Will and Advance Directives are up to date. I often hear children talking about their parent’s second marriage and how the

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Ask the Staff: “Forgetfulness as a Symptom of Grief ”

Saundra Yates, Bereavement Coordinator (Mount Airy, NC)

Q: I keep forgetting things. For example, I can go from one room to another, needing to get something. But when I enter the latter room, in only a few seconds, I’ve already forgotten what I needed to get. Am I losing my mind?

A: Many people have asked this question. They become afraid, thinking that they are literally losing their mind because they can’t remember. Obviously, memory loss happens as we get older. However, when we are in grief, whatever was going on prior to the death usually intensifies. In essence, that means the problem – in this case, memory loss – will happen more frequently.

When people ask me this question, I try to reassure them that they are not losing their mind; rather, they are experiencing one of the many symptoms of loss and

grief. Some other symptoms that you may experience are a lack of concentration, sensitivity to noise, numbness, disbelief – and the list goes on.

It is very important to remember that there are three parts of each of us as individuals: spirit, soul, and body. It is also important to remember that whatever our soul – which is comprised of our mind, will, and emotions – is experiencing due to grief will also “seep” into our body. Thus, our body responds to what our mind tells it. That’s why there are times when someone will be going through grief, and they cannot get well physically. Their body is responding to the stress that accompanies grief. So, it is important for us to take care of our bodies when we are under a great amount of stress emotionally. What is not needed for grieving individuals is to become prey to

sickness, which just adds another layer of stress.

Thus, I often encourage grievers, if they are having difficulty remembering things, to keep a pad of paper and a pen with them to write down things that they are trying to accomplish that day. Also, it is important to make sure that you take care of yourself nutritionally and get the necessary rest during the journey of grief. If changes in appetite and sleep continue to be a problem, please consult with your primary care physician, so that they may assist in that process with a medication that will be temporary and help you “over the hurdle”, so to speak. Remember, grief is a journey, not a destination.

Have a question for Mountain Valley Hospice’s bereavement team? Email it to us at mtnvalleyhospice.org/forms/contact, and we may feature it in an upcoming newsletter.

The Photo Album of My Mind

Jeanne Losey

The photo album of my mind
Holds treasured thoughts of you.
I can almost see again
The things we used to do.

I hear your voice, I see your smile,
I feel you close to me.
The photo album of my mind
Shows how we used to be.

Time may have changed us
through the years,
But I will always find
You’re just as I remember in
The album of my mind.

As I turn page after page,
Such precious scenes I see.
The photo album of my mind
Is very dear to me.

It holds the pictures of our past,
Like reels of film unwind.
I cherish all those photos in
The album of my mind.

Bereavement Staff and Support Groups

Mount Airy, NC
336-789-2922
 Sandra Yates, M.Div. NCBF
 Josh Armstrong, BS
 Sarah Tweed, BSW
 Ben Webb, BA
 Fonda Younger, BS

Pilot Mountain, NC
336-368-1260
 Josh Armstrong, BS

Yadkinville, NC
336-679-2466
 Sarah Tweed, BSW

Elkin, NC
336-526-2650
 Lisa VanHorn, BS

Hillsville, VA
276-728-1030
 Bruce Thomas, M. Ed

Stuart, VA
276-694-4416
 Patricia Morris, BS, TRS

Mount Airy
 2nd Tuesday of every month
 9:00 a.m. Good Mourning with Fonda
 TBD (Call Fonda Younger for details.)

4th Tuesday of every month
 11:30 a.m. Fonda's Lunch Bunch
 Golden Corral

Elkin
 1st and 3rd Tuesday of every month
 10:00 a.m. "Living with Grief"
 Matty's Restaurant

1st Monday of every month
 7:00 p.m. "Transitioning to the New"
 Fairfield Inn

4th Monday of every month
 7:00 p.m. Prime Time with Lisa
 (Loss of spouse in one's 30s, 40s, and 50s)
 Fairfield Inn

Stuart
 3rd Wednesday of every month
 1:30 p.m. Support with Patricia
 Stuart United Methodist Church

Wilkesboro
 1st and 3rd Monday of every month
 2:00 p.m. Listening with Lisa
 Rose Glen Village

Yadkinville
 1st Thursday of every month
 11:30 a.m. Sharing with Sarah
 Ace's Restaurant

Hillsville
 3rd Thursday of every month
 11:30 a.m. Moments with Bruce
 Hillsville Office

Valentine's Day cont.

love, and it doesn't have to be a holiday exclusively for couples. It provides a great opportunity to express your love and show appreciation to those around you. Perhaps more importantly, it is about receiving love and appreciation from those around you. What better day to show your friends and family how much they mean to you while allowing them to do the same for you? Maybe the saying is true that the more love you give, the more love you feel.

Starting new traditions with your family could be a great way for you to remember your loved one. Write down your favorite Valentine's memories of your

significant other and share those memories with your family. Make homemade cards and cookies for nursing home residents as a good way to remind them of their favorite childhood Valentine's Day memories.

Whatever new tradition you start this year, remember that your memories are a gift to you. Allow yourself to receive them this year, while opening your heart to new expressions of love. The goal is not to leave behind the memories, but to share the love that will always be with you.

Dating & Remarriage cont.

estate is handled. Children have a much harder time trying to cope with their grief when they are dealing with stepfamily members who do not get along. Make your children a part of the process. Gather their support and let them know how the marriage will affect them. You don't just marry a person, you marry their family. Consider the family dynamics, and make sure your children are protected.

Whether or not you date again is a decision only you can make. Weigh your reasons for wanting to date and what you can contribute to a new relationship. If you have any

specific questions or concerns, please call your bereavement coordinator.

**For more information, read Through a Season of Grief by Bill Dunn and Kathy Leonard.*



GriefShare.org offers daily emails to help one through the grieving process.

Mountain Valley Hospice & Palliative Care Bereavement Services

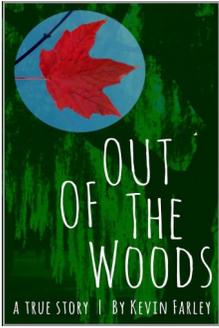
Following a patient's death, Mountain Valley provides specialized grief support services to help loved ones cope with their loss. These services are provided as part of hospice care for 13 months, at no cost to the recipient, and include:

- Grief counseling and education
- Face-to-face/phone sessions
- Monthly support groups
- Monthly newsletter

Community support is also available for bereaved individuals whose loved ones were not in hospice care.

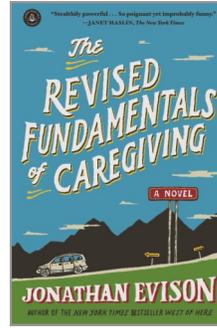
For questions and comments, contact Mountain Valley Hospice at 336-789-2922 or 888-789-2922, or mtnvalleyhospice.org.

Now available at the
Grief Resources section of the **Mount Airy Public Library:**



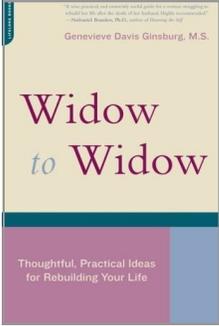
Out of the Woods
 Kevin Farley

A widowed father recounts how a summer production of Stephen Sondheim’s dark fairy tale musical *Into the Woods* helped him and his six-year-old daughter confront seven years of unresolved grief.



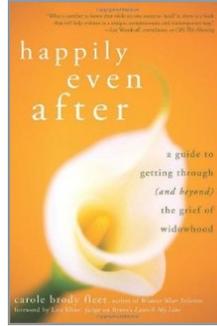
The Revised Fundamentals of Caregiving
 Jonathan Evison

Evison wrote *Caregiving* as catharsis for his sister’s death. In the celebrated novel, Ben Benjamin has lost virtually everything. Desperate for a job, he becomes a caregiver to 19-year-old Trev, who is in the advanced stages of Duchenne muscular dystrophy.



Widow to Widow
 Genevieve Davis Ginsburg

Inspired by her own experiences, therapist Genevieve Davis Ginsburg advises individuals how to rebuild one’s life after the death of a spouse, from traveling and eating alone to surviving holidays.



Happily Even After
 Carole Brody Fleet

Following her critically-acclaimed *Widows Wear Stilettos*, Fleet once again assists widows with *Happily Even After*. The book touches on such topics as being a single parent, re-entering the workplace and eventually re-entering the world of dating, love and intimacy.

Books and videos may be borrowed at any of the
 Northwestern Regional libraries in Alleghany, Stokes, Surry, and Yadkin counties.

Return Service Requested

