



THE AFTER A DEATH SERIES

When A Wife Dies

When Pat Page's wife was dying she had a cowbell beside her bed. When she needed Pat she rang the bell. He became so alert that he would awaken at night whenever the neighbor's wind chimes sounded. As the funeral coach was taking her body away, Pat took the cowbell outside, placed it on a stump and smashed it to smithereens.

- Men tend to grieve by *doing* something.
- Men tend to grieve through *action*.
- Men tend to grieve just as hard and thoroughly as women.

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IT'S CULTURAL

About the only place in our society where you, a man, can openly cry, wail, beat your breast and bury your head in your hands is at a football, baseball, basketball, hockey or other sports event. In some native cultures, men who were grieving painted their bodies. Here, you can do it at the Super Bowl. The biggest, toughest, meanest dude in the National Football League can look into the camera with tears streaming down his face and everybody understands. If tears stream down your face at work...well, that's a different story.

Another interesting cultural quirk comes with whom you can share your grief. If you talk to another man, you risk being vulnerable. If you talk to a woman – even if you cry – she's likely to see you as tender and sensitive. How you grieve depends a lot on how you were raised, how the men in your family grieved and your present circle of friends. You know who will be helpful and supportive and who will not.

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IT'S HORMONAL

In recent years we've learned that when men grieve they release the hormone testosterone. When women grieve, they release the hormone oxytocin. Testosterone is an action hormone. Oxytocin is called, "the cuddle hormone." Men want to move, take action, DO something. Women want to be held, cuddled, cared about. While grief is physical – upset stomach, bowel disturbances, headaches and more – those hormones also influence it. We used to give you men a lot of physical work to do after a death. You built the casket, dug the grave. Now you have to find new action outlets for your grief, and there are several:

- Walk. "Take your grief for a walk," is an old saying with a lot of sense. Walk the mall, walk outside, walk on a treadmill. Run, if you're a runner.
- Cry. Big boys DO cry. Cry in the shower. Cry in front of your TV. Cry into your pillow.
- Be Creative. Paint, plant, sculpt, dance, write, build.
- Tell your story.

This is perhaps the most important part of getting your grief out. You don't have to go on and on about how you feel. You don't have to bare your soul or emote all over the place. Just tell people what happened. Write your story in a journal. You heal through details. Women heal through feelings. If there's a grief support group in your area, give it a try. Your funeral director can recommend one and such groups are good for both men and women.

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IT'S LONELY

One of the toughest parts of grief is the loneliness and aloneness that

comes with it. Men are much more likely to hurry into another marriage than are women. Even though the casseroles aren't all eaten yet, you've probably thought about your future or someone you know who was married within six months after his wife's death. The key is to *take your time*. It's okay to be with yourself alone. You're good company. Get involved with a social group or a support group when you need a sense of community.

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IT'S MANAGEABLE

Take things a day at time. It may be hard to go through the mail and pay the bills or get up the strength to do the dishes. Your life seems to slow down. One piece of advice one widower gave another was to, "Keep your house clean – it's a simple thing and you feel better when things are neat."

You may need to learn how to make a different kind of grocery list. Eat healthy food, even if you're tempted to stand over the sink with a baloney sandwich. And be careful of the alcohol and even anti-depressants. They often stuff the grief inside and it WILL come out – eventually.

It's not easy. If this were a football game, you'd be the quarterback and grief would be the other team. You're the leader. You make the calls. You make the plays. You're in control of how you deal with your feelings and what you do.

- Take care of yourself.
- Tell your story.
- Honor your wife and your life together by living well and you'll win the game.

A Caring Gift to you from: _____