

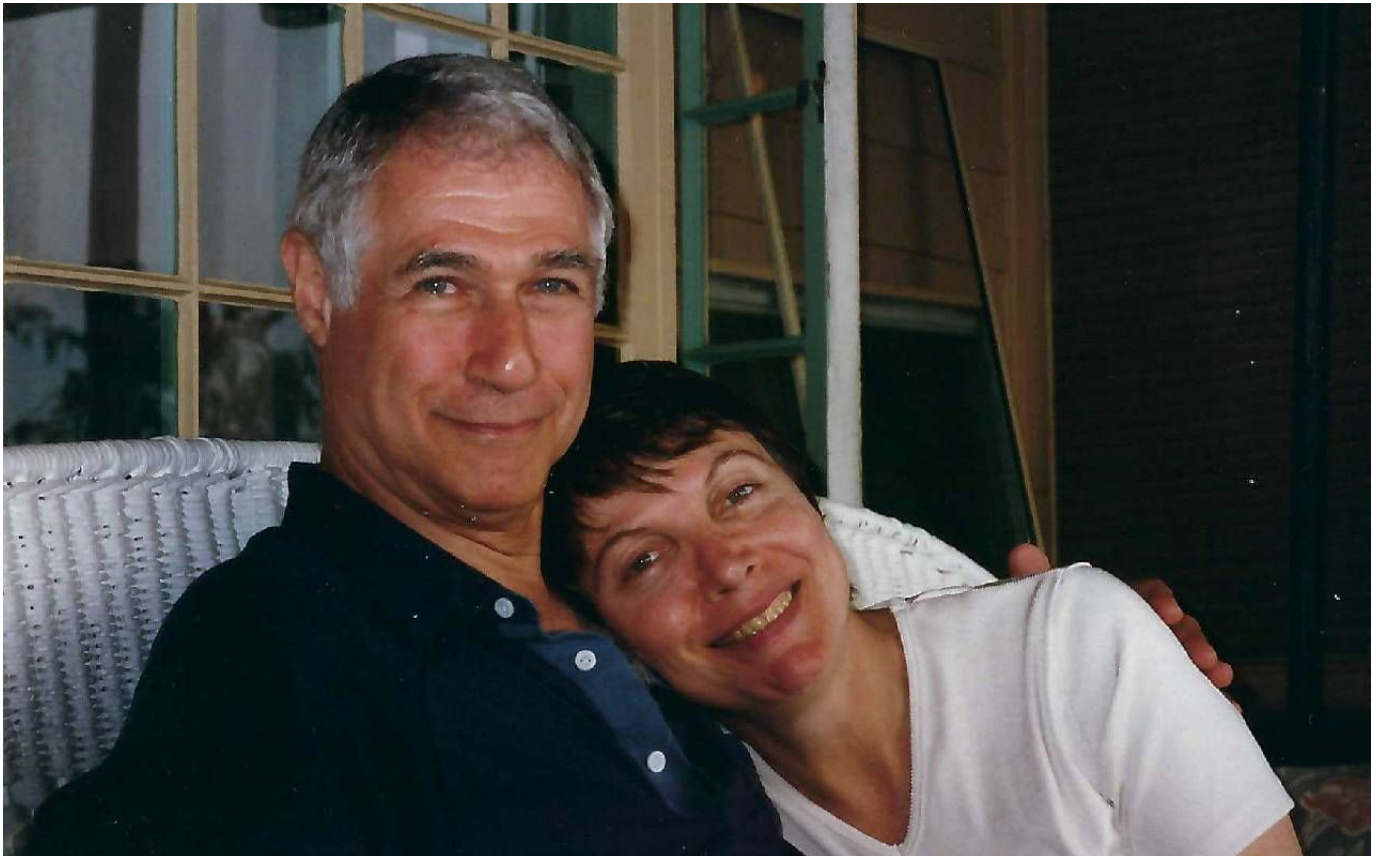
Surviving Grief

Going through grief is moving through a process, in which you begin to engage proactively with life, while still involved with profound loss

By [Leida Snow](#) | September 9, 2024 | [Grief and Loss](#)

Lou said often that he knew we would be married from the moment he saw me. I had no such flash. When we met, I was involved with someone else.

"What would you have done if I'd married Ted?" I asked him once. "Oh, I knew you wouldn't," Lou quipped. "He wasn't right for you." None of that made sense to me. That kind of thing only happened in movies.



Lou and Leida earlier in their marriage | Credit: Courtesy Leida Snow

When Lou proposed marriage after I broke off with Ted, I blurted out, "Marry you? I don't even know you!" Lou was indignant. "Not know me? I'm the guy who's waited more than two years for you. I'm the guy who wants to spend the rest of my life with you."

**"I wasn't there with
you."**

When I agreed to marry Lou, a colleague asked if I loved him. "I don't know about love," I answered slowly. "What I know is, we fit together." I linked my fingers to show her. I never experienced — believed in — his feelings. Until Paris.

The trip with Lou wasn't my first to Paris, but it was his. "It's silly for you to wait while I go to my meeting," I said. "I know you'll want to visit the Eiffel Tower." I carefully wrote out directions. Meeting up later, he beamed, "Just how I'd always dreamed it would be."

I couldn't keep from laughing, catching his delight. "What do you want to do now?" I smiled up at his 6'4" tallness. "Let's go to the Eiffel Tower," he enthused. Whaaat? "But you were just there!" I was puzzled

Lou said: "I wasn't there with *you*."

The Force of Love

That was when the force of his love hit me, enfolding me, making me whole.

So we went to the Eiffel Tower, to be there together. We were inseparable for more than 41 years. I was a New York theater critic, and Lou was my plus-one. Later, when I worked for a national trade organization, my husband came to all the conferences. I joined a chorus, and Lou picked me up after every rehearsal and was in the audience for every performance.

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As a citizen activist, Lou's passion was transportation, and I went with him way uptown, deep into Harlem, and miles underground, to follow what was happening with the Second Avenue subway. I marveled at local parks that he helped turn into reality.

We explored New York, our city, together. We found special restaurants. We walked everywhere, holding hands. We'd sit at our partners' desks, facing each other in our shared home office, commenting off-and-on all day.

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Or we'd take what we called a lap break: he'd sit on the sofa in the living room, and I'd find my spot in the crook of his arm, and we'd lie there, sometimes talking, sometimes not saying a word. It was in the sharing that our love lived.

We didn't travel much. Sometimes this was frustrating. I had to convince him to go outside our bubble. When I insisted, we did get to roam — to Italy, England, Israel, China and Japan, and back to Paris. But any voyaging was to accommodate me. Lou would look up from his desk across from mine, and as long as I was there, he didn't want or need to be anywhere else.

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Our Time Was Limited

Lou died after a years-long cancer battle on September 18, 2023. [Cancer with unknown primary \(CUP\)](#) affects 2% to 5% of diagnosed malignancies. Doctors throw multiple tests and hard to pronounce chemicals at their patients, but it's all guess work. In Lou's case, there were ghastly side effects, but no cure.

I knew our time was limited. I thought I was prepared for the end, but somehow I didn't expect to miss him so much. The grief is like the undertow in the ocean, pulling me down, engulfing me in waves.

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I am so much better now. I am functioning, spending time with friends, relatives, and clients. They no doubt believe I'm well past the worst of the bottomless sadness. They don't see me at home when I collapse, when the despair grabs me by the throat, threatening to drown me, leaving me gasping for air.

Folks mean well when they suggest that I keep busy. They don't understand that I can enjoy being in others' company, that I can laugh with a smart comedian or lose myself in a Broadway show. But I miss talking about the

world with Lou. I miss sharing breakfast with him. How he would putter in the kitchen and make a pot of loose tea for us, keeping track of the brews I preferred. Missing the sharing is one of the gut-tearing truths about losing a life partner.

Lou's wristwatch is where it always was, on the table on his side of the bed. His razor is in the medicine cabinet. His certificates hang on our office walls. And the fire engine red windbreaker that he wore constantly hangs in the foyer closet. I have photos of him from when he was dying and I can't delete them; but the photos I display show him healthy and us, so much "we."

There is a [Zen understanding](#) that says there may be sadness when there's a loss, but there is grief only where there is love. I want to believe, that it is because my love is so strong that the hurt is so deep.

The one certain thing about all of us, is that we are all going to lose someone we love.

Every loss is unique. Every mourner grieves differently. I've checked with quite a few taking this unwelcome journey through mourning. Some lost their loved ones recently. For others, the abyss opened years, even decades, ago. Some remain alone, others have found new partners, some are remarried. Every one, without exception, shared an ongoing partnership with felt loss.

Navigating Grief



Lou and Leida in Paris | Credit: Courtesy Leida Snow

So how do we navigate this voyage? The help needed is more than/different from that offered by family and friends. The search for comfort is boundless. Music, art, and poetry are the go-to's for some. Others find that [therapy](#) helps. Still others hook up with like-minded travelers in support groups offered by [hospitals](#), [hospices](#), funeral homes, and Zen teachings. Or in books or [articles](#). I was fortunate in finding [someone to talk to](#).

There is no getting over, or beyond, it. I have trouble believing so many months have passed since Lou died.

The reality is that going through grief is moving through a process, in which you begin to engage proactively with life, while still involved with profound loss. It's the integration of grieving and living. It is knowing that the pain will always be there even as there is a merging, a blending, with life.

There's an [essay](#) by the American journalist and author [Emily Hahn](#), published long ago, about her decline

into opium addiction and her emergence from that poison. I've never been into drugs, yet her words resonate for me. The opium had dulled the ache of living for her. At the end of her article, Hahn acknowledges there is no cure. She writes: "The pain has always been there, and now it hurts again. That is all. It is supportable."

It is the same with [grief](#). There is no getting over, or beyond, it. I have trouble believing so many months have passed since Lou died. The wound feels so fresh. If the experience of others proves true for me, the heartache will always be there and will stab again and again.

What I hold onto is that, as the months and years pass, as I continue the journey, it will become bearable. It will be supportable.

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

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