

**HOW EASY IS IT TO HAVE A SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIP
AFTER THE DEATH OF A MUCH LOVED PARTNER ?**

**THE FOLLOWING TEXT IS A “FROM THE HEART” ACCOUNT OF MY
RECENT JOURNEY WITH THIS QUESTION.**

**IT COVERS MY STRUGGLES AND HOW I DEALT WITH THE ISSUES IT
RAISED, SUCH AS BETRAYAL, GUILT, FEAR, FAMILY
CONSIDERATIONS AND A RELUCTANCE TO LET GO OF AN
INDEPENDENT LIFESTYLE.**

**IT SHOWS THAT EMOTIONAL ISSUES, WHEN FACED, ACKNOWLEDGED
AND DEALT WITH CAN BECOME AN ESSENTIAL TOOL IN THE MOVING
ON PROCESS.**

**WRITING THIS HAS BEEN HELPFUL TO ME AND MY FAMILY AND I
HOPE THAT YOU TOO, WILL FIND IT USEFUL IN SOME WAY.**

BY SHEILA LEE-WOOLHOUSE. JULY 2006

HOW CAN ANYONE?

I am a widow! Every time I say that I can hardly believe it really happened to me. Did my husband really die and leave me a widow? Even after all these years it still seems hard to say it. However, don't get me wrong, it has been a long time now since my husband died and the searing pain of those early days is long since gone.

Sometimes I like to think back over these last years since his death and as I do, I recognize that I have accomplished a great deal and achieved so much since then, not to mention the traveling I have been able to do. In fact I would go as far as to say, if I hadn't become a widow I would never have had the chance to do so much, see so much, or accomplish so much. It is also true that I have enjoyed my new found independent life.

Looking back I find it very hard to recognize myself, or should I say the person I used to be back then, I know I have changed a great deal, but I had to in order to survive and move on. Actually, in my opinion, which is backed up by people around me, I feel I have successfully worked my way through the grieving process, no easy ride I can tell you; I have come out the other side as an independent, emotionally stable women, financially well able to take care of herself. In fact, well rounded and stable is how I would describe myself.

However as the years have rolled on, I am increasingly more aware of a deep seated loneliness inside me. I am missing having that someone special in my life, someone who could make me their number one, priority person. I am surrounded by loving, caring people, both family and friends but these can't take the place of that special relationship that only a partner can provide. Be that as it may, I had decided very early on that I wouldn't marry or even enter into a relationship just for the sake of it. I would rather be on my own than with the wrong person. Imagine then my delight when I felt I'd actually met Mr. Right! Here was someone who obviously cared for me a lot, I also liked him and felt very drawn to him. It appeared to me that my dreams were coming true at last, like a fairy tale, how exciting. Yet even as I allowed myself to enjoy this new and budding relationship, I realized that it wasn't going to be easy. Not at all like the first time. I was a teenager back then, with an "I'm- in- love-and-nothing-else- matters" attitude, no need to look too far ahead, nothing was going to go wrong was it? How could it, this was "real love". Well that was then and now is now and it's definitely not the same at all. So many confusing thoughts and feelings to deal with, why is there so much, confusion? Why can't it be simple like it was before? Yet I know it can't be, so much has happened to me and I have lived a lifetime since then. I know what it's all about, the bad as well as the good and I've got the T shirt to prove it! Is it really all that surprising to have all these jumbled thoughts and feelings? Perhaps it might help me if I could identify them and then maybe I would begin to understand,

and find a way to deal with them. As the days and weeks go by in this new relationship I start to recognize some of them.

BETRAYAL is most certainly there, but why? It's as if my being in this relationship, is actually betraying the love I shared with my husband and the family life we had together, it's not rational I know. What we had is still real and valid and means as much as ever, even if I am with another man. That's what I want to believe but obviously don't feel.

GUILT is another one. I feel guilty for loving another man and for wanting him to love me, even more so for wanting or imagining myself sleeping with him. How silly is that, isn't it normal to need to love and be loved?

FEAR is there in a big way, like a big black cloud overshadowing everything else, but fear of what? Fear of being left alone again through death; fear of going through a partner's serious illness and eventual death like the last time; fear of not being understood, or worse misunderstood by my new love, who has never been down that particular road. How could he possibly understand? I could never expect him to. Talking of understanding; there are my three adult sons to consider in all of this. How are they going to take to a new man in my life, not to mention a possible stepfather for them? I know it's my life but we are so close. I can't risk losing what we have, it's too important to me

There is also my **desire for independence**, Although I didn't chose independence, it has in fact brought me a lot of benefits and I have really enjoyed my single lifestyle, how can I give it up? Actually I don't really want to. How complex it all seems when considered like this.

How can anyone who has not been bereaved understand me and where I'm coming from, especially when I can't even understand myself? Least of all the new man in my life, how is he supposed to understand that sometimes I will want to remember my late husband? What we did and what we said; where we went, what it was like back then.... It is a time of my life he is not a part of, although important to me. So how will he feel? Will he get jealous? Will my wanting to remember spoil this new relationship?

My husband was the father of my children after all. We were once a complete family. It's very hard not to yearn for the past and what we had together. I spent a huge chunk of my life with that man and I still want to hold onto that in some way. Why should I have to let it go? At the same time I do want his new relationship to work. So how can these two things or two people fit together? I still I love my husband and yet I also feel I am falling in love with this new man. On the other hand, I do know my husband wouldn't want me to be lonely and unhappy, because that's how I feel sometimes. I miss being loved and loving someone in that special way and he's not here anymore to give me this .I know it's Ok for me to move on and possibly build a new life with this new man. If that's true and I realize it must be, why then does it feel so much like betrayal? Why the guilt and why all this fear?

The issues these questions were raising needed facing but how? It was becoming obvious to us both in this new relationship, that our feelings for each other were growing stronger, but also was the confusion inside of me. Often it was like being on an emotional roller coaster which at times threatened to overwhelm me.

On one such day, it was possible to give myself the time and space needed to allow all these thoughts and feelings to come out and be voiced. Because I believed that God would understand and listen to me, I brought Him into this. It was a release to put words to all the emotional confusion which had been simmering inside for so long. However I felt raw afterwards and knew I needed my boyfriend's care and support, which meant sharing the experience with him. I had tried to explain things before, but never felt my words adequately expressed what I wanted say.

What happened next took me by complete surprise, that evening we were both in a church meeting where the sermon was about facing new and frightening situations in life, even using some of the same words I had used a few hours earlier. What I remember the most from that talk is we can expect to feel fear and other such feelings when facing big changes in life. But things happen for a purpose because God really is involved in everything and it's all part of His unfolding plan for our lives We need to believe that and trust that things will work together because He NEVER makes mistakes. This had a big impact on me .As I considered all that was said that evening, it felt like I'd been given the first piece of a jigsaw puzzle. However it took several months of heart searching and many times when I backed off the relationship altogether, before I got the picture.

As the months went by I was becoming aware that marriage was a distinct possibility and of course for that to happen I needed to be sure of where I was and what I really wanted As before it all seemed to come to a head on a particular day. This time I was determined not to let it go, until I had the answers I needed and a peace inside for whatever step I took next. Again I brought God into the process and again it was not an easy experience As it progressed memories of some dreams I'd had, past experiences, conversations, things I'd read and spoken about came flooding back, I began to see links between them all. What also intrigued me was that all I read that day seemed to link up; everything was apparently pointing in the same direction.

At last the message was getting through. This relationship was not something that had come out of the blue, but was in fact, part of an overall plan for my life. My fears and emotions were understandable and valid, as marriage is a big step for anyone to take. When it involves all the emotions I've described plus, in a sense, leaving behind a much loved partner, it is an even greater step to take. But everything can and does, work and fit together when it's meant to be.

I gradually felt the fears and worries of the past months dissipate as I took it all on board. In their place came the peace I'd been searching for, along with a lovely sense of my husband's approval at the way my life was moving forward. Therefore, when a little time later I got a proposal of marriage, I was able with all sincerity, to answer "Yes with pleasure."

The cherry on top of my cake came on my wedding day, when my grown up sons came to me with an obvious acceptance of my new husband, (although it can't have been easy to see their mother marrying another man). They genuinely told me how happy they were for me and wished us both every happiness in the future. This was like a joining of two life circles into one completely new one, with much loved members from both joining together. I feel very grateful to have been given such beautiful gifts- a wonderful new husband, a new life and a larger new family.

A WIDOW NO MORE