

FINDING THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

When my husband committed suicide, I also died -- maybe not physically, but emotionally and mentally. After two-and-one-half years I still don't have the answers that will tell me why. Oh, I can figure out some of them, but truly this was a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

Since his death I have worked on and through my grief and have found a happiness I never thought I would have again. Sometimes it is scary that so many good things have happened to me since he has left. I suppose it is how you look at life. Even though I did go through stressful times and obviously something terrible has happened to me, I still feel positive about life. In fact, I feel lucky. Almost immediately after his death I felt the most amazing outpouring of love and support from close friends, as well as people I hadn't spoken to in years. It was amazing to me that all these people took time away from their busy lives to help me. It truly made me believe in the goodness of mankind at a time when I did not have much hope. There are many people who do not know what to say to you when a loved one dies; they feel awkward, scared, and a gamut of other emotions. They also might feel guilty when they stop calling you to see how you're getting along. I don't want them to feel that way. It was enough that they were there when I really needed them. In truth, I still feel them around me -- sort of like a circle -- way in the background. If I ever do need them, I know they will rush forward to catch me. It has made me appreciate my friends so much more, and it has made *me* a better friend and more empathetic person.

Anyway, life went on. My children came to accept their loss and, I believe, deal with it at their level. I know they will always feel the loss of their father, but it has not stopped them from being happy and successful. I think I must take some credit for this fact. In the last few years I have made my children the entire focus of my life by giving them my undivided attention. They feel very secure in my love and the fact that I'm always going to be there for them. I feel blessed that I have a seventeen year old who still wants to talk to me -- maybe not all about his emotions, but he tells me about the things he does, the friends he makes, and just stuff in general. I expect my children to do the right thing, and they have not let me down. My older son does not have a curfew, but my rule is that he has to let me know where he is and what time he'll be home. Not once has he failed to do this, even though he complains about it! I try to teach my children by example. They always have a full itinerary of where I'll be, how to reach me, and when I'll be home. I want them to feel secure and know exactly what I'm doing and when I will return.

I have a whole and different new life now. I have many new friends. I have had work related successes and am doing something I truly enjoy. Even though I am so busy, I do not feel any stress. Everything I do, I do because I want to and it brings me pleasure. I know I am so very fortunate to be in this position. I have seen first hand how short life is and will not let the little annoyances in life bother me ever again. I see people taking life way too seriously, and I just want to shake them and tell them to stop and smell the roses before it's too late. Unfortunately, I think that's a lesson you have to learn the hard way. I wish I didn't have to learn it in so brutal a manner, but I'm glad I learned it and that I'm young enough to take advantage of that knowledge.

I was married for almost twenty years. My husband and I were childhood sweethearts, meeting at sleep-away camp when I was fifteen and he was seventeen. I thought I would spend my whole life with him. When he died I could never imagine ever being with anyone else. This man had known me over half my life and had seen me grow from a teenager to a woman and mother. Nevertheless, time has passed and I am not unhappy with my new life. Never being single before (I was married at twenty), I have been enjoying my new-found freedom. I wanted to be there for my children and rarely went out at all, except with them. I have always said that I would not look for a new relationship, but that if I were to meet someone they would have to trip and fall over me. Well, I think someone has tripped!

My name was given to a gentleman about whom I knew nothing. I was a little apprehensive, as this would be my first date in twenty-seven years! But he called, and we talked for a very long time and everything he said seemed to be the right thing. He did not know the circumstances of my husband's death, and when I told him he did not seem taken aback. We met for dinner a few days later and again talked for hours. In my entire life, I have never felt so comfortable with a perfect stranger. We have continued to talk, and after each conversation I feel we have more and more in common. None of those red flags of dating are waving in my face. It's funny because I told him that it never even entered my mind that there would be more than one date. All you hear these days is that everyone's a jerk out there. I assumed we would have dinner and that would be it. Wrong again! He is truly a gentleman who lets me talk about my emotions, is cognizant of the feelings of my children, and is allowing me to discover myself at my own pace. I don't think you can ask for anything more.

I guess the point of all this is to explain how I feel inside. I never realized that I was so dead emotionally. I had turned off all my desires and wants because I just assumed I would never find anyone else. Who would want me and all my baggage? Would I ever feel desirable again? It was just easier not to think about it and hide that part of my life in some corner. Well, I want to let you all know that I feel wonderful and good about myself. I, and my cheering committee of friends, are all so proud of me. In part, I think my friends are glad because others always want to see mourners go on with their lives. But I feel good because of the fact that I can actually feel something. Maybe I didn't die when my husband did and it was only my emotions that went on hiatus. I can't be dazzled by going to nice places or receiving gifts, only by honest emotions and a caring and understanding nature. Right now it is just friendship, which I think is the basis for any type of relationship anyway. Whatever this relationship is, and he said whatever it turns out to be he would always want to be my friend, it has awakened me to the possibilities of life again.

I know if this had happened earlier, I would not have recognized it, but I think I'm ready. I don't feel guilty or that I'm cheating on my husband. And it's not that a new relationship is the only thing that can make you go on. It's the fact that this encounter woke me up to the possibility of life again. I've been seeing the light at the end of the tunnel for a while, but now I think I'm about to climb out. And I will be here for you to take your hand when you are ready to climb out.