

Are You Ready?

From Shirley

“*I*m sorry. He’s gone,” he said gently. Matt was the ICU nurse attending my husband Bill.

Gone? My beloved husband of forty years?

We had celebrated our fortieth anniversary doing what we loved best, exploring the outdoors in beautiful Glacier and Banff National Parks. But a headache that would not go away shortened our trip. Bill had contracted an incessant virus. Eventually, he suffered a stroke and six months after our memorable wedding anniversary trip, I heard those devastating words: “He’s gone.”

Months passed and I began to learn to live without the man who’d been by my side for forty years. The thought of going on without Bill was like looking down a chasm into a world of nothing but fear and loneliness. I depended on God to get me through this time that was more difficult than any loss I’d ever experienced.

After many lonely months, I longed to share my life with someone again and joined an online dating site—my nickname was “Loves2dance.” A certain guy, whose nickname was “TeacherGuy1492,” caught my eye. We chatted back and forth through the matching site. When I received an email with the subject line saying, “Would you like to dance?” my heart skipped a beat.

His real name was Blair, and we clicked. When I introduced Blair to my sister, she said, “There’s a sweetness about him.”

Within six months, we were married. I never dreamed I'd meet and fall in love with someone besides my husband, Bill, but I did! We both marveled that we were a perfect match.

Blair had one more year of teaching before retirement. One evening as we prepared for bed, I noticed his face, shiny with perspiration, had a vacant look. "What's wrong?" I asked.

"I have a headache," he replied. A few moments later he said, "I think you should call an ambulance." At the hospital, I learned it was a brain aneurysm. He never regained consciousness before he died.

I walked through the halls in the hospital and raged silently at God. I didn't understand why this was happening. We'd only had seventeen months of marriage! Couldn't we have more time? I'd already been widowed. Did I have to go through this again?

Though sadness was my partner for months and months, I continued to live. But I began to think recovery would require a new relationship.

Twenty-Six Months Later . . .

"It's over. I can't marry you."

I took the phone away from my ear for a moment in shock and looked at it—the phone, not the voice I heard—as if the phone and not the voice of my fiancé was telling me this. Why hadn't I paid attention to the red flags I saw but ignored? I was lonely. I wanted to be done with the grief and sadness. I needed to go on through my grief, to the other side. It would take work. And tears. And more time.

From Jim

"Her time is coming soon," said Molly shaking her head. She was Kathy's caregiver, giving final instructions for the day.

Though I knew one day death would come to Kathy, I thought,
not now, another day, another time.

Kathy slept most of the afternoon, her breaths becoming slower and slower. I watched her chest rising slowly with great effort. And then, it was quiet. She didn't take in any more air.

She was now breathing heavenly air. My Kathy was gone.

I carefully closed her eyes, kissed her gently on her lips, and called Father T with the news. Then I called hospice. They needed to come and certify her death. It was 4:20 in the afternoon.

A few months went by. I was so lonely I decided I'd like to meet someone. Surely the company of a woman would remove the sad feelings. I talked to a trusted friend who told me he knew a single woman I might be interested in. I asked her out on a date. I thought I was on my way out of my grief.

Little did I know my grieving had really just begun

When LaRay and I became engaged, close friends warned me I was moving too quickly. It had only been six months after Kathy died, but I thought I was ready. I wasn't. A few weeks later, we agreed we weren't right for each other and we ended our engagement.

Those are real scenes from each of our lives. Broken engagements and broken hearts. Loss of money and time. Bruised egos. Had we read a book like the one you are going to read, we might have been spared some of that pain. However, even making right choices does not exclude pain. Life brings pain. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Shirley made the choice to marry her second husband. Having been widowed, she experienced a spark of fear that marrying Blair made her vulnerable to another loss, yet the love was worth the loss. Jesus reminded his

disciples of life's difficulties when he said: *I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world* (John 16:33 NIV). Life is full of pain, as we have learned through our life experiences. We hope the experiences in this book may help you determine, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that you are ready for a new mate after a long-term marriage has ended by death or divorce.

You're working through the grief process and now you'd like to meet someone you might possibly marry. You're an empty nester; you thought you'd be fine as a single person. You may have grand-children. You may not be retired yet, but you'd like to be in the next few years—and you'd like a spouse to share it with you.

When you were a teenager or young adult in love, you probably didn't think about what it would be like to be married to this person your whole life. But now you know the realities of married life. You may—or may not—be more cautious. And even though you meet a new someone with whom you are head over heels, caution might not be a bad idea. It is our hope this book will open communication more fully between you and a possible lifetime marriage partner.

In the following chapters, we address seven key issues we think deserve your careful consideration before you take that next important step:

- Grief work
- Faith
- Finances
- Blending families

- Sex

- Health

- Politics

We include separate self-assessment questionnaires throughout the chapters to help you determine where you and your potential partner stand on the issues. A comprehensive questionnaire in the appendix will provide all the questions combined for an overall assessment that can illuminate your conversations and the challenges you might encounter in your future together.

Hard as it might be, answer each question at the end of each chapter as honestly as you can. Each of you should take it separately, then share and discuss your answers. Give examples to assist your partner to fully understand why you answered as you did, or provide details that illustrate your point of view.

It is important to compare and discuss your thoughts with each other. Your communication is crucial when considering remarriage. There are no right or wrong answers—just clearly communicated and jointly understood issues that can play a significant role in developing a deep and satisfying marriage. Keep in mind that if you are reluctant to be totally honest in your answers, it might be you aren't ready for another relationship.

As you read through the following chapters, we hope our stories will help you to recover from your grief and then talk with a possible partner about necessary considerations to begin a new chapter in your life.

One last thing. We enjoy all types of music and have found that it enhances life and connects with the soul. To enrich your reading experience, we've shared carefully chosen titles that go along with

each chapter's theme. Go online and enjoy the song together to set the stage before you read the chapter. To begin your journey, start with this song: ♪ “What I Did for Love” ♪ Edward Kleban/Marvin Hamlisch.

For the remainder of the book, please listen to the recommended song at the beginning of the chapter.