

Adapting to Widowed Life: What's Next for Me?

Searching for what's next and discovering the 'now'

By [Leida Snow](#) | December 11, 2025 | [Grief and Loss](#)

One of the curve balls life can throw is that the personal tragedy that has engulfed us is not unique. Still grieving for my husband, Lou, gone two years, my suffering is mostly private. In the world I'm Out There, functioning, enjoying life. Sharing where I *really* am with friends who might understand is a humbling experience because my situation is fairly common.



Lou used to make us tea in the mornings. Two years on, I can't put up a pot of water without my throat going dry and my eyes filling with tears. | Credit: Getty

Lou was [diagnosed with stage 4 cancer](#) in the summer of 2022, but my old notes reveal he showed symptoms as early as 2015. That's when Lou had episodes of [syncope](#) or fainting, which doctors say is caused by a sudden decrease in blood flow to the brain.

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I was the frog in the water, slowly making adjustments, turning down career possibilities, reaching out to specialists and spending more and more of our time catering to his declining health. It never occurred to me to resent what was happening. The reality simply existed. Lou needed me, and I wanted to be there for him.

My husband's world became my world, and I wasn't aware of how much my purpose in life circled around him. I had no idea that I would miss him so much, or that some of my grief would be because, with him gone, my days and nights were no longer filled with clear mission.

Searching for Meaning

Well-meaning friends ask if I'm keeping busy. My full life is separate from the grieving that continues to hold me in its grip. Tiny happenings [trigger](#). Lou used to make us tea in the mornings. Two years on, I can't put up a pot of water without my throat going dry and my eyes filling with tears.

But my deep sadness is different from the crater of emptiness that opened before me when he died. Sleep was a luxury. Food lost its taste. Politics? Performances? If I couldn't share experiences with Lou, what was the point?

Many friends who have lost a loved one, a spouse, a parent, have — like me — lost the meaning to their lives. Many ask the same question: What will fill

the bottomless void? What's next?

People may not use the word "purpose." They may talk about what's going on for them in different ways, but the deeper meaning comes through: Life seems *blah* somehow. They may be busy, but there's nothing that they care that much about.

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Taking this journey with grief, I feel like [Don Quixote](#) tilting at windmills. Try searching for "finding a purpose" in Google or Wikipedia. Quite a few sources, books and authors, come up. Some of them sound too New Age-y for me, but the question remains: What's next? What is there that would make a difference in my life?

I've spoken to quite a few friends, acquaintances, neighbors and relatives. Some were so deep in grief

they could hardly function. Others had found hobbies or were working or looking for work. A few had found new partners. As they shared their heartbreaking losses, what came through was also about how their days and nights had been filled with thinking about, and caring for, the one they lost. When we got down to their truth, they missed the certainty of knowing that their being on this earth made a difference for someone.

According to the [National Library of Medicine](#), in this country, four million individuals are caring for an adult cancer patient. According to the [Alzheimer's Foundation of America](#), nearly 15 million in this country are living with the disease or caring for someone who is.

A friend's wife is physically fine but, after some ten years, she doesn't know him. In many ways, he has lost her and when she finally does pass, he will lose her again. Meanwhile, every waking moment and many nights revolve

around her. What will remain for him when that all-encompassing need is gone?

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Another friend is leaving New York and a job he loves to move far away to help his mother care for his father, who has dementia. He says he never hesitated, once the obligation was clear. My friend knows that caring for his parents will take over a good deal of his future. When that responsibility ends, what will happen to him?

If we're lucky, as we age, we remain healthy, but many of our lives become intertwined with someone else, in ways we didn't anticipate. According to an [AARP report](#), one in every four adults in this country is a caregiver. We slip into these roles, some willingly, some because they see no other option. The physical, emotional and financial strains are often huge. Even with the deepest love, there may be terrible loneliness, even anger.

And when the end finally comes, the immeasurable grief comes with the



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elimination of responsibilities; and relief, guilt and a vast emptiness. When your whole being has been invested in helping someone you love, what happens when that essential is gone? What should we, the survivors, be doing *now* that would make life worth living? How do we keep from giving up?

Leida Snow and her young neighbors. Lex is on the left. | Credit: Courtesy of Leida Snow

Some people find solace in their faith.

Others look to professional help or self-help. The [Zen](#) masters suggest a focus on *now*, on being fully present in the current moment, and being open to whatever appears. That needs to be repeated because it's a subtle, but important, distinction. Instead of focusing on the goal, of searching for and discovering a purpose, the message is to focus on whatever is happening *now*.

My Now

In my *now*, I had occasion to meet with someone about a local issue. Turns out this district city manager knew Lou over 20 years. She shared how his "just checking in" calls had cheered her. Then, on the second anniversary of Lou's death in September, the loss felt so fresh I was crushed. A neighbor showed up at my door with her daughter Lexington holding a huge bouquet of flowers. When Lex had met Lou, they instantly connected. It was a joy to watch him light up when he saw her and how she would hug him.

"You look sad, sweetheart," I said. "What's the matter?"

Five-year-old Lex looked up and tried to smile. "I miss Lou," she said. This sweet little girl remembered. Her words were beyond comforting. I thought of those who spoke at Lou's memorial. All of their memories made Lou's

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continued presence real for me. The impact he had on others' lives. I am so grateful.

As time passes, the process of grief changes, and what remains is the love we had for the one we lost. We can open ourselves to the future through what is in front of us *now*.

No one said it would be easy. But the answer comes when we accept that we can't possibly know what the future holds. All we can do is be open to the possibilities the future offers.

As we continue the journey with our grief, that is the power of *now*.

There's a widely known saying that holds a general truth: If you want to know where you're going, look where your feet are pointing. Nothing said Purpose to me when Lou needed me. I just knew what I had to do. The same is true now. There is a *now* happening in my life and I can be open to that.

Instead of urgently searching to know what's next, we can welcome *whatever* is in front of us. We can ask with enthusiasm: What's happening *now*? We can embrace whatever's next, and then next and then next.

I hope to greet what comes as an opportunity. I will keep asking: What's next? I hope to be open to whatever comes. What's next? I'm ready.

Leida Snow is an award-winning journalist and communications coach. Follow her @LeidaSnow [Read More](#)

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