



# *Living the Change*

by John Kennedy Saynor

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Eleanor Roosevelt, America's first lady when her husband Franklin was president, said this, *"You must do the thing you think you cannot do."* She probably never thought when she was a young girl that she would one day be married to a president of the United States. Life for the two of them wasn't easy, yet they accomplished things they would never have believed possible because they were both courageous.

The reaction of many bereaved people to their situation is, "I don't know how I will get through this!" There is nothing wrong with that reaction. It is a normal response to their situation. So what are some ways you can continue to help yourself deal with the change that has taken place in your life?

## *Gradually adjust to your new identity.*

This is one area of adjustment people find difficult. For the new widow it is worsened by the fact that there is an unspoken stigma around the word "widow" or "widower." Nobody wants to be a widow or widower and adapting to this new identity is difficult. Removing a spouse's name from your checkbook, your address labels and your bank accounts are all part of the process. If you are mourning the death of a parent, or parents, you may find the loss of that "line of defense" that parents often provide a great difficulty.

## *Begin to learn what your new responsibilities are.*

This is closely connected to adjusting to your new identity, but it is different. Your time, energy and priorities may change greatly because of this death in your family. It will take time for you to adjust to it, to adjust your schedule and to adjust your expectations of life. Be patient with yourself and seek the support and advice of professionals, family members and friends who can help you.

## *Begin to adjust to your new environment.*

This is perhaps an area where most people have the greatest difficulty. A woman who I have been counseling found her husband dead beside her in bed not long ago. Her adjustment has been typical of many who find themselves recently bereaved. She told me she found it difficult to go into their bedroom because she could see him in the bed where he died. So I suggested she rearrange the furniture so the bedroom didn't look the same. She did that and can now go in there without seeing him. Then, she sold her husband's truck and bought herself a new car. The lease on the truck was coming up and had to be dealt with. It was difficult, but she did it and now has a new car. Of course, she would rather have her husband here to deal with it all, but she did it and I think is quite proud of herself. Many changes have to be made after someone dies, and some can be made in order to make the adjustment to a new life.

## *Adjust to a new social life.*

Many newly bereaved people don't want to go out socially immediately after a loved one dies. However, the time comes when they want to get out again. Some fit right back into their old social group without a problem, but I think most begin to develop new friends and interests. It is part of recreating life! As odd as it may seem, some people make new friends in a bereavement support group. Others find new friends and interests in

volunteer work. Building a new social life based on your new reality means that the relationships aren't clouded by memories of the one who has died. You can do new things with new people and not find yourself remembering your loved one in that context.

### *Don't be afraid of challenging your former assumptions about life.*

Often our values and priorities are determined by those around us and when a significant person in our life dies, many find their values change. Sometimes this is frightening. If you have lived a large part of your life with certain values, to have them challenged can be scary. However, if those priorities are no longer valid, then be willing to change for today and the future. As I said before, a death can be a wake-up call for us. Death can be a reminder that we aren't here forever. Many people discover they are thinking about spiritual questions in a way they haven't for a long time. Spirituality is the heartbeat of life. Serious questioning and re-evaluating life at this time can provide a good foundation for building a new future.

### *Dream and hope again!*

When someone you love dies, many of your hopes and dreams die with them. For a while it will seem like you will never dream again. But in time you will – and don't be afraid when those new dreams begin to come to you. Dreams bring hope and without hope you can't carry on. So, hoping and dreaming go hand in hand.

One last thing. While it is true that we need friends and family to support us, I believe we all have a responsibility for how well we get through the difficulties of our life. To work through our grief takes courage, hope and determination. Know that the sun will shine again and you will rebuild your life, and life will be good again.

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