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The Monthly Haven

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Addressing the Needs of LGBT Widow/Widowers



Heterosexual and lgbt widow/widowers have many things in common.

They have both experienced the pain of losing their significant other.

They both face the need to create a new life for themselves as single women or man in a coupled world.

Both find that those who have not been widowed themselves do not really understand how incredibly painful the experience is. Likewise, others do not understand the length of time it takes to grieve.

Despite these commonalities, however, there are significant ways they differ from the heterosexual.

One has to do with the nature of the relationship itself. Women in general are more relationship focused than men, Men in general are more relationship-focused than women, and lgbt relationship involves the intense connectedness of two women or two men.

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Women in general are more relationship-focused than men, Men in general are more relationship-focused than women, and lgbt relationship involves the intense connectedness of two women or two men.

Having to deal regularly with heterosexism and homophobia can also draw lgbt partners closer together. Thus, the loss of a partner profoundly shakes the survivors' world and sense of self.

Lesbian widows and Gay widowers encounter hassles with the legal system that straight men or women do not face. Because lgbt relationships are not legally recognized in all states. Nineteen states plus Washington DC have made gay marriage fully legal, while 31 States Ban Same-Sex Marriage.

Even if her partner left a will and signed over power of attorney to them, they may be denied legal and financial rights automatically accorded to heterosexual widows.

The loss of a "friend" is not accorded equal status with the loss of a husband in our society, the legitimacy of the relationship itself unacknowledged. While a heterosexual widow may receive cards and words of comfort from colleagues and neighbors, lgbt who are not out at work or in their community for fear of losing their job or housing will not receive such support.

In addition, organizations currently providing bereavement groups automatically offer support services to married widows and widowers while very few groups exist for them, and then only in large cities. Even health services working solely with lgbt rarely offer such groups. Yet talking to other widowed is considered one of the most effective ways to cope with grief.

Many books address the needs of heterosexual widows not many are dedicated solely to lgbt widowed. In the absence of professional and written support services, many will turn to their friends, family, and/or the local lgbt community for support.

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There are complications to doing so, however. Even the most supportive family and friends do not necessarily understand the grief process or how to be supportive. Few lgbt health services offer widow support groups. And those not well-connected to their local community suffer in isolation, the worst way to face the grief recovery process.

The lgbt widowed needs support for a grief process that involves reconstructing meaning of his or her experience. (Helping widows develop rituals, memorials, and ways of coping with anniversary dates are part of that meaning-making process.

Unlike heterosexual widows, however, family is not necessarily where they find support. They may need skills for responding to inappropriate or unhelpful remarks made by others.

Dealing with legal and financial hassles due to their legally unrecognized relationship adds another layer of loss to the lgbt widowed grief process.

Although there are some commonalties between lgbt and heterosexual widowed, lgbt face unique challenges.

The relationship between two women or two men is generally more intense than between a man and a woman, and homophobia and heterosexism in society tend to draw lgbt partners even closer together.

Thus the loss of a partner shatters their world. In addition, they encounter hassles with the legal system because their relationship may not be recognized as a legal marriage in one of the states that doesn't recognize it.

Lgbt who are not "out" at work or to their families won't have the seriousness of their loss validated by others. Few professional resources are available for lgbt widowed, and well-meaning friends or family may not understand how to be supportive.

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19 States Have Legal Same-Sex Marriage

8 by Court Decision:

California (June 28, 2013), Connecticut (Nov. 12, 2008), Iowa (Apr. 24, 2009), Massachusetts (May 17, 2004), New Jersey (Oct. 21, 2013), New Mexico (Dec. 19, 2013), Oregon (May 19, 2014), Pennsylvania May 20, 2014)

8 by State Legislature:

Delaware (July 1, 2013), Hawaii (Dec. 2, 2013), Illinois (June 1, 2014), Minnesota (Aug. 1, 2013), New Hampshire (Jan. 1, 2010), New York (July 24, 2011), Rhode Island (Aug. 1, 2013), Vermont (Sep. 1, 2009)

3 by Popular Vote:

Maine (Dec. 29, 2012), Maryland (Jan. 1, 2013), Washington (Dec. 9, 2012)

Washington, DC legalized gay marriage on Mar. 3, 2010; the date marriage licenses became available to same-sex couples.



31 States Ban Same-Sex Marriage

26 by Constitutional Amendment and State Law:

Alabama (2006, 1998), Alaska (1998, 1996), Arizona (2008, 1996), Arkansas (2004, 1997), Colorado (2006, 2000), Florida (2008, 1997), Georgia (2004, 1996), Idaho (2006, 1996), Kansas (2005, 1996), Kentucky (2004, 1998), Louisiana (2004, 1999), Michigan (2004, 1996), Mississippi (2004, 1997), Missouri (2004, 1996), Montana (2004, 1997), North Carolina (2012, 1995), North Dakota (2004, 1997), Ohio (2004, 2004), Oklahoma (2004, 1996), South Carolina (2006, 1996), South Dakota (2006, 1996), Tennessee (2006, 1996), Texas (2005, 1997), Utah (2004, 1997), Virginia (2006, 1997)

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2 by Constitutional Amendment only:
Nebraska (2000), Nevada (2002),
Wisconsin (2006)

3 by State Law only:
Indiana (1997), West Virginia (2000),
Wyoming (2003)

12 states where gay marriage bans have
been overturned, but where appeals are in
progress.

ARKANSAS – On May 9, 2014, Arkansas' gay marriage ban was ruled unconstitutional by Pulaski County Circuit Judge Chris Piazza. Arkansas had previously banned gay marriage by both state law and voter-approved constitutional amendment. Some Arkansas counties began issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples on May 10, 2014, while other counties refused to issue licenses. Arkansas Attorney General Dustin McDaniel requested that the State Supreme Court put a stay on Judge Piazza's ruling, but the request was denied on May 14, 2014. The Supreme Court effectively halted gay marriages from taking place, however, by noting that while Judge Piazza's ruling had struck down both the constitutional amendment and the state law, it had not affected an additional state law prohibiting county clerks from issuing same-sex marriage licenses.

456 licenses had been issued in total. On May 15, 2014, Judge Piazza expanded his ruling to strike down the additional law and any other measures that made gay marriage illegal, but on May 16, 2014 the State Supreme Court suspended that ruling, halting all gay marriages within the state.

COLORADO – On July 9, 2014, Colorado District Court Judge C. Scott Crabtree struck down the state's gay marriage ban but immediately stayed his own ruling, pending appeal. Judge Crabtree stated that the ban violates the due process and equal protection guarantees in the US Constitution. One Colorado county clerk had already been issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples since June 25, 2014, following the US 10th Circuit Court of Appeals ruling that found Utah's gay marriage ban unconstitutional (Colorado is in the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals' jurisdiction). The Colorado attorney general's office filed a federal lawsuit to stop Boulder County Clerk and Recorder Hillary Hall from issuing the licenses, but on July 10, 2014, Boulder District Court Judge Andrew Hartman ruled that Hall could continue because the state's gay marriage ban was "hanging on by a thread."

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Within hours of Judge Hartman's ruling, Denver's county clerk joined Hall in issuing licenses to same-sex couples, but was ordered to stop eight days later by the Colorado Supreme Court. On July 29, the state Supreme Court ordered Boulder County to stop issuing licenses also.

FLORIDA – On July 17, 2014, Monroe County Circuit Judge Luis M. Garcia struck down Florida's voter-approved ban on same-sex marriage, stating that "it is our country's proud history to protect the rights of the individual, the rights of the unpopular and the rights of the powerless, even at the cost of offending the majority." The ruling applies only to Monroe County (location of the Florida Keys), and although Judge Garcia initially said marriage licenses could be issued beginning on July 22, 2014, an automatic stay was put on the decision when Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi filed notice that the state would appeal. On July 21, 2014, Judge Garcia denied a request by the plaintiffs that he lift the stay and allow the marriages to go ahead. On July 25, Miami-Dade County Circuit Court

July 25, Miami-Dade County Circuit Court Judge Sarah Zabel ruled that the state's gay marriage ban is unconstitutional, stating that "It serves only to hurt, to discriminate, to deprive same-sex couples and their families of equal dignity, to label and treat them as second-class citizens, and to deem them unworthy of participation in one of the fundamental institutions of our society." Judge Zabel stayed her decision pending appeal.

IDAHO – On May 13, 2014, a federal judge struck down Idaho's ban on gay marriage, saying it violates the constitutional guarantee of equal protection under the law. US District Magistrate Candy Dale's ruling was set to go into effect on May 16, 2014, but the US Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals issued a temporary hold on Judge Dale's ruling on May 15, 2014.

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INDIANA – On June 25, 2014, US District Judge Richard Young found that Indiana's same-sex marriage ban violates the equal protection clause in the US Constitution. Some Indiana counties began issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples almost immediately, while others held off, waiting for further guidance. The state appealed Judge Young's decision to the US 7th Circuit Court of Appeals, which issued a stay on the ruling on June 27, 2014, leaving the status of several hundred marriages performed before the stay in limbo. On July 7, 2014, Mark G. Ahearn, General Counsel to Indiana Governor Mike Pence, confirmed that the state will not recognize marriages performed before the stay, with one exception. The state will comply with a ruling by the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals that it recognize the out-of-state marriage of two plaintiffs in the case, Amy Sandler and Niki Quasney, because Quasney is battling stage four ovarian cancer.

KENTUCKY – On July 1, 2014, US District Judge John G. Heyburn II ruled that Kentucky's constitutional amendment banning gay marriage violates the equal protection clause in the US Constitution. Judge Heyburn stated that the ban serves "no conceivable legitimate purpose," but stayed his own decision, pending the state's appeal to the 6th US Circuit Court of Appeals.

MICHIGAN – On Mar. 21, 2014, a federal judge ruled Michigan's gay marriage ban unconstitutional. US District Judge Bernard Friedman wrote that "Today's decision... affirms the enduring principle that regardless of whoever finds favor in the eyes of the most recent majority, the guarantee of equal protection must prevail." Around 300 same-sex couples received marriage licenses before the US 6th Court of Appeals issued a stay on the decision on Mar. 22, 2014, making same-sex marriage illegal again in Michigan, pending the appeal process. On Mar. 28, 2014, US Attorney General Eric Holder stated that the marriages performed prior to the stay being issued would be recognized by the federal government: "These families will be eligible for all relevant federal benefits on the same terms as other same-sex marriages."

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OKLAHOMA – US District Judge Terence C. Kern struck down Oklahoma's gay marriage ban as unconstitutional on Jan. 14, 2014, stating that the ban is "an arbitrary, irrational exclusion of just one class of Oklahoma citizens from a governmental benefit" and that it is based on "moral disapproval." The judge stayed his decision pending an appeal to the US Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit. On July 18, 2014, a three-judge panel from the appellate court upheld the earlier ruling 2-1, with the majority agreeing that Utah's gay marriage ban is unconstitutional. The panel placed its ruling on hold pending a further appeal. The same panel overturned Utah's gay marriage ban on June 25, 2014.

TEXAS – On Feb. 26, 2014, a federal judge ruled Texas' gay marriage ban unconstitutional. Judge Orlando Garcia wrote "Without a rational relation to a legitimate governmental purpose, state-imposed inequality can find no refuges in our U.S. Constitution." He then stayed his own decision pending appeal to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, leaving same-sex marriage illegal in Texas.

UTAH – Gay marriage became legal in Utah on Dec. 20, 2013, when US District Judge Robert Shelby ruled that the state's gay marriage ban was unconstitutional. More than 1,300 same-sex couples were married before the US Supreme Court put a stay on the decision 17 days later, pending the state's appeal to overturn the ruling. On June 25, 2014, a three judge panel of the US 10th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld Judge Shelby's decision that the gay marriage ban was unconstitutional, but immediately stayed its own ruling pending further appeals by the state of Utah. On July 9, 2014, Utah Attorney General Sean Reyes announced that he will next appeal directly to the US Supreme Court. In the meantime, the Supreme Court ruled on July 18, 2014 that Utah does not have to recognize the same-sex marriages that took place between Dec. 20, 2013 and Jan. 6, 2014 while the appeals process continues.

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VIRGINIA – On Feb. 13, 2014, US District Judge Arenda L. Wright Allen ruled Virginia's gay marriage ban unconstitutional, stating that the United States has "arrived upon another moment in history when *We the People* becomes more inclusive, and our freedom more perfect." The judge stayed her decision pending appeal. On July 28, 2014, a three-judge panel of the US Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld Judge Wright Allen's decision by a two to one vote. The court has jurisdiction over Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia. The ruling is on hold for 21 days to allow the appeals process to proceed.

WISCONSIN – On June 6, 2014, US District Judge Barbara Crabb struck down Wisconsin's same-sex marriage ban as being unconstitutional. While some Wisconsin counties began issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples immediately, others turned couples away, waiting for further guidance from courts or the state government before granting licenses. The state appealed Judge Crabb's decision to the 7th US Circuit Court of Appeals, and Wisconsin Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen requested an emergency stay to prevent further marriages from taking place. On June 13, 2014, after more than

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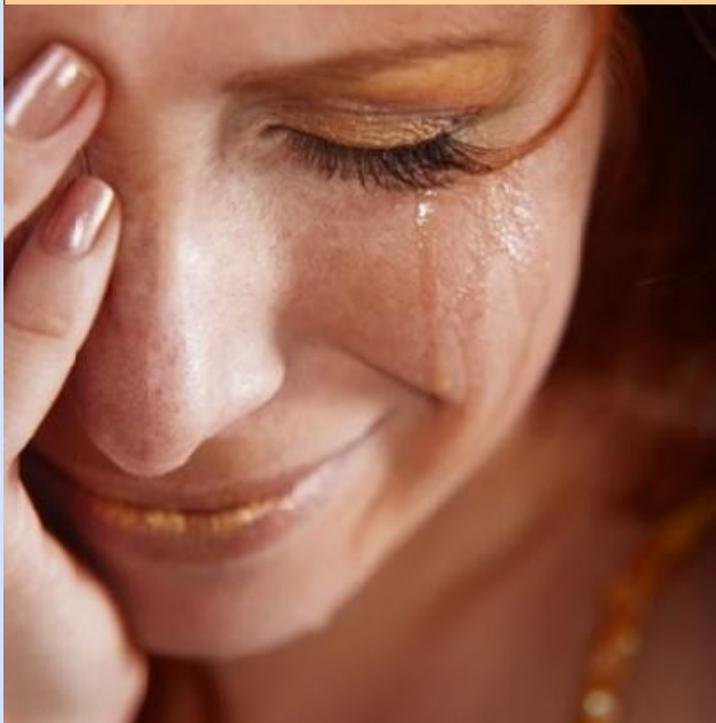
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Summertime Grief - Lonely, Alone and Solitude



One of the most common grief reactions is feeling lonely. Someone with whom you have shared your happy, sad, and just-the-ordinary moments dies and you may feel lonely, no matter how many others are around you. Lonesome, as you watch neighbors pack the car for vacation or when you receive the “wish you were here” cards from the places you used to enjoy. It is a feeling we don’t often talk about but just can’t shake after a death. Feelings are not to be avoided.

Can alone times be enriched? Can it become solitude? Creating an alone place in your home may become a part of self care that will be rewarding for you.

Keep it simple, uncluttered, and comfortable. Take a regular break to go there for praying and meditation, reading poems or whatever inspires you. You might try creating a mantra that resonates with you like “grant me peace”, “I shall survive”, or “we shall overcome.” Say it several times to yourself. You might also try talking to your loved one or writing a letter to them. Or you may try writing a conversation in which you talk to your spouse and then write his or her answers.

Summer is time for fun and vacation, time away from jobs and ordinary tasks of life. The beach calls or the mountains come to mind, a cool retreat from work. Yet this year may be different for many who are grieving the death of a loved one. Family vacation is often meeting time forgetting together with Mom and Dad or taking time off and spending it with your spouse and the kids. But what happens when the summer vacation time arrives and you find yourself alone for the first time? If not completely alone, you may still have the lonely feeling of loss.

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Summertime Grief - Lonely, Alone and Solitude

There may be a season, day of the week, or time of day that is most lonely for you. Prepare for it by listing things you can do: ask a friend to go to church with you, call someone just to talk, visit a local park, check for local baseball games you can attend. Just getting outdoors can help to fill in those spaces in our lives when we are alone. Try doing something on your own and make it special by dressing up, fixing a nice meal, sitting at the table instead of eating in front of the TV. If a friend or family member can't attend an event with you, try it on your own.

A woman whose spouse died found it easier to drive to her hometown for a summer vacation because she knew she would be met there by old friends and family. Driving alone was a challenge but simply putting her husband's hat on the seat of the car next to her gave her enough feeling of connection to make it tolerable. She planned a route that would give her breaks to get out, walk, stretch and enjoy the scenery along the way.

She was determined not to miss out on her summer vacation. You too may find that the anticipation is more difficult than the actual event. You too may want the old familiar feeling of joy.

Trust the process of grief, take time to be with all your feelings. Notice the difference between alone and lonely. Find your ways of creating a pleasant solitude during the days ahead.

“Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we are not alone.”

— Fred Rogers —

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Summertime Grief



For many people the warm, sunny days of summer bring some relief to the cold, dark feelings of grief. Through the winter the days are so grey and frigid, the snow so menacing, that we find it difficult to leave the house. We are stranded with our grief, unable to get out and be with other people, or even to just take a walk around the block. The bitter temperatures and the dreary skies seem only to reinforce the feelings of sadness and loneliness that grip our hearts.

When the weather finally takes a turn for the better and we are able to get outside, to be more active, to visit with friends and family, and to simply soak in the summer sun, we start to feel lighter, more hopeful.

It is almost as though our hearts and souls begin to bloom right along with the tulip bulbs.

Summer, however, like every season in grief, can also bring along with it some new challenges in our grief journey. The summer, so full of possibilities for fun and excitement, may also serve to remind us that our loved one is not here to enjoy it with us. So often in grief the things that we used to look forward to, taking walks, planting flowers, going for ice cream, watching the fireworks, seem less exciting or even painful without our loved one. Even if we are still able to enjoy these things they may be shaded grey by the deep loss and longing that we carry in our hearts. In some ways there is some comfort in the winter when the weather outside matches our feelings inside. The summer brings feeling of discord, there is fun and happiness on the outside, but we still feel sad, dark, and lonely on the inside.

I have found in my conversations with the bereaved that grief is full of these times of conflicting emotions. There are many moments when you smile and laugh at the memory of your loved one, and feel sad and tearful at the same time.

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Summertime Grief

You may feel a sense of success in learning to do for yourself something that your loved one used to do, but also frustration that you even have to learn. You may feel relieved to make it through a day without crying, but at the same time feel guilty and worry that you are forgetting your loved one. Grief is not about black and white emotions, distinct, separate feelings that you feel one at a time. Grief is deep; there are layers, contrasts and conflicts, ups and downs.

The best way to approach this tension is to embrace the feelings as they come, however messy and conflicted they might be. Your grief journey is your own, and no one should judge you for your feelings. This also means that we should not judge ourselves for how we feel, since we are often the ones setting up the unrealistic expectations for our grief. If you have times of joy, allow yourself to feel them, and if there is sadness underneath, feel that too. Not being afraid to accept all of our feelings, the whole untidy jumble of them, helps us to learn about ourselves and to better understand our grief



Warm Summer Sun
By Mark Twain

Warm summer sun,
Shine kindly here,
Warm southern wind,
Blow softly here.
Green sod above,
Lie light, lie light.
Good night, dear heart,
Good night, good night.

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Coping with Sudden Death



In both sudden death and anticipated death, there is pain. However, while the grief is not greater in sudden death, the capacity to cope is diminished. Grievers are shocked and stunned by the sudden loss of their loved one. The loss is so disruptive that recovery almost always is complicated. This because the adaptive capacities are so severely assaulted and the ability to cope is so critically injured that functioning is seriously impaired. Grievers are overwhelmed.

If you are such a griever, you probably are suffering extreme feelings of bewilderment, anxiety, self-reproach, and depression, and you may be unable to continue normal life. You had no preparation and no time to gradually absorb the reality that the world was about to change dramatically.

Instead, there was a sudden destruction of the world you used to know. There was no gradual transition, nor time to make changes in yourself, your expectations about your life, or your world. In sudden death you are called upon to face a massive gap between the way the world should be, with your loved one alive, and the way the world is. The person whom you loved, and who provided you with security, is taken away without any warning. This is a major violation of your expectations. Your sense of the world and of control is assaulted. This is not to say that these issues are not confronted by those whose loved one's death was anticipated. The difference is that they have had a valuable period of anticipation that placed the death in the context of events that were predictable and made sense. Although they experienced pain when their loved one died, they could see what caused the death. Ideally, they had been preparing for the death and dealing with their feelings about it. They were able to finish unfinished business with their loved one, to say "I love you," and to do the things they wanted to do for the person before they died.

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Coping with Sudden Death

While there certainly are many problems and emotional demands associated with losing a loved one in an anticipated death, at least when the death comes, the griever's coping capacities have been directed toward dealing with that expectable end.

The loss makes sense.

After a sudden death, the loss doesn't make sense. The critically important understanding of what happened is missing. The sudden shock of losing someone we love without warning so stuns us that we cannot comprehend what has transpired. Consequently, if your loved one died suddenly, you may be unable to grasp the situation and find it difficult to understand the implications of the loss. Accepting that the death occurred can be difficult, even if you intellectually recognize that it happened. The death may continue to seem inexplicable for a long period of time. You repeatedly will have to go over the story of the accident or of the heart attack to try to make sense of the loss after the fact.

Because you were not prepared for the death and it had no understandable context, you will try to deal with your lack of anticipation by putting the loss into a series of events.

You may find yourself looking back at the time leading up to the death and searching for clues that could have indicated what was to come.

For example, one woman looked back on the days preceding her husband's sudden fatal heart attack and "perceived" warnings she had missed initially. This tendency to reconstruct events in your mind in order to allow for some anticipation of the death is quite common. It is an attempt to restructure what happened so that it seems you had some inkling that the death was going to occur: "He really didn't look that good in the last few weeks as I look back on at now" or "You know, he was visiting his sisters whom he had not seen in a long time. Maybe he knew that something would happen." This retrospective construction of events makes the situation more manageable. It gives a perception of logical progression, of control and predictability, and retrospectively provides you with some anticipation and preparation.

However, problems arise when you hold yourself responsible for not perceiving cues that were actually either imperceptible or nonexistent prior to the death.

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Coping with Sudden Death

Frequently grievors react emotionally and respond to what they perceive as unmet responsibility. One woman felt inordinate guilt for many years for not recognizing that her mother had been having some difficulty climbing the stairs. After her mother died suddenly from a burst aneurysm, the daughter felt that she should have recognized the mother's impairment and known that it meant that something was wrong with her. However, unless this woman had been a physician and had run tests on her mother, there really was no way she could have known.

For survivors whose loved ones die suddenly, grief symptoms tend to persist longer. The physical and emotional shock that is a normal part of acute grief appears to be more intense and long-lasting. This may further demoralize you as you are trying to understand what happened to you and to cope with a drastically altered world, in addition to dealing with your feelings of loss and grief. You have the same grief tasks as all mourners, but you must cope with extra stresses that leave you relatively more depleted and disadvantaged.

If you have lost a loved one from sudden death, you know that you had no chance to say good-bye and no opportunity

to finish unfinished business with your loved one. Most probably these are major issues for you. The lack of time to bring this important relationship to a positive close causes much anguish to those of us whose loved ones die without warning. We wish that we could have known in order to say and do what we wanted to; we wish we could have just one more brief moment with our loved one to tell them we loved them, apologize for ways we might have hurt them, explain why we treated them the way we did, or let them know what they meant to us.

You may feel a profound loss of security and confidence in the world. After all, you have been taught a dramatic lesson: Loved ones can be snatched away without warning. You may always await another loss to befall. Research has shown that widows whose husbands died suddenly are slower to move toward remarriage, since they are unwilling to risk future unanticipated loss again for themselves and their children.

Avoidance and anxiety eventually can lead to states of anxious withdrawal since the world has become such a frightening, unpredictable place.

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Coping with Sudden Death

In some ways, the consequences of losing a loved one to sudden death can last a lifetime. While for some mourners this can be evidenced in chronic grief or persistent anxiety in which security and confidence never totally return, for others the consequences are less dramatic, though no less powerful. The best example I can give of this is a personal one. All of the deaths in my husband's life have been anticipated deaths. When I am a little late returning from work my husband automatically assumes that I have been held up on the telephone or have run overtime with my clients. Unless I am dramatically late, he is not unduly disturbed and assumes I will be home soon. In contrast, I have a much different response when he is later than expected. This is because all of the important deaths in my life have been sudden, unexpected ones. As a consequence when he is later than usual I automatically assume that something terrible has happened. I experience a considerable amount of apprehension. What makes me different from someone who has not worked so hard on these issues is that I will not immediately jump to call the hospitals or the police. I will remind myself that statistically the chances are that he is all right and that there are reasons for his delay. Nevertheless, I am concerned.

Does this mean that I love my husband more than he loves me because I am more concerned when he is late? I think not. What it reveals is the scars of sudden death. I have been taught all too well that the people I love can be snatched from me without warning, and that death doesn't always happen to someone else.

This awareness that you can lose someone without warning does not have to be negative. It can prompt you to deal with your loved ones on a timely basis. It can help you not to put off until tomorrow those things you should say and do today. It may assist you in making sure you don't have too much unfinished business with the people you lose. If your loved one died from a sudden death, you know that tomorrow is promised to no one.

This awareness also can help you keep in mind what is important in life, so you don't get lost in trivial matters and lose sight of those things that are most important to you. It is an ironic but positive consequence of sudden death that it can make you appreciate life more than you ever would have if you had not undergone such a traumatic experience.

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Coping with Sudden Death

This does not mean that you would seek out such a loss in order to teach yourself such a lesson, but it does let you know that you can pull something meaningful out of such a tragedy.

When a boyfriend or girlfriend dies, does the grief mean less?



Unmarried companions can face the same grief

Unmarried companions can face the same grief and desolation that a husband or wife does at the loss of a partner. But the suffering of a girlfriend or boyfriend may be minimized by others, who assume it shouldn't last so long or hurt so deeply as in, "Well, they were only your boyfriend or girlfriend."

The "boyfriend \ girlfriend" label: "What do I call him or her now? They are not ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend because we never broke up, but he's also not my boyfriend."

"At least now you can move on and find someone else."

"Do not start any statement of sympathy with "at least."

"They think they're trying to help by minimizing the pain, but it doesn't affirm that you're hurting -- and that I respect that you're hurting,"

Grief is a normal, healthy response to a loss no matter the relationship, and things get murky if the depth of grieving becomes connected to how long a relationship endured or whether it was legally binding.

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*When a boyfriend or girlfriend dies,
does the grief mean less?*

Our culture also needs to eliminate the notion that grief ends. What's more helpful is learning to live with a loss: "Grieving helps us identify what we lost and express the love that we had."

Losing a unmarried partner in the public eye can mean a greater level of scrutiny and a heightened set of expectations.

The heightened attention happens in part because other people's pain is uncomfortable, even taboo. We want a clean, clear statement about the loss and reaction from the surviving half of a well known couple to sew up the narrative. Instead of trying to hurry the grieving process up or tiptoe around it, the public should allow people to grieve and speak in their own time.

There are practical matters, too. Some unmarried partners leave clear instructions on how to include loved ones in family decisions after their passing, such as a last will, while some do not. The latter can leave a boyfriend or girlfriend adrift.

It is helpful for a grieving partner when the family allows him or her in on decisions such as funeral planning. Those who have lost a partner make clear early on they want to be included in honoring their loved one.

Sometimes it helps to hold onto a tangible piece of a relationship.

If you can embrace or reclaim a ritual or special place, it's a way of feeling connected that's more active than just sitting alone, being sad.

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How Pets Mourn the Loss of a Companion



You may have seen the photo* taken at the funeral of Navy SEAL Jon Tumilson who died recently in Afghanistan.

The loss of a beloved pet is painful for any owner. But for a pet, the death of a person or other animal companion can be just as traumatic. Pets, like people, form strong attachments to family members whether canine, feline or human. If grief can be described as a huge sense of loss combined with the anxiety of trying to come to terms with that loss, then yes, pets do grieve.

Signs of grief in your pet

Pet grieving can be expressed both physically and psychologically. Bereaved pets may show symptoms similar to those of grieving adults or children. As every human reacts differently to grief, so every animal will react differently.

Both cats and dogs can suffer loss of appetite, disturbed sleep or a change in sleeping habits.

They can appear lethargic, listless or withdrawn. Dogs may lose interest in activities such as walks or play. Cats may groom excessively.

Some animals become overly clingy, not wishing to be separated from their owners, while others may distance themselves from family members.

Ways to help a grieving pet

- Stick to your pet's usual routine. Keep normal meal and walk times if possible.
- Try distracting your dog by taking him on outings, or for walks with other dog friends.
- Give your dog or cat lots of affection. Stroking or massaging can help soothe your animal.

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How Pets Mourn the Loss of a Companion

Ways to help a grieving pet

- Make grooming a part of your dog's daily routine; it will be comforting for both you and your pet.

If your pet has lost her appetite, provide some favorite foods to encourage her to eat. Offering the occasional treat is fine but don't use treats to replace the extra cuddles or attention she might need.

Also avoid offering treats to quiet a cat or dog who barks, whines or meows excessively. It may reinforce the unwanted behavior and could result in the development of a new bad habit. Only praise desirable behavior.

Be patient; your pet is just expressing his emotions.

Consider aromatherapy or homeopathy for your pet. Although there is no cure for grief, some essential oils or homeopathic remedies can improve your pet's emotional wellbeing.

Always seek qualified advice on which oils or remedies are safe to use.

Waiting for a companion to return

When the owner or animal companion dies outside the home (for example, in hospital or by pet euthanasia), it will seem to the remaining pet that the animal or person has simply disappeared. A pet may then begin to search for his deceased companion or wait for his return, not understanding where his friend has gone.

Some animal behaviorists believe that in these cases, an animal's comprehension of death is similar to that of a young child. He feels the loss, but if the absence is unexplained, he doesn't understand the permanence of the loss. As we can't explain to our pet what has taken place, this 'waiting' may only add to the animal's anxiety.

Should you allow your pet to see the deceased?

This is up to you. Anecdotal evidence shows that pets (cats in particular) that have seen the body of their owner or animal companion, do not wait or search for their missing friend. It seems that being allowed to smell or nuzzle their deceased friend can help start the grieving process. The animals may instinctively understand that the companion is dead and cannot return.

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How Pets Mourn the Loss of a Companion

Consider bringing the body of a euthanized pet home to allow other pets to see it. Obviously this is not always possible. Allow the remaining pet to observe the funeral, if there is one. Some owners have reported cats that continued to sit on their feline companion's grave years after the burial.

Getting another pet

Introducing a new pet into your home is an upsetting experience in itself for an existing pet. At a time of grief it may cause additional anxiety and detract from the healing process.

Dogs and cats may eventually adjust to the loss of their companion. They may even be happier on their own instead of having to compete with a new pet. If you eventually decide to get another pet, try to choose an animal who will best fit in with your remaining pet. A new pet should be a joy when the time is right.

Time heals

As with human grief, every animal will mourn for a different period of time. Some bounce back quickly. Others may slide into depression or illness.

It's important to monitor your pet. Look for signs of pet grieving, but also check that the symptoms of grief aren't masking those of another illness.

When a pet dies it can be hard to be mindful of a remaining pet's grief while simultaneously dealing with your own grief. Caring for your pet and helping him through his grief can also assist you (and other family members) with the healing process.

* Photo credit: Lisa Pembleton/Facebook

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“Words From Our Administrator”

We are currently in the process of redesigning our website. It's not that it's broken, it's just time to update the design. The average site gets revamped every 3-4 years. We want to make sure that it meets the needs of all those that have lost a spouse, partner, or a loved one's.

“Widowed or non-widowed”
All are welcomed here.

Giving continuing support through this journey at all times with up to date technology and resources as needed.

We started this process two weeks ago and we're excited about how the website will take shape.

Be watching for the update soon!

I hope you enjoy this issue and, as always, if you have any suggestions, concerns, or comments, please do not hesitate to let us know.

Sincerely,

Tracy Crain
Assistant Director, SHFW

There is a new feature that was added to the main page of the website called Frequent Asked Question's. Which is one of the features being added for easier navigation, and finding information to questions we may have.

Also you should have received the copy of the User Guide in the email that was written on the features and how to use them in the chat and on the site.

If you didn't receive this please contact us [Request User Guide](#) we will make sure you get your copy or click on the link to get yours now. [Get Your User Guide Now.](#)

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“Words From Our Administrator”

If there is a topic / poem or story that you would like covered or would like to share in an upcoming newsletter, please let us know. You can email it to: Thehaven@safehavenforwidowed.org to suggest the subject or you can write a piece yourself and submit it to be reviewed for possible publication. We appreciate all suggestions and inputs.

The newsletter is sent out on the sixth of every month, once a month.

Sincerely,

Tracy Crain
Assistant Director, SHFW

The hardest words for us to hear are “We wish we have had known about you earlier.”

If you have family members or friends that have lost a loved in death no matter how long ago who need support from those that understand and do get it.

Safehavenforwidowed is for all who've lost a partner: women, men, and straight, LGBT, all ages, kids of all ages, no kids, unmarried, all religions or no religion non discriminating or judgmental.

Have them meet others also on the same journey and path, who totally understand. Where they can find members to chat with in or chatroom and get support, we also have forums to participate in, and posts to read or write plus offer other resources.

Invite them to come to our website
[Refer our site.](#)

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“Words From Our Administrator”

On September 1st 2014 starting at 1pm est. Safehavenforwidowed will be hosting a Meet and Greet online in the Main Chat Room till 2am September 2, 2014.

All are invited included Safehavenforwidowed Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus and Others. Invite your friends others too.

So don't spend this Labor Day holiday alone join in with others, and meet other members who are traveling this road and understand and are ready to help you navigate this road you find yourself on and not alone. Our room is open to all widowed and non-widowed who have suffered a loss.

Invite your fellow widowed friends of all ages that lost someone from other widowed support groups to join it is free and doesn't cost anything to join this club not one of us desires to join. This event will be for one day. Your site is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, with no snow days.

Safehavenforwidowed.org website is a safe confident, private, secured environment, non-discriminating, non-judgmental, and drama free website.

Sincerely,
Sue Robinson
Senior Administrator SHFW
Sue@safehavenforwidowed.org

Just a reminder there are a few user profiles that again that are incomplete. Please take 1 minute and complete your profiles. This is very important and is not only the Rules of the site but also for security measures. You can ask a moderator or some members for help in doing this to avoid from being muted and removed from the site. We have information on the on how to do this and can be found in newsletters and on the site too.

There is no exception to this it is our rules just like any other site you join you fill out a profile and it is no different here as it is there rules too.

Any questions or concerns please contact me anytime also. By clicking the link below.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,

Tracy Crain
Assistant Director, SHFW
Tracy@safehavenforwidowed.org