



*Widows Helping Widows
Rebuild Their Lives*

Reading Resources

NOTE: All book descriptions have been written by widowed women who found these books to be helpful as part of their healing journey.

Widowhood

Caine, Lynn. **Being A Widow**. New York: Penguin Books, 1988.

This is a very practical guide for women who are newly widowed. Drawing from her own experiences, Caine outlines practical suggestions and strategies for coping with the devastating loss-- finding a confidant; turning to bereavement counseling; helping children adjust. Throughout, she emphasizes the need for each woman to rebuild her life in her own way. For those who want a bit of a roadmap for being a widow, I found this book came as close to one as possible.

Cicero, Julie K. **Waking Up Alone: Grief & Healing**. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse , 2007.

Following the sudden death of her husband, Julie Cicero obtained a Master's in Social Work and began her career as a hospice grief counselor. Her work includes daily interaction with widows and people who are in the process of losing their loved ones. The book focuses primarily on younger widows, Cicero's own experience.

Didion, Joan. **The Year of Magical Thinking**. New York: Vintage Books, 2006.

Joan Didion has written a very moving story about the year following the sudden death of her husband, and the grief that enveloped her. This is not a book of advice and guidance. Didion writes about her very personal experience, including the feelings of vulnerability, unexpected moments of being blindsided by memories and sudden tears, etc. Didion readily shares her emotions in this book - emotions most widows feel. I found her sharing helpful in validating some of my own emotions / experiences. I do not recommend this book for the newly widowed since it is a very emotional read.

Feinberg, Linda. **I'm Grieving As Fast As I Can: How Young Widows and Widowers Can Cope and Heal.** New Jersey: New Horizon Press, 2004

A resource for young widows and widowers. Being a young widow, I found this book was very helpful in explaining that I was not alone in this world and there are many others like me.

Ginsburg, Genevieve Davis. **Widow to Widow: Thoughtful, Practical Ideas for Rebuilding Your Life.** Cambridge, Massachusetts: Da Capo Press, 1997.

This a very useful guide that addresses many of the issues facing widows –from learning to eat alone, to creating new routines, to surviving the holidays and anniversaries that reopen emotional wounds. Widow, author, and therapist Genevieve Davis Ginsburg offers fellow widows—as well as their family and friends—sage advice for coping with the loss of a husband. Though there is no “playbook for being a widow”, as a new widow, I found “Widow to Widow” extremely helpful in learning from the experiences of others what to expect. Most importantly, I learned that all widows are faced with rebuilding their lives and that mutual support from other widows would be key to my healing process. I have gone back and reread this book many times.

Jacks Scott, Elizabeth. **Widowhood: A Doorway to Calling and Conversion.** Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2009

Author Elizabeth Jacks Scott, MSW and a counselor with a specialty in grief counseling, writes about her own spiritual journey in the healing of grief while studying at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City after her husband had been killed in an automobile crash. To her joy and amazement, the naming of her pain freed her. Scott relies on Isaiah 54, a passage she believes graphically depicts the spiritual journey of a widow as an experience of being abandoned and found. She says that the ...”touching of her forsakenness was followed by a mystical experience that healed”.

Roiphe, Anne. **Epilogue: A Memoir.** New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008.

Since being suddenly and unexpectedly widowed two years ago, I have read several memoirs by widows and widowers. My favorite so far has been **Epilogue** by Ann Roiphe. Roiphe recounts her experiences in the dating world after becoming a widow, meeting men both online and going on “blind dates”. I think the book resonated for me particularly at this time because my two daughters and I are suddenly being bombarded with questions from well-meaning friends, acquaintances, and people we hardly know (primarily female, interestingly enough) asking if I have started dating. I have not, for a variety of reasons. I had a good marriage and am still somewhat reeling from the shock of losing that. I met my husband when I was 30, after spending the previous 15 years dating, having serial monogamous relationships (and some not-so monogamous – it was the 1970's, after all!), and have not felt the urge to relive all that. Ann Roiphe is a good and lively writer, and her account made me feel that my decision to learn to live

alone again and have a social life on my own terms is a good one for me, at this point in my life.

Silverman, Phyllis R. **Widow to Widow: How the bereaved help one another.** (Second Edition). New York: Brunner–Routledge , 2004.

Phyllis R. Silverman, Ph.D., is a researcher, teacher and author who has studied bereavement and widowhood for 40+ years. Her book, *Widow to Widow*, explores mutual help programs for widowed women through which the newly bereaved address their grief with help from women who have already lost a spouse. Her research showed that widows rarely need therapy or crisis intervention – the most effective help comes from each other. There are excerpts from many interviews with widows and widowers contrasting their experiences, as well as chapters discussing widowhood as experienced with or without children and from the perspective of young, middle–aged and elderly women. I found this book very informative. This book addresses many of the issues facing widows and provides an excellent combination of theoretical research data and actual true life experiences.

Wylie, Betty Jane . **Beginnings: A Book for Widows.** Toronto, The Canadian Publishers, 1997.

Drawing from her own personal experience, Betty Jane Wylie gives the reader an inside view of what it is like to be widowed at middle age. Wylie's personal anger and pain at her loss are evident. ...realistic and practical, the book is filled with advice for the newly widowed, especially information on finance, employment, relationships with friends and children, companionship and sex, travel, household repairs, and so on.

Bereavement/Grief

Baughner, Bob, Ph.D. **A Guide for the Bereaved Survivor** (A List of Reactions, Suggestions and Steps for Coping with Grief)

I highly recommend this book for any newly bereaved person. It is very helpful for those coping with a new loss. My own loss will be 3 years this month, and many of the reactions rang true with me, and the suggestions and steps were very helpful. The lists of possible reactions and feelings cover the gamut that all those who experience a loss may feel, and they are very comprehensive and specific. I think most bereaved people will relate to many of them. The suggestions for coping with each reaction immediately follow, which is very helpful. The book gradually deals with the "moving on" part of life, and a quote I especially liked was: "Long–term bereaved people want you to know that you never "get over" the death, you "get different." You will always be a different person for what you have gone through with this loss." Another was "I realize that I will always carry my loved one in my heart and that I am a better person for having had this person in my life".

Bonanno, George A. **The Other Side of Sadness: What the New Science of Bereavement Tells Us About Life After Loss.** New York: Basic Books, 2009.

The five stages of grief is something we have heard a lot about. We have been taught that grief is a predictable five-stage process and that we must step through each stage in a linear way in order to grieve correctly and completely. Yet, most of us don't experience grief this way. According to Bonanno's research, there's little evidence to support the existence of stages of mourning or the corollary that if the stages aren't followed completely, there's cause for alarm. His research demonstrates that humans have a remarkable capacity for resilience that helps guide us through the sadness of loss and grief. He writes that humans are already hardwired to deal with our losses efficiently. His research explores mourning rituals, the experiences of the death of a parent or child, and how our inborn emotions help us deal effectively with loss. I found his historical overview and perspective on resilience particularly helpful.

Brook, Noel and Blair, Pamela D., PhD. **I Wasn't Ready to Say Goodbye: Surviving, Coping and Healing After the Sudden Death of A Loved One.** Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Champion Press, Ltd, 2000

For those struggling to cope with the sudden death of a loved one, the authors discuss and explore surviving the sudden death of a loved one using down to earth language and their own experiences

Callanan, Maggie and Kelley, Patricia. **Final Gifts: Understanding the Special Awareness, Needs and Communication of the Dying.** New York: Bantam Books, 1992.

My husband died after a year of illness, which started quite dramatically and turned out to be a rare type of lymphoma. He was a physician, so after the diagnosis was made, he knew what he was up against. Going through that year was so emotionally difficult for all of us, and yet we kept our spirits high, and made the most of the time we had together as a family. The illness brought us closer and there were many wonderful moments we shared. This book helped me integrate those moments and the difficult ones and accept the outcome. It acknowledges the needs of the caregivers and loved ones, whose support is vital to anyone facing a terminal illness. There is much comfort in this book for families, and friends in this role.

Curry, Cathleen L. **When Your Spouse Dies: A Concise and Practical Source of Help and Advice.** Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1990/2003

The author covers a wide range of topics from prayer to a balanced diet; a good roadmap for a full life, a book with much wisdom packed into its pages. Curry is very practical in the advice she gives for getting through and growing through the death of a spouse, especially her emphasis on the goals of letting go and moving on with her life.

Moffat, Mary Jane, editor. **In The Midst of Winter: Selections From the Literature of The Mourning.** New York: Vintage Books, 1982,

This was a very important book for me as it opened the door to looking beyond traditional sources for answers as to how to grieve, to a more spiritual journey. Mary Jane Moffat brought these writings together, as she found herself unable to piece together the many conflicting feelings she was facing, when she suddenly became widowed.

One of her condolence letters quoted Camus, 'In the midst of winter, I finally learned that there was within me an invincible summer.' "These were the first words of solace I'd been able to comprehend, partly because they did not try to comfort or explain." We can again experience our own loss in poetry and literature, which speaks to the human condition and the universality of death. "I looked in particular for writing that revealed inner feelings unacceptable to the outside world, that avoided easy sentiments or consolations in favor of hard, often brutal truths." The selections are drawn from writers from many cultures and periods. One I liked a great deal is a memoir of Daphne du Maurier on widowhood.

Sanders, Catherine, PhD. **Surviving Grief and Learning to Live Again.** New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1992.

Sanders is a researcher who specializes in bereavement issues. She describes five universal phases of grief and guides us through each. By drawing on personal experience and those of others she talks about what it means to lose a mate, and discusses factors that can have an influence on the grieving process such as age, gender and the circumstances surrounding a loved one's death.

This book was the first book I read after my husband died. It helped me begin to handle my grief and understand what was happening. The author lost a teenage son and then became a grief counselor. It is a book that is easy to read and understand, and describes the stages of grief, shock, awareness of loss, conservation, the need to withdraw, the turning point and finally renewal. It was a great book to start with as the author was both a professional and had experienced her own tragic loss, giving her words even more authenticity.

Smith, Claire Bidwell. **The Rules of Inheritance.** New York: Penguin Books, 2012.

When my husband became ill, my sons were 19, 21 and 24. Two were in college and the oldest one worked in NYC. His illness, a rare lymphoma, and treatment demanded my full attention and resources. I told them the best way they could help me was to carry on with their responsibilities. It was a difficult year for all of us, but I don't think I really ever understood what they might have been experiencing away from home. When this book came to my attention, I was eager to read it, because it gave me a window into the struggles they may have had in this special time of emerging adulthood.

Claire was just entering college when she learned that both her parents had cancer. Her father's prostate cancer was successfully treated, but her mother's colon cancer was more advanced. She attended a small school in Vermont and was immediately caught up with all the challenges of becoming independent, developing an identity and socializing with her peers. As her mother's illness became more serious, Claire found herself angry and resentful at times with the attention she had to give, and the difficulty

of inhabiting both worlds, and it took its toll on her emotionally. She describes in the book, with searing honesty, her feelings of anxiety, depression, guilt, the extraordinary pain of the loss of her mother. Her life begins to change dramatically. Her journey is a rocky one, but told in a beautiful spare and powerful way and you come to admire her relentless desire to confront her demons head on. She journals her life, under chapters that are headed by Kubla Ross's stages of Grief, and moves around in time seamlessly telling it.

I would this book recommend to anyone of that age group who has experienced a loss. Her ability to be in touch with all of her feelings, especially the dark ones, gives permission to the full range of emotions that encompass loss. This is a memorable tale and beautifully told.

Staudacher, Carol. A Time To Grieve: Meditations for Healing After the Death of a Loved One. New York: Harper Collins, 1994.

Carol Staudacher, a grief counselor and lecturer, writes in this book: Some survivors try to think their way through grief. That doesn't work. Grief is a releasing process, a discovery process, a healing process. The brain must follow the heart at a respectful distance. It is our hearts that ache when a loved one dies. It is our emotions that are most drastically affected. Certainly the mind suffers, the mind recalls, the mind may plot and wish, but it is the heart that will blaze the trail through the thicket of grief. One reviewer says, Filled with wise insights, comfort, and good counsel.

Tatelbaum, Judy. The Courage to Grieve: The Classic Guide to Creative Living, Recovery and Growth Through Grief. New York: Harper Collins, 2008.

Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, national expert on death and dying says of this book: An excellent and tactical, valid book on all the aspects of grief and grief resolution, including important ideas about self-help and avenues to finish unfinished business and teach people how to let go. It is a well-done book with wisdom and love, and makes people aware that every ending is also a new beginning. One reader says, "recommended by my therapist, [it] vanished my fear that I was having a nervous breakdown".

Wallace, William. Living Again: A Personal Journey for Surviving the Loss of a Spouse. Topeka, KS: Addax Publishing Group

Wallace speaks from the heart having lost his wife to cancer after 17 years of marriage. He guides you through what to expect, and details the tools to manage the traps that beset your path to recovery, using vivid specific examples from his own experience. Wallace writes from a Catholic Christian perspective.

Wolfson, Ron A. Time to Mourn, A Time to Comfort: A Guide to Jewish Bereavement (The Art of Jewish Living/Second Edition), Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1993/2008.

When someone dies, there are so many questions....As a guide for honoring the dead and empowering the living, Dr. Ron Wolfson takes you step by step through the mourning process, including the specifics of funeral preparation, preparing the home and family to sit shiva, and visiting the grave. One reviewer says: this book captures the best in Judaism's approach. Honest, tender, and wisely written.

Transitions

Bridges, William. **Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes.** Cambridge, Massachusetts: Da Capo Press, 2004.

Becoming a widow thrusts women into one of the biggest transitions of their lives. Not only have they lost a life partner – they have lost a way of life. First published 25 years ago, *Transitions* provides a simple and insightful roadmap of the transition process. William Bridges takes readers step by step through the three stages of any transition: The Ending, The Neutral Zone, and, in time, The New Beginning. He explains how each stage can be understood and applied as a guide for coping with change. Understanding Bridges' "Neutral Zone" helped me deal with the extraordinary ambiguity that comes along with my loss and the rebuilding of my life.

Bridges, William. **The Way of Transitions: Embracing Life's Most Difficult Moments.** Cambridge, Massachusetts: Perseus Publishing, 2001.

William Bridges is one of the most renowned experts on transitions and the author of many books. By his own admission, Bridges states this was the most difficult book he has written. In this book, Bridges describes his own transition after his wife of 35 years was diagnosed with breast cancer and his own personal journey after her death two years later. It is very interesting to see him apply his own concepts and frameworks to one of the most personal of experiences in his life.

Children and Grief

Dann, Patty. **The Goldfish Went On Vacation: A Memoir of Loss (and Learning to Tell the Truth About It)**. Boston, Massachusetts: Trumpeter Books, 2007.

Through a collage of vignettes, Dann chronicles the progression of her husband's illness from a gently learned man fluent in multiple languages to one whose brain could no longer remember the purpose of a paperclip. Out of her family tragedy, she created a book to help others live and shares her insights about how to help children deal with the death of a loved one.

Silverman, Phyllis R. and Kelly, Madelyn. **A Parent's Guide to Raising Grieving Children: Rebuilding Your Family After the Death of a Loved One**. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

The authors say that with children and grief age really matters. They discuss how children are affected at different ages and stages of development by the process of dying; the finality of death; the upside down world after the death of a loved one (a parent, child or friend); ways to help; continuing bonds; and finally, looking ahead. One reader says, "This comprehensive guide for parents of bereaved children is filled with a wealth of wisdom borne of personal experience and outstanding scholarship in the areas of grief, child development, child-rearing practices and mental health".

Financial and Legal

Colgan, Mark, CFP®. **The Survivor Assistance Handbook**. Pittsford, New York: Plan Your Legacy, LLC, 2009.

This is a very comprehensive guide that provides answers to many questions newly widowed men and women face during their first year. The author wrote this book based on his personal firsthand experience as a widower.

Schwartz, James D. CFP®, CDFA TM , Senior Advisor, Strategic Wealth Advisors. LLC **Financial Challenges Facing Bereaved Spouses and Partners**

This e-book , which is located in The W Connection's Widow Survival Kit, contains a lot of valuable and practical information to help widows and widowers deal with the financial issues they face after losing their spouse. Married couples will also learn how to prepare for what is most likely an inevitable event – one of the partners will be widowed.

Spiritual/Inspirational

Dyer, Wayne. **Wisdom of the Ages: 60 Days to Enlightenment.** New York: Harper Collins, 1998.

Dr. Wayne Dyer, PhD Education and Counseling, is an author and inspirational speaker. He has developed a spiritual philosophy which embraces many religious and philosophic teachings drawn from many sources including poetry and literature. This book is very readable as it is divided into short essays examining important subjects and attributes to develop and understand, as we go through life trying to better ourselves. Some of these explored are Meditation, Leadership, Patience, Grief as Blessing, Hope and Passion. The writers he uses, to enlighten us and expose us to their teachings, include John Milton, William Shakespeare, Lao Tzu, St. Francis, Henry Thoreau and Buddha. I have given this book to many people as a gift and still enjoy rereading it.

Dyer, Wayne. **There is a Spiritual Solution to Every Problem.** New York: Harper Collins, 2001.

In this book, Dr. Dyer draws inspiration from St. Francis of Assisi's famous prayer and then helps us to see beyond our problems to a consciousness, which operates on a higher more generous and open level. He offers and advises that the power of love, harmony and service, and putting our collective energies toward what we are for, instead of what we are against, will bring us and our communities closer to a place of peace and harmony with one another and nature.

Hickman, Martha Whitmore. **Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations For Working Through Grief**

In this book Hickman offers a quote for each day of the year. The quotes range from religious scriptures to contemporary authors, poets, and philosophers. Following the quote, Ms. Hickman writes a short passage of interpretation as well as a reflection on her grieving experience. Finally, on the same page she writes one "meditation" which the readers may use as a conscious exercise to objectively think about their grief.

I enjoyed the book when I first received it over a year ago and continue to turn to its pages. Many of the quotes, I loved, others angered me, or annoyed me—I simply skipped them! What I found interesting is that a year later my reaction to those particular passages changed. It made me realize that I am evolving, my grief is evolving and that, in itself, gave me hope. I found that the "meditation" was often helpful and important, as it was objective and provided another perspective.

Remen, Rachel Naomi, MD. **My Grandfather's Blessings, Stories of Strength, Refuge and Belonging.** New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 2000.

Remen, Rachel Naomi, MD. **Kitchen Table Wisdom.** New York: Penguin Group, 2006.

These two books are gems. Dr. Remen grew up listening and learning from her religious Jewish grandfather, who cherished his time spent with her. She became a prominent pediatrician, suffered from a serious chronic illness (Crohn's disease) and became interested in counseling the terminally ill. She now teaches medical students about how to care and communicate effectively with patients, who need not only their medical expertise, but genuine concern and empathy. As grieving has an erratic, protracted healing process, her messages resonated with me and I wrote down many passages in her books, which I highly recommend to everyone.