

...The heart monitor slowed and stopped. There was a moment of unreality, of vacantness, of not being anywhere. And then just as suddenly, the realization hit, and both my world and my body came crashing to the floor. I was helped to my feet and back to reality. Through my tears I could see my wife, or the person who used to be my wife, lying motionless. She looked uncomfortable, not peaceful. Aren't people supposed to look peaceful once they have been released from their battle with the illness? Who am I going to take advice from now? Who is going to teach me? Who can I hug? What was it like for her? The answers are not obvious.

She was thirty-nine and I was forty-two. This was not supposed to happen.

It was a bad day. Funeral arrangements were followed by a drive home to tell my children that their mother had died. The tears made the drive dangerous, raising other concerns. Let's not cause the children to lose both parents today...

...Kathy and Gary met on December 18, 1991. Fluorescent lights illuminated the room, encouraging blinding reality. He couldn't cry because it had been over two years since his wife died, and he had to present a picture of having "weathered the storm." Kathy couldn't cry because she was ill at ease among the widow veterans. But when they met, they did not need to cry or even speak. The hurt was communicated clearly. The need was mutually felt. The loneliness, emptiness, need and anger was all there in a glance. Introductions seemed redundant, but having done so, the basis for a life-long friendship, and more, had been established. Friends, relatives and support people all figure into the recovery from loss and grief, but this was something else.

We were young widows and widowers, a strange breed combining the end of a life with the strong life force of a living young person with so much potential. The challenge would be to harness that energy and pull it from the grip of the tragedy. This cannot be done alone.

With our companions dead, could we allow ourselves to be open to this?

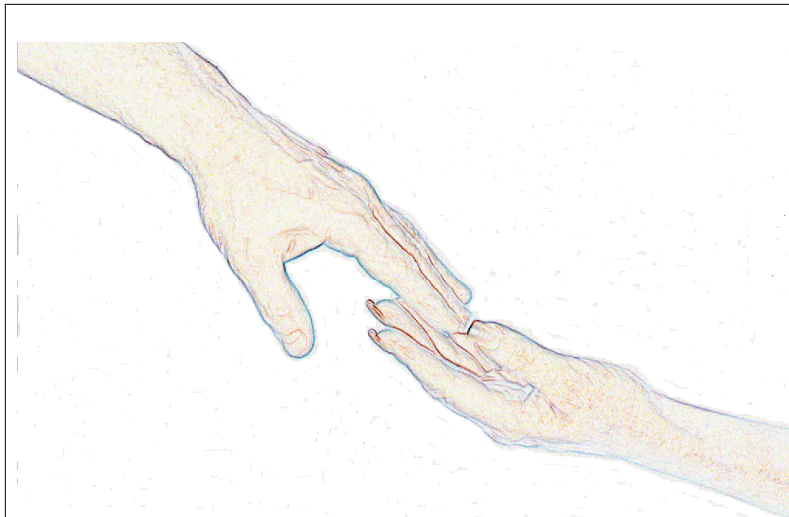
LOSS and FOUND

How we survived the loss of a young spouse

~~ *EXCERPTS* ~~

by

Kathy and Gary Young



Calabash Press

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LOSS AND FOUND
How we survived the loss of a young spouse

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To Kathie and Sandy

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The insights and information contained within this book would be impossible without the help and encouragement of many very sensitive people.

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We especially thank George and Bette Baulch, Robert and Beverly Natelson, and Rick Natelson for their continuing unconditional love and support.

Our experiences were personal, even though most moments are shared with the collective young widow/widower population. Everyone is different, of course, but our goal is to show how we handled our own young widowhood, in the hope that we can be of help to others.

Some names, occupations and/or physical descriptions found in this book have been fictionalized to protect privacy.

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INTRODUCTION

TO START

We could start with the tears, with the expectations dashed or the changes in our lives, and leave it at that. We could dwell on all of the disruptive things that happened during the several years of illness and after, leading up to the “crash.” We could dwell on the positive lessons learned about the value of time and human life, or the lesson learned as our spouses died in our arms.

This book is not about dying. It is really about surviving. We can’t expect to make complete sense out of the tragic, capricious, unnerving events that bombard us, but we can show how it is possible to make grief manageable, rather than letting it manage us.

NOT TO START

Our recollections will make sense, but it’s hard to make sense out of this type of situation, or even life in general. Maybe we can at least be intelligible about what occurred and the aftermath.

OKAY, WE START

For a second let’s start at the end. The end of a young life is a kick in the butt. A second kick, plus understanding, is needed for the beginning of recovery and redefinition. It’s difficult, but not entirely negative.

Disorientation occurs. Decisions are difficult and dependability is at great peril. There can even be the perception of a loss of IQ points. People can talk directly to us and we can react, but later, when called to carry out what we discussed or to remember something about the discussion, we can blank out completely, swearing that the subject was never breached.

Tears sneak attack us when the bank teller asks for an endorsement from our dead spouse. We cry when someone bangs into our car in the parking lot and our spouse is not there to comfort us, yell at us, or handle the situation. We cry when the final doctor bills come in as we feel the insensitivity

of the business world. We cry in front of our children, both a good and bad thing. It can frighten them but it can also give them permission to express their own emotions and it can show that we are human, capable of all emotions. We cry alone, in the privacy of our home. We cry with friends, and we can tell that the friends are getting tired of seeing the tears. Is it time to snap out of it? What if we start to cry and can't stop? What if we can't cry at all? What do friends and family think of us now and how do they think we are handling the situation? Do we care? Should we care? We are human, so we probably do. And they are probably at a loss as to what to say and how to help. And they might be frightened about the details of the death, and concerned that they might hurt us more by words and actions that might be seen as insensitive.

Individuals experiencing the death of a spouse will have varying degrees of trauma, all the way from mild to clinically severe. It can take a while to recover even from a mild trauma, and it takes work.

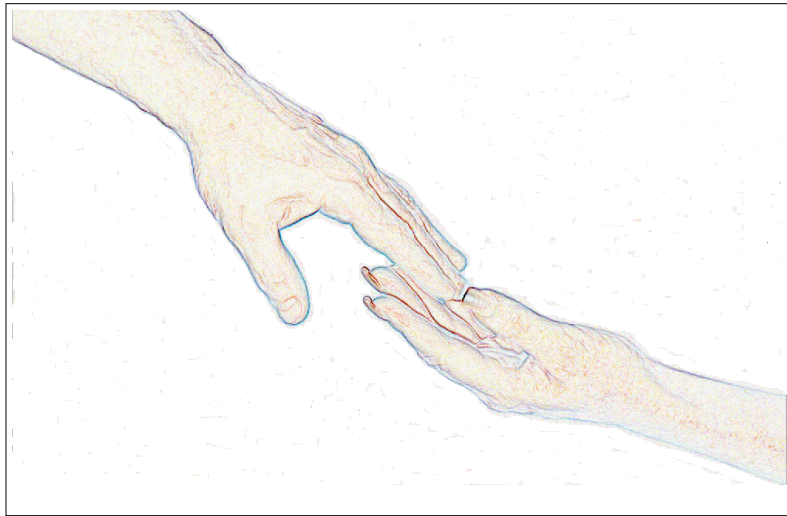
Identity. If we ever really know ourselves, it is usually in the context of what others think of us and how successfully we interact with others, and especially with someone special. When we stay with someone for a long time and grow with each other, the two people can meld into an entity, a union. That entity consists of two individuals with hopes, fears, dreams, inter-linked in such a way that nothing is real unless the two people share the experience. This sharing can be argumentative as well as harmonious, but it is a sharing. The sharing is very human, and part of living life to the fullest. When the other person is gone, the link is gone, and with that, the framework or context is altered. Not only are we at a loss to bounce ideas off of someone, but also due to our weakened condition, we are forced to re-define all of our experiences, a distinct disadvantage.

In our case, after losing a large part of our identities, we set out to re-invent ourselves. We quickly learned that we were still who we used to be and decided to not re-invent, since we were not "invented" originally. The process of years of experiences and learning became the recipe of our personalities and with this event the process took a quantum leap. It is not re-inventing, but it is a process of the re-discovery of old things under a newer context, and discovery of new things. This could even lead to being a better person. We had

to assimilate this leap as naturally as possible without over-intellectualizing.

So we must recover from a trauma and from the sadness associated with our spouse's fight. At some time it will be appropriate to start again, or restart our engines. We'll try to do whatever it takes.

OKAY, SO NOW WE REALLY BEGIN



PART ONE:
GARY'S STORY

Chapter 1:

THE EARLY YEARS

The first thing you should know, to clear up confusion, is that my first wife was named *Kathie*, with an “ie” and my new wife is also named Kathy, but with a “y.” Always one of my favorite names, the similarity was initially more of a negative than a positive for me. To help avoid the confusion, *Kathie’s* name will be in italics and Kathy’s will appear in regular font.

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Our Good Fortune

Kathie nurtured me when I came down with pneumonia and when I sustained job-related injuries, teaching by example the quality of care that I would soon be called on to give to her.

Our family enjoyed a relatively idyllic life, punctuated with typical conflicts, frustrations and bickering. We were almost a cliché of urban/suburban bliss, *just waiting for the rug to be pulled out from under us.*

Chapter 2: ILLNESS

Discovery of the lump

What we could not know is that sometime between three and six years before diagnosis, *Kathie's* cancer had begun to slowly develop. A tumor such as this can be symptom and detection free for years.

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Even after all the anticipation and preparation, my body went limp and I fell to my knees, crying loudly. My brother in law, Ron, caught me and held me. I looked at *Kathie* and then the monitor. Then it started again. Was this the start of a recovery? Even then I had a glimmer of hope that things could improve. Confusion and anger, combined with desperate sadness. What was this? It turned out to be a momentary extra beat or two, followed by quiet. She no longer looked like her body was part of her. Her shell looked empty, restful in a way. I knew that she was no longer in discomfort, so I think I projected that feeling for a moment, and that made her look peaceful. But then, upon a second reflection, she did not look as peaceful as I had expected. I was confused.

I looked up to the ceiling and tried to smile and wave. I might have felt stupid for a second, but it was something that we had talked about, so if she was up there, I didn't want to miss the opportunity. If she was not up there, I really didn't have a problem looking stupid. I was becoming good at it.

Chapter 3: DYING

Sounds terribly harsh, doesn't it? Not surprisingly, I had quite a bit of trouble coming to grips with that. Saying it out loud hurt terribly but helped me to come to reality, a concept that was about to be in short supply.

There is no easy way to talk about death and dying. Everyone has to go through it and at some point everyone becomes a survivor of someone close. But it never gets easy, especially with those you love.

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No degree of anticipation would prepare me for the moment when it came. It was not sudden. It was not a shock, even though the end was a surprise, earlier and more abrupt than we had anticipated. It progressed in an almost linear way. And yet, the effect was total shock.

I didn't want to let her go. I wanted to continue my life with her. Life without her seemed ludicrous. But my wonderful daughters, gave me a reason, motivation and the courage and strength to go on. Despite my fatalistic state, my children enabled me to begin to see possibilities for the future.

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My journey begins

At this moment I perceived the first inkling that my life had been changed profoundly. Who was I? It suddenly dawned on me. I was a widower. A new label. I would have to struggle to find myself again. Before this, I really knew myself, and now I was foundering.

I felt profound, all-encompassing sadness. *Kathie's* fight was over, but I felt tremendous sorrow that she had to endure such pain, especially at such a young age. And I was sad that she would never see the development of her children. I felt equally sad for my children, so young, who no longer had a mother, a loss especially dear since *Kathie* was such a loving and active mom.

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I have always had strong ESP. Not everyone believes in ESP, so I am not going to get into a whole ESP discussion, nor recount my experiences. *Kathie* and I did many ESP experiments together. They did not always work, but most of the time they did. The energy could have something to do with that. Or it might just be a way to fill a void, a way to try to get closer to her. We'll never know for sure.

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People brought lots of food but I don't remember any of it. We were in St. Louis for four days. I remember only a very few bits. My father-in-law, quietly purchased business class seats for our return to Los Angeles, so that we would be as comfortable as possib

Chapter 4: AFTER

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Loneliness and isolation

During the course of *Kathie's* illness, I experienced many manifestations of loneliness. In business matters I was sure of myself. But this new, personal, and devastating world of widowhood was uncharted territory. I did not know how to buttress myself.

Driving to and from the hospital during the illness is a state of loneliness all unto itself. Oddly, even though I was painfully alone on the last trip after she died, I felt as if she were in the car with me. I was in a state of shock, crying, with a cacophony of emotions, questions, insecurities, and I was just beginning to feel the loneliness that would be my unwanted but constant companion until I recovered my strength.

Physical and psychological isolation is part of the loneliness. After diagnosis of the recurrence, despite her desperate state I was not able to find support for either of us because of *Kathie's* admonition, generating the first hints of loneliness and isolation. After *Kathie* died and the relatives went home, my bedroom was very empty and my prospects for a positive or productive future were quite remote.

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The gifts

Sometimes we receive gifts from unexpected places and in strange ways. It's can be difficult to see them as gifts when they happen, or even upon reflection. *Kathie's* passing opened me up emotionally. I feel that crying is not macho, nor sissy. It's a healthy human release and expression. Yes, it can be over done, but so can drinking too much water.

It's hard to imagine how anything positive can come

out of something so tragic, unnecessary, sad, and maddening. But it can happen. It can take time to see the positive things because of the overriding emotional turmoil and desperation. But it's there.

How do we recognize the positive moments that come out of the blue? How can they be called gifts?

A gift is something that is given selflessly, if it is pure. It is something that teaches, enriches, lasts in your memory, and changes your life, even if on a small scale.

As subtle as they might have been, these particular gifts communicated something positive at a time when it was most needed. I am a fairly optimistic and curious person by nature, which helped me recognize and appreciate these moments. I don't think they were messages from beyond. Not this time, anyway.

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The most difficult lesson about pain

I was not yet truly moving on. I did not understand that moving on did not mean erasing memories, thus distancing myself further from *Kathie*. I felt a vague undercurrent that laughing and enjoying someone else's presence betrayed *Kathie*. My analytical mind understood what was best, but my irrational heart, was not ready to give up the pain, which itself was a kind of bridge to *Kathie*. The silent, unrecognized pain became a strange friend and a subversive justification for inertia and sadness. Okay, that is a pretty good excuse for a while. But even good things can be over done.

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Chapter 5: NANNIES AND BIG SISTERS

Recovery: Nannies to the rescue

Kathie and I employed a nanny before we moved to California. Julie was Mary Poppins incarnate, the perfect nanny. This smart, talented, energetic, sensitive woman now has three of her own children. She was with us for about two years, living in our house in Maryland during *Kathie's* illness, and really became a member of the family. This was what a nanny should be. I thought most nannies were like Julie. Wrong!

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Chapter 6: DATING

My baggage

I wasn't the only person with baggage, both positive and negative. I needed to figure out what baggage I could accept from a new woman and what might be too much. No prediction could help. I thought I would know it when I saw it. By the time we hit forty, we develop our own funny personality quirks and patterns. It's life. We have children with their unique issues. We've been divorced, widowed, or never married, all with issues.

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Labels / Am I single?

No! Next chapter.

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Are you EVER going to try?

Well, it had to happen. After all, I was young, healthy and aside from hurting, there were no counter-indications. EXCEPT. I had to ask myself why I should have such a good time when my wife was dead? How would *Kathie* take to these women? What type of woman would *Kathie* like? Wait a minute. This was not for *Kathie*. It was for me. I understood that I did look to her for advice all the time when she was alive. EXCEPT. Does this make me selfish? Am I undergoing Midlife Crisis? What is Midlife Crisis under these circumstances and how do we separate that from my grieving/recovery state? Is that even an issue? Will I be able to have sex? What is sex these days, with AIDS and herpes, and things I never had to deal with before? Will I see *Kathie*

every time I'm with a woman? I even had to change gears about the word "woman." The last time I dated in the 1960's, I was dating "girls." How do I shelter my children from my dating fiascoes? What type of woman do I want? What age? What religion? What, what, what?

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I rang the doorbell. She was finishing her make-up, but over the intercom she invited me into the living room. I sat down and scanned the room. She had the place tastefully decorated for the most part, punctuated by tribal masks, which can only be described as faces of death and torture. Was this an omen? Could she have been the model for these masks?

She said, "Okay, here I come," which I should have taken as a warning.

Like Loretta Young in her 1950's TV series, she glided down the stairs...well, more like Morticia from the Adams family. I couldn't help noticing that her description over the phone was a little different from the vision before me. She was a little heavy, not fat, but not thin as she indicated. She looked like she never worked out or exercised at all, rather than the exercise freak that she described. The long blond hair described over the phone had been replaced by medium darkish brown, with obvious gray roots, and Linda Evans was nowhere to be seen. I really don't like to dwell on physical attributes, but she made such a point of the fact that she was gorgeous and young. Here was a woman who was most unattractive and several years my senior. Okay, now how do I get out of this? I really had no useful thoughts in that direction. I am a nice guy, so I didn't want to hurt her, even though she had purposefully deceived me.

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What the heck was I doing?

Chapter 7: KATHY

I met Kathy Smith on December 18, 1991, eight days after my first *Kathie's* birthday. I think of this day as my re-birthday. I was at the time newly smitten with Mary #2 and I had just met Carla. But I noticed Kathy. Is this confusing?

We met at an informal mixer after I had been in the group for two years. The leader, Jo-Ann, mixed the old guard, my peers and myself, with the new members and arranged us in groups of six. I know that Jo-Ann, in her infinite wisdom and optimistic frame of mind, had newcomer Kathy and me in mind for matchmaking. It took three years, but her plan eventually worked.

I had an immediate attraction to Kathy but it was too early to date her, although Kathy says she does not believe that it would have been too early. She was very recently bereaved, about three months, and I was too much into the search for a lasting relationship to chance a transitional relationship with her, especially since I assumed that she was emotionally vulnerable at that time. I've been there.

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The children react to the engagement

All of the children reacted to our engagement very enthusiastically. Their body language showed the relief of a great burden. The boys were fairly sure that they had "screwed up" any chance of a marriage by their actions. But I also saw their potential. The girls were always sure I would propose to Kathy and felt that if I hadn't, I would have been a prime idiot. They told me that afterwards.

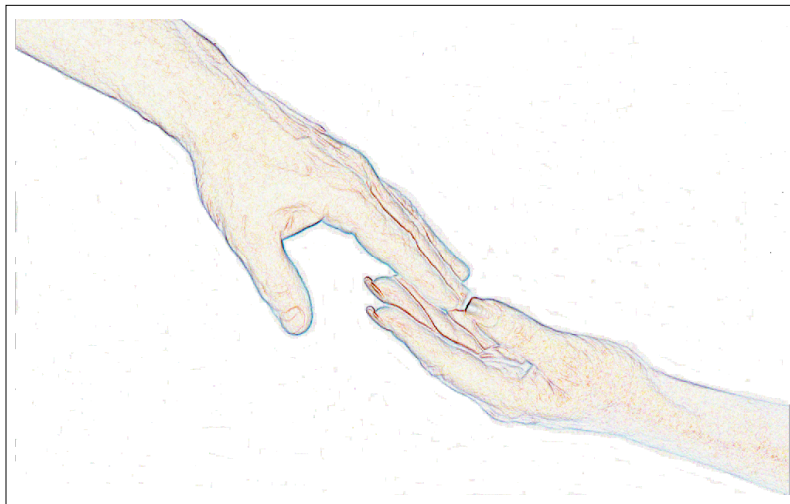
On the surface it appears that it took longer for the

older children to acclimate. This is normal, since they were with their original parent longer. I get a real thrill when the boys call me Dad. It's one of the biggest compliments that anyone could give me, but I never suggested that they call me that. I felt that such a request would be inappropriate, given the circumstances, and it would have been wrong of me to place that emotional pressure on them. They are often warm and affectionate in their own ways when they are not being monsters. Well, the *lovely* teenage years present the quest for independence, acting out, and communication shut down. We butt heads a lot, but they are finding behavior parameters. So there's hope that they will be survivors, and not self-destructive. There is a germ of health-consciousness (pardon the pun), and I eagerly await the day that they discover the concept known as The Future. I'm told that they would be butting heads far worse with their natural father, but I studiously avoid comparing or saying anything negative about their natural father, since I only know him through the words of others. I'm learning about genetics vs. environmental influences in child rearing. Despite this chasm, which can only be partly breached, I do have the answer to my question: I do love the boys unconditionally. I get really pissed at them, and they at me, but the love remains. That makes me a moderately strict father, but a real pushover when the boys show that they are willing to work on their problems, accept responsibility for their actions, and listen to those who would try to protect them from a tendency toward self-punishment.

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I love *Kathie*, but I am in love with Kathy. This might be confusing, even to a person with a split personality! Kathy has my fullest attention and life with her has been good. A perfect life together? I don't even know what that word means. Of course, there are superficial issues between us. There were issues with *Kathie*, too. But for me, yes, it feels perfect. We are true partners and we are holding on tightly. We know what can happen. And we do not take each other for granted, which is another lesson learned the hard way. Every day is a gift.

PART TWO: KATHY'S STORY



Chapter 8:

THE HAPPY ENDING

I looked up into the magnificent array of stars in the clear night sky above Big Sur on August 1, 1995. Not one, but eight shooting stars in a period of one hour, magically illuminated the sky. It wasn't so urgent to make a wish. Finally, my wishes and dreams had come true. This brilliant occurrence was a "sign" that life would finally be good again, even better than before...

Chapter 9: THE EARLY YEARS

I was a twenty-three year old elementary school teacher in Los Angeles, when we met in the summer of 1976. I attended a cousin's wedding in Michigan and met Sandy through another cousin. Sandy was dashing handsome and we had immediate chemistry.

He was loving, caring, generous, and very charming. It troubled me that he smoked, because my grandfather had died of a smoking related illness. However, because my life until then had been so blessed with good fortune, it seemed as if nothing bad could ever happen to me or those close to me.

We became engaged that December while I was in Michigan visiting. We planned the wedding for July 3, 1977. Sandy was in Michigan and I was in Los Angeles. Our daily phone conversations and our four brief visits, convinced me that he was the perfect mate for me, even though this was a classic long-distance relationship. My parents and friends felt that it was difficult to really know a person unless you were with them on a continual basis. Of course, I disagreed. My father, a notable physician, also predicted that Sandy would develop some kind of malignancy at an early age if he did not change his unhealthful eating and habitual smoking.

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The boat begins to founder

Around the end of 1990, Sandy was coughing a great deal and developed terrible headaches from the severe coughing attacks. I pressured him to go to his internist for a check up. He wouldn't listen to me. He knew something was wrong and he was frightened by the thought of what the doctor might find.

Chapter 10: ILLNESS

The cough

After two months, Sandy's coughing was much worse and he was having great difficulty breathing. Finally, in January, 1991, he went to see his internist. The chest X-ray showed something on the lung. Sandy called me from the doctor's office and told me that he would be home late because he was being sent to a pulmonary specialist to have a CT Scan of his lungs. Things were happening alarmingly fast, but ironically, the time seemed to pass in slow motion.

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Sandy's pain began to get worse and he wasn't able to sleep at night. I would wake up and find him sitting on the edge of the bed, bent over, rocking back and forth. One night, six year old Adam also awakened, and without saying a word, he sat next to his father on the edge of the bed, rocking along side of him. This was a special moment of great compassion and love between father and son. Adam is a very sensitive and loving child and he feels compassion for others.

On the way home from Las Vegas, we stopped for dinner, Sandy ordered a large meal, and couldn't touch it.

Chapter 11: DYING

By the time we arrived home, Sandy was in agony. We called Dr. Green and he told us to continue the present dosage of Prednosone, and he increased the pain medication.

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The nurse said, "Oh my God," and ran into Sandy's room. He was pronounced dead at 2:30 A.M., August 27th, although I knew that he had died earlier.

I asked the nurse to take the contact lenses out of his eyes. I didn't want him buried in them. I also wanted the lavender silk robe that he was wearing. It was his favorite, and I still have it .

The nurse then escorted me into a room where I could make calls and she told me that the evening hospital administrator would be in to see me soon, to finish business.

Chapter 12: AFTER

I called my parents first. They asked if I was okay. Functioning on automatic pilot, in a dream-like state, I asked my father what I was supposed to do now. He told me to decide on a mortuary and call immediately. They took the children to school but did not tell them. That would be my job once they were home from school.

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Going home

At around 3:00 A.M. I once again said goodbye to my husband, packed up his things, including his robe and contact lenses, and went down to the parking garage for my car. When I pulled up to the exit gate, the parking attendant demanded more money than what was truly due. I started to argue with him and finally told him that my husband just died, and to please stop hassling me. His response was, "Sure your husband died. What a great excuse!"

I was so angry. I told him it was not an excuse, but a reality. Why else would I be at a hospital at 3:30 in the morning? I paid the ticket, but it was eventually reimbursed.

As I drove home down Doheny, to Wilshire, and on to the 405 freeway, I didn't feel as if I was really alone. I felt Sandy's presence very strongly, and I even spoke to him, telling him how much he was loved and how greatly he would be missed.

I arrived home about 4:00 A.M. I showered, washed and dried my hair, and went to bed. The next morning, at around 7:00, after having not really slept, I began to call my

friends. They were all very sad and a little shocked. Sandy was the first of our contemporaries to die.

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Several unexplainable events

A few days later, I came home after having been gone all day. Sandy's cologne was permeating my bedroom so strongly that I thought for sure it had all spilled. I went over to the cabinet where it was still kept, and was shocked to see the bottle perfectly upright and sealed tightly. I picked the bottle up and smelled it, and there was no odor. Yet still, the essence filled the room. I then looked up and said, "Sandy, you must be here."

Then the telephone rang, and I left the room to take the call. When I returned to the room fifteen minutes later, the odor was completely gone. It felt like Sandy had been there.

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Chapter 13: DATING

My first spark

Our grief group resumed after a two-week New Year hiatus. I was surprised to see that a man had entered our group of ten women. The widows perked up immediately when they saw him, especially Jan. I could tell that she was already planning their future.

As usual, we took turns telling about our losses, as we did when new members entered the group. When it came to the man's turn, he introduced himself as **Jeff**. He certainly wasn't what you would call attractive, but he seemed quite sensitive and he moved me deeply when he spoke of his wife. He was an anesthesiologist and she had been a C.P.A. They had four children. His wife had been fighting cancer for over four years, and had passed away in December. To add to all of this, Jeff's father was critically ill and wasn't expected to live much longer. I really felt for him.

After group, I was shocked when Jeff approached me and told me how moved he was by my story. He then walked me out to my car, we wished each other well, and Pam and I drove home.

Three days later, much to my surprise, Jeff called me back. He told me that he really appreciated my call and we continued to talk for about an hour. We finally got on to the subject of movies. He said that he really enjoyed going to movies and often went by himself to escape the reality of what was going on in his life. I lightheartedly mentioned that I would join him sometime if he liked. He immediately asked me out, and we decided to go to the movies the following Saturday night. He would drive from his home in Santa Monica and pick me up at around 7:00. This would be my first outing with a man since Sandy died.

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Chapter 14: GARY

The lectures

Later that month, my father signed me up for a group of lecture/discussions for young, single professionals. He felt that it would be a great way to meet some interesting people. I wasn't thrilled about going to this course alone. I told Gary about the course, and to my delight, he decided to take the course with me. Gary agreed to drive to my house and pick me up. He had recently proposed to Carla. So I asked if Carla would want to take the course with us. She was busy on those evenings, but Gary confessed much later that he was happy to attend with me alone because of the building tensions in his relationship with her.

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Gary finally commits

I met Gary at his house, because I told him that we needed to talk. The girls were not at home, so we had our privacy. There was a tension between us that we had never experienced before. I knew that I was sending out weird vibes. Gary and I were so in tuned to each other, that we could sense immediately when something wasn't right. We sat in the family room, and I told Gary about Derek.

"Gary," I said. "Remember the man that I met when I went out to dinner with my friends?"

Gary acknowledged that he remembered.

"Well," I went on, "he liked me so much that he came to visit me while you were away."

Gary said, "Oh, well that explains why I could never reach you." He didn't look too pleased.

"Anyhow," I went on, "we spent quite a bit of time

together and he has asked me to marry him.”

Gary was furious. He questioned me as to how I could even consider marrying someone that I had only known for a few weeks.

I told him that Derek was just so good to me, that Derek truly adored me and assured me that I was the most important part of his life. I told him that Derek wanted to take all my worries away and take care of me. I told him that Derek loved me.

Gary immediately stood up and shouted, “I love you, and I have always loved you! I want to do all the things that Derek promises, and more! You’re making a big mistake if you go with him. His love could never be as sincere as mine!”

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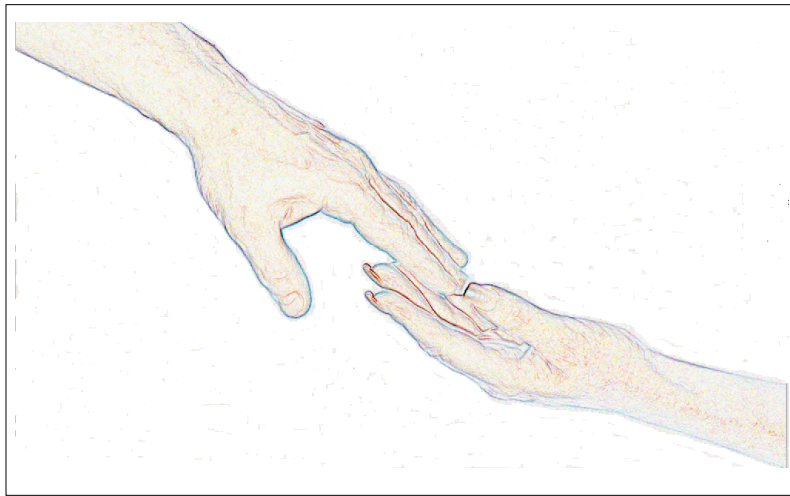
The honeymoon

We drove home from the wedding, quickly changed, and drove up the coast to The Simpson House in Santa Barbara. It was a lovely, romantic, bed and breakfast inn. Here we spent our first night of marriage in our own little cottage.

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The past four years have been painful, and I have come a long way, learning many lessons. My spiritual and emotional growth, have made me a stronger woman and I am forever grateful for the good in my life today. I am one of the happiest and luckiest women in the world, and I will never take anyone or anything for granted for the rest of my life.

EPILOGUE: OUR STORY since yesterday



One of the facts of life is that every lovely dream realized has a reality attached to it. Some may call it the “fine print,” or the “anti-escape clause.” The idyllic setting of our honeymoon at Big Sur was so compelling that we returned the following year. Since we were not trying to rerun the events and emotions of the honeymoon, we enjoyed the second visit thoroughly.

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The interactions with the children sometimes take us to wit's end and even further. We share anger, rage, frustration, headaches, bewilderment, and reconciliation. The mix is very interesting. Ellie, Robyn, Jamie, Adam and Jordan each have strong personalities, each have a complex and interesting sense of humor. Each has an interesting and challenging take on reality, and each have impressive talents such as music, soccer, skateboarding, dance, studies, art, debating, and the list goes on. At this moment we have four teenagers and one adult, so we are dealing with new drivers, college, and (gulp) serious boy or girl friends.

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It took time figuring out the mechanics of this new family, and the process is reformulated daily. And the grocery bills! But we have what we wanted, a life with love and tenderness, not alone, not dwelling on the past or trying to reinvent it, nor erase it. We still cry when something hits a chord, usually both of us at the same time. But we also laugh together. We are growing more alike daily, and even though in many ways we are still acting like newlyweds, people tell us that we are like a couple who have been together for a long time. Well, it has been a long time, if you include the three years of friendship, having met in 1991.

We are told that the years with the children will go quickly. Our lesson has re-taught us what we already knew, that included in the madness of parenting are beautiful moments that also should not be squandered. And after the children have left the nest, we hope to be there for each other.

Our lesson was learned the hard way, and it hurt. We are limping a bit from that, and we appreciate the frequent reminders that the rug can still be pulled out from under us, but we have what we have, and it is now, and we have chosen to be survivors.