

Surviving Widowhood: My First Year

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By Sally A. Connolly



Whether the loss occurs suddenly or over time, the death of your lifelong companion, lover, and friend is a shock beyond understanding. In the face of such eternal loss, joy and opportunity seem gone forever and even unseemly to contemplate. Happiness, beauty, laughter—these are gifts to be shared with your partner, the one who owns a special part of your history and your most cherished memories. As for recognition and acceptance of the inevitable, Edna St. Vincent Millay expressed this best:

*Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind;
Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the brave.
I know. But I do not approve. And I am not resigned.*

The currents of fleeting time, however, refuse to stand still. We are swept up as our own basic needs and the demands of those we care for, cry out for attention. We eat, dress, shop, go to work. And we wonder: How can the rest of the world move about so ordinarily, as if the world has not changed?

After the loss of my husband of thirty-seven years, my “year of magical thinking” began. The busy blur of diagnosis, surgery, treatments, rehabilitation, and home care--that had preoccupied the family for almost two years--began to fade. In its place, emptiness. My changed status, my singleness, confronted me.

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I mourned not going out for breakfast on a moment's notice. Not having the words of comfort and the hugs that showed he understood and cared. Not having the daily advice. Not hearing the resonant voice. Even not having the Sunday news reread to me as we sat at the kitchen table. I drove myself to destinations, completely familiar, with the eyes of a novice on the road.

Gradually, however, with the love and support of family and friends, my emotional wounds began to scab over. The greatest tool in my healing was immersion in a project: the creation of a scrapbook of my husband's writings. A gifted teacher and communicator, my husband dearly loved his students, extended family, and friends. For him, faith was foremost. All these devotions he had beautifully documented throughout his life. By bringing together many of these writings, I once again heard the cherished voice. His spirituality and words of encouragement spoke clearly once again and gave all of us the much-needed inspiration.

Accepting widowhood, I have learned, can be made easier. By grabbing onto your skills and using them, you can begin to work through the crisis. Find an interest and launch a project. Paint a picture, sew a quilt. Hunt through your favorite photographs and create a family scrapbook or movie.

Use whatever talents are uniquely yours to create something you can hold onto. Or immerse yourself in a cause or a memorial to your loved one. Listen to your hearts, cherish the good memories, and face the future with courage. Look forward to "a new stage of life full of vast opportunities for extraordinary joy." (A BOY FROM LAWRENCE: The Collected Writings of Eugene F. Connolly, 2006)

Sally A. Connolly, a retired school counselor and teacher, is editor of A BOY FROM LAWRENCE: The Collected Writings of Eugene F. Connolly (2006), a verbal scrapbook of a teacher's spiritual journey. For information, go to <http://www.freewebs.com/aboyfromlawrence>

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