

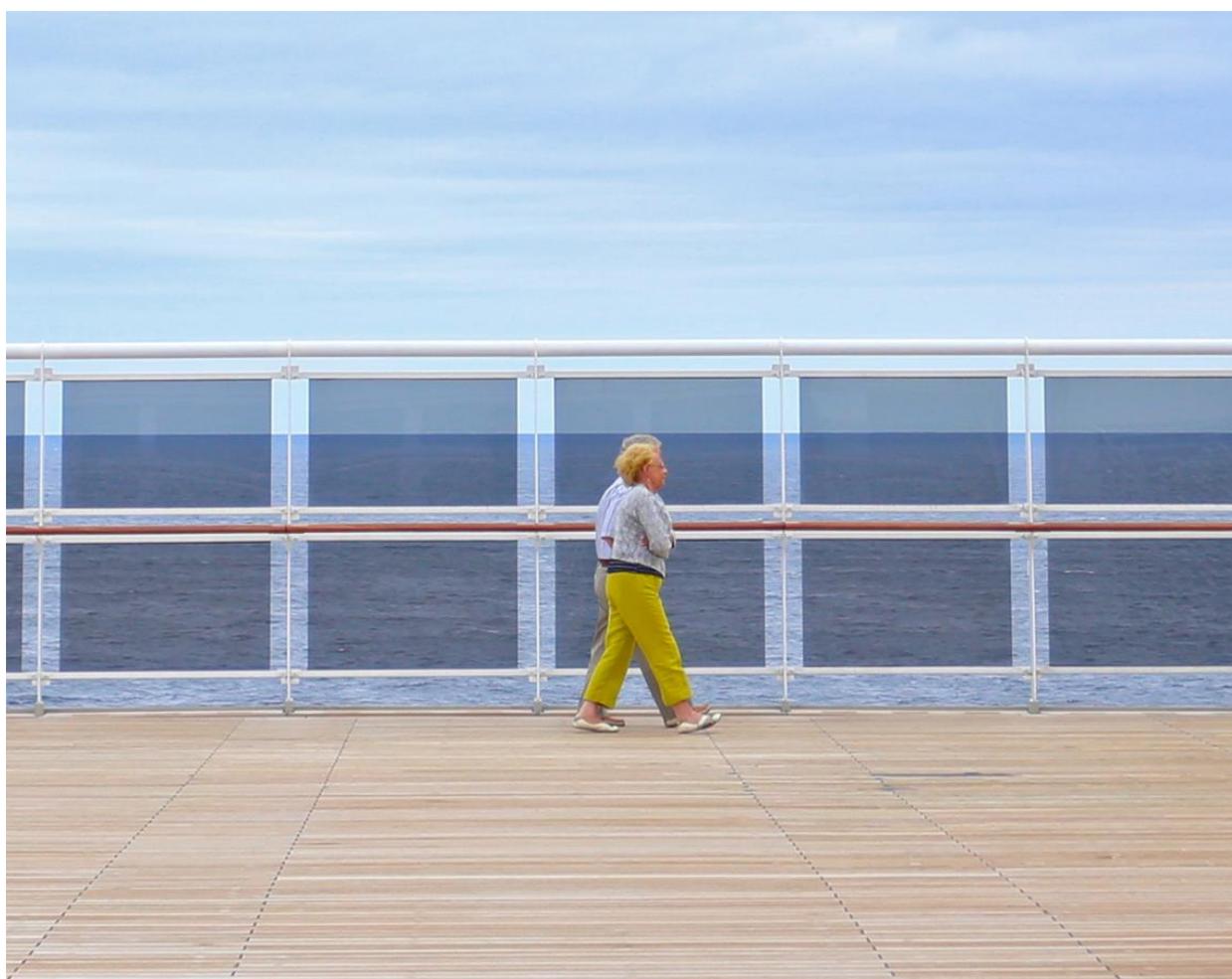


<https://www.headspace.com/articles/life-after-a-death>

The After Series: Life After a Death

By Suzanne Boles

We spend so much of our waking lives avoiding death—in more ways than one. When it comes to talking about the inevitable, it isn't always easy. So the Orange Dot is aiming to shine a light on these stories, in hopes that it may help others. The After Series features essays from people around the world who've experienced loss and want to share what comes after.



It may sound cliché, but my life changed forever the day my husband, Bob, died.

After 30 years of shared memories and life as I knew it, I went from *we* to *me* and began my journey of intense grieving. Grief isn't the life you choose, it chooses you. It's continually moving from "I have to tell him that," to "Oh no! I can't!" in a split second. Many

of the newly grieving turn to grief groups, therapists, and reading articles on the internet and social media to try to understand the upside-down world that no longer makes sense. Everything tells you there are tools you can use that will help, and one tool I kept hearing was *mindfulness*. "It's about living in the moment," I was told. I wondered how you could live in the moment when you're going back and forth between the past and present at lightning speed, unable to harness your thoughts, but I was willing to try. You grasp at any opportunity to take you out of the grief nightmare you're living day in and day out.

My first experience came when I took part in a mindfulness group offered by a local organization, in my city, for anyone who has lost a loved one during the one-year period after their passing. Although billed as mindfulness, this particular meditation involved a kind of visualization that instructed us to think about the worst possible thing that had happened and to re-live that moment.

My heart was beating uncontrollably as my mind played the horrible scenes of the months that had led to my loss. Eventually, flight conquered fight, and I ran down the stairs, sobbing uncontrollably. It was the last time I wore mascara for more than two years. You might think I would have backed off the whole mindfulness idea after that experience but, when you're grieving, one of the clichés repeated over and over is that "you can't get *around* grief, you must *go through it*." Despite what they tell you, all you really want is to find that miraculous way to get around it. Plus, this first very painful experience with "mindfulness" wasn't really what I had learned about mindfulness—which is being still and present focusing on being in the moment. I was open to trying it again, and that opportunity came not long after.

During this time I was nurtured by women. I didn't have a lot of female friends, but after Bob died they surfaced. They arrived on my doorstep. They brought gifts and food. They invited me to coffee. Many just sat and listened as I cried. One of these women invited me to join a group of women who practiced meditation once a week. They took turns hosting the meditation evening in their homes. The practice was to sit for 20 minutes focusing on the breath—*breathe in, breathe out*—in silent contemplation, followed by 10 minutes walking meditation, then another 20 minutes sitting meditation. No reliving of painful moments involved.

But for me, grief took away my ability to be patient—I couldn't sit still for long periods because if I didn't move, I was thinking about my loss. So to say this meditation ritual was difficult for me is an understatement. But I persevered. A few evenings I fled into the bathroom crying. But no one said anything until one night when one woman, with an amazingly dry sense of humor, commented that my moving foot resembled something rather phallic, and we all erupted in uncontrollable laughter.

Slowly, a bond began to grow, even as some women left and new ones appeared. One woman in our group had been diagnosed with brain cancer before I joined, and tragically died a few months later. My role of griever reversed as I became the one who listened to the stories the other women shared about their friendship with this special person and her

impact on others. I was finding strength through this bond and the practice of meditation. I was becoming proficient at meditating.

After a year, rather than closing my eyes, I was able to lower my gaze and focus without distraction. I was actually surprised when the 20-minute sittings concluded. Meditation was not only guiding me through grief, but opening me up to a support system. I looked forward to sitting every week—and having something to look forward to was no small thing. Three years later, as I prepare to honor the third year of Bob's passing, I continue to attend the meditation group. The worst part of my grief journey is over. And as I reflect, I realize how important the bonding of women and the practice of meditation has been, for me, through a time of tragedy, and how important it continues to be, in this new life after Bob.