

Healing the Brokenhearted: Hope and Help amid Marriage Breakup

Continuing the *Voice of Zion*'s effort to include helpful, honest writings about the trials that families face in many areas of life, we have gathered a number of writings drawn from responses to questions on family or marriage breakup, where one spouse/parent leaves living faith and the home. The believing writers, whose names are not included here, share both the staggering trial they've experienced, including the long-lasting affects on adult and child, but also God's blessings of His Word and kingdom, Christ's gospel of forgiveness, prayer, the care of fellow believers, societal help, and much more. May these writings from both the spouse's and child's perspectives offer support to those experiencing such trauma, those who seek perspective on such painful past events, and also for others who can help children and spouses who face or have faced marriage or family breakup. The writers also reflect the mind of Christ through their merciful and prayerful attitudes toward the one who left faith and family.

Our Refuge and Strength

Divorce Implications Are Long-Lasting

Loss at the death of a loved one is extremely painful and forever changes the persons it has affected. Loss of a spouse or parent by the family due to infidelity, addiction, abuse, or for some other reason, is also very difficult. It is hard to understand and brings unique trials that have far reaching effects. Not only does it end the marriage, it can divide the family in ways that seem irreparable. It can cause the loss of faith for the one struggling to overcome whatever the temptation might be. In some situations the remaining spouse has eventually left faith as well, perhaps succumbing to the enemy's pressures and temptations of being left alone.

These kinds of trials are not new or unique to believers. The enemy of souls has attempted to divide the family unit from the beginning. He despises the sanctity of marriage as well as a happy and loving home, and thus he uses whatever tools he can to break this unity and love. Even though we know this, it can be shocking when it hits close to home; the security we have known is shattered and one starts down a path that is mostly unknown. "This happens to others, not me. Where will it lead? How will it end? Does God even remember me? Where do I turn for help? Who will understand?" These are all questions that are frequently asked. So, where does one turn? At the depth of trial and difficulty one can especially turn to God, prayerfully asking for strength to endure and reach acceptance and normalcy in life. God through His Word promises to care for His own. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1).

God's Kingdom—a Source of Help

Those who have experienced these kinds of trials have also found comfort in God's kingdom. I personally have experienced that when trials are the heaviest, God's kingdom has always felt the sweetest. There is a network of support that is unknown to the world around us. Even professionals in varying fields have pointed to the support group that God's children truly are.

However, because of the closeness of God's children and as the matter becomes known in the congregation, it can be those people who don't completely understand the situation that may begin to judge. It can also be a natural thing for a parent or close one of those struggling to take sides, blindly supporting their own child or family member, and perhaps

forgetting the other spouse involved. What once was a matter between two can become a far greater problem. It is essential that one is cautious about judging the situation from afar; trusting instead that the matter is in good hands and that all is being done that can be done. Pray for God's guidance.

Christ's Gospel Is for All

God's kingdom foremost is a forgiving kingdom. Even in these situations, Christ's gospel and forgiveness are for all people. Some families that have been touched by this great trial have also experienced the blessing that, through God's grace, a family member has been able to repent and return to God's kingdom. On the other hand, we know that many times the fallen one does not return to God's kingdom, and sometimes, even if they are again granted grace to believe, they're not able to live with their families because of many different or changed circumstances. Nevertheless, God still helps and offers His guidance and protection to those who believe.

Eric Jurmu

God Has Carried Me

I was seven when I realized that my father was not committed to our family. He made sporadic appearances throughout the rest of my childhood; sometimes he was there, and sometimes he was not. I wondered what I had done to make him not love me, why he didn't love us enough to stay. When around, he was in a good mood sometimes, taking us children out in the woods for hikes, exploring, or shooting practice; those were good memories. Other times he was volatile, taking his anger out on my mother. Eventually my father divorced mother and left for good.

Mother worked full time to support us. Once when I got sick at school, I remember my grandma picking me up and taking me to her house. My father then lived with his girlfriend, who had children of her own. I don't remember him making any effort to spend time with me or even giving gifts on birthdays or Christmas. I wondered once again why I was so unlovable. It hurt to see him spend time with and give gifts to his girlfriend's kids, but not to his own.

I also turned to my believing friends and their homes. I loved Sunday school and youth camp—reassuring, safe, and consistent events that I could depend on. I faced no ridicule there from believing friends. I especially looked up to my camp counselors. In middle school, my friend's mother also took me under her wing. She arranged for me to ride their bus home once a week. I did my homework there and even helped with after-dinner chores.

In high school, a believing aunt and uncle let me nestle in their large and happy home. I spent many nights there, taking comfort in the structure and routine, even the strict rules. I recognized the rules and curfews as a sign of love, and craved those boundaries. Nobody mentioned my family's struggles. Nobody told me that they were trying to help me, or perhaps they were unaware that they were even helping. They simply welcomed me into their homes and let me be a part of their family. Wherever I was, hearing the gospel was like being set free from all my worry and sorrow; it was like being wrapped in a loving embrace.

God has helped me to hold no grudges and bad feelings. The past is what it is, and I have to accept it as that so I can move on. Every year, though, I face guilt for not striving to maintain my relationship with my father and let my children have one with him. I struggle to find the balance of loving him, but protecting my children from his lifestyle. In the end, I always choose to protect my children over keeping a close relationship with my father. We talk on the phone and occasionally I bring my children to visit him, but my own family is now my priority.

I look at my loving spouse and my beautiful children as gifts. God has sent them along with my believing friends and extended family as my escorts, as sources of comfort. God has carried me, as well as my mother, through the difficult years, and I am secure knowing that He will continue to do so. I am humbled and thankful that I have the grace-gift of faith, and so incredibly thankful that I have a Heavenly Father with undying love.

Angels Come in Unbearable Times

My prayer is that God will grant me words to express my heartfelt thoughts, feelings, and the sadness I experienced when my spouse left me. Initially I thought my spouse would return to the children and me. As the days and weeks went by with no contact, I grew more and more anxious. Finally, I was able to contact my spouse and said that the children and I wanted to come to see him. He refused, and divulged that he was living with someone else. My heart sank and the children and I cried for many days.

My spouse told me already sometime before he left that he was no longer believing. I grieved for many months as life had changed in our home. When believers came over he left; he wasn't interested in visiting believers, going to services, or even communicating with me. When I asked my spouse about faith matters, he said he cannot believe and that he will go straight to hell. Despite my great sadness for him, and I can only pray to God that he will repent and be able to again believe all sins forgiven in Jesus' name and precious blood.

In the face of sorrow, I was so happy to have all my believing friends, children, parents, and escorts in God's kingdom. As the years and time went on, I often wondered if the sun would ever shine again. One day a dear sister gave me great comfort, as she had also lost her spouse. She said to me, "You will be happy again." Of course, I did not believe it then, but do believe it today, as God has truly blessed me by guiding, caring, and taking care of me with the gospel. My many escorts help me on this journey.

Zion's camps are so precious, uplifting—a secure haven, days of fellowship and joy. God has granted strength to battle another day against the threefold enemy. And it truly is a battle that we fight every day until the war is won and we gain the victory.

Our believing escorts, services, camps, listening to online services and songs of Zion, and singing songs of Zion, even if you're home alone are a great comfort. We may think we're alone, but we never are. God is with us and will send that angel to see, call, or contact us when life seems unbearable, as it has happened to me countless times. Time does heal but sometimes it feels like forever. Remember me and all in my situation in your prayers.

Perspectives of a Child Looking Back

There's no place like home, a place of comfort and security. Yet, some children have their secure home foundation shaken and unsure with the breakup of their parents' marriage.

Each child handles the breakup differently. When my parents divorced, my siblings and I experienced many emotions: anger, resentment, sadness, insecurity, distrust, detachment, and many other feelings.

It is important for the adults to remember the children's feelings. Sometimes in the craziness of a divorce or separation, a child's mind begins to wonder if somehow they are to blame. Reminders from the parents or other adults that adult issues are what have caused the breakup may lessen the child's anxiety.

Life begins a new normal as parents live in their separate homes. Children often feel unsure about going to stay with one parent and then home to the other parent. I remember feeling like I was being disloyal when I would leave one parent to spend time with the other.

A mistake that parents often make during this emotional time is to speak ill of each other in front the children. It is best to avoid that behavior as it adds to the child's discomfort and confusion.

I remember sensing that some people seemed uncomfortable when asking about how life was going after our parents split. Yet, the simple question, "How are you doing?" reminded us that the support was there when we needed it.

Life is forever changed for a child when their parents split up. Nevertheless, it does settle into a new normal—and life will go on.

The Gospel and Escorts Give Strength

Due to my husband's repeated betrayal of our wedding vows, our marriage ended. At the time, we had several school children and some who had already graduated. Of course, this was very hard for all the children and for me. The older ones had experienced earlier and similar breakups in our home life, but for the younger ones, it was especially devastating. My youngest son, who was "daddy's boy," cried nearly every night for a year.

I struggled to balance my own grieving and the children's needs; I feel that I was unable to be there enough for my kids, especially the first couple years. I asked God to help me get through the pain and the loneliness; only by His help I survived and avoided a breakdown. I let myself cry whenever tears came and allowed the frequent gut wrenching pain to come so I could work through it. Sometimes I felt like I could crawl in a hole and never come out. That's when I especially cried out for God's help, and He helped me through it somehow. Now, years later, I rarely have that pain anymore.

The financial situation I found myself in was dire, including huge debt. There wasn't enough money for even the necessities. At first I worked part-time but that wasn't enough, and then I found fulltime employment a couple years later, holding two jobs for a while. I would then rush home from work to be with my school kids. Nevertheless, the turmoil affected some of my children's school performance, including some very low and even failing grades.

I went to a professional counselor for the first time. During earlier crises I had gone many times to a local congregation minister for counsel, and he helped a lot through many trials and my struggles of faith. At that time, I still had hope for our marriage, that my husband would repent and get help, and we would have good family life. When the marriage finally ended and I had no more hope for it, I felt like I needed help. I went to a psychologist, who was very helpful. She respected how I believe and said the fault wasn't my faith, but rather my husband's issues.

Some who didn't know our situation speculated and even passed rumors; others who had no idea of our reality were quick to offer advice. Fortunately, there were and still are believers who helped me and my children, were there for us, not giving advice, but listening and encouraging. To have someone come to me, give a hug, and say they're thinking of me, meant a lot. It was also meaningful to be invited over and be included in activities, even though I don't have a husband.

I'm thankful for the believing friends who listened when I needed to vent, helped me in my trials, and encouraged my weak faith. My strength has been in the gospel. I would never have made it through my trials without it. I prayed so many times for help from God, and He has always helped. I listened to many sermons online and sang and listened to songs of

Zion. It was hard to take my children to church by myself, but we endeavored to go. I needed it so much and still do. It has also been strengthening for my faith to be at camp—a refuge and break from daily life.

I had one person that I especially was able to share my sorrows, struggles, and fears with. I have been so thankful for her, a close believing friend. I have been able to share with other friends, too, and they have helped. Whenever I have been feeling down or something is bothering me, I have prayed for someone to help me, and my prayers have been answered.

Gradually, I started to have less pain and feel more hope and optimism, but it took years. And still many times there is an ache, but not the deep pain. One thing that has really helped me, blessed and enriched my life has been grandchildren. I love them all and love doing things with them.

How can we remember others in this situation? Give them a hug and tell them you're thinking of them. Ask if there's anything you can do to help. Invite the person and their children to your home, on a picnic, or other outing. Tell them you care. Offer to babysit; some of my friends offered to watch my younger ones when I taught Sunday school, or for Bible class if they were staying home. Include the single mother or father and their children in activities.

A believing dad in our area especially reached out to my boys, had them over a lot, and included them in outings with their boys. It meant a lot when an uncle took my boys to father-son camp more than once. Some of my sons went; some didn't because their dad wasn't here to take them. Young men in our congregation reached out to one son when he was struggling. My older children also talked to the younger ones, helping them in their difficulties and doing things with them.

Sometimes I've sat at home feeling sorry for myself; sometimes I've been depressed, but I've tried to force myself to go out and see people and ask for help. I've prayed that I would not hold anger toward my husband and have prayed that I could forgive him and not be bitter. I know that I can't keep faith and a good conscience if I harbor anger and bitterness.

I have found that physical activity helps a lot to release tension and anger. A good brisk walk or ski, or exercises, helps me feel better. Another way I feel better is through healthy eating.

A couple of my children had some professional counseling which seemed to help. They all have suffered from feelings of abandonment and rejection, and not feeling good enough. I have tried to help my children with this. I know that some have turned to other believers for support. Their believing spouses have helped with this, too.

Advice to others: Pray to God for help. Turn to believers for strength and comfort. Get professional counseling, but find a counselor who respects your faith. Keep busy. Attend services, other church functions, and camp activities as much as possible. Don't dwell on what you can't change. Be thankful for the blessings in your life.

Birds Were Singing above Me

When a spouse departs, whether through death or divorce, one experiences stages of mourning.

With death, it would seem, there is closure. With divorce by an unbelieving spouse, one feels a constant limbo, for as a child of God, I consider myself still married "until death do us part." This has been difficult to explain to the world, as I do not consider my spouse as an "ex." Yet one does not have to live in an abusive situation.

This limbo then, which I still travel amid, causes a heavy heart at times from loneliness. It would be good to have believing visitors often, not just of the same sex, but couples also, so that one's children would have role models of a

normal, happy Christian marriage.

It is good to fill the void with healthy, constructive activities so that the mind does not wander too far and seek the lusts of the world. It was easier when the children were all home, as they kept me very busy, and I did not have time to think about what could have been or what could be. I also worked fulltime and attended school online fulltime after work. Now that I am older and less busy, loneliness can set in more easily.

Throughout the troubling years with a spouse and later without a spouse, comfort came from reading the Bible. This was important and remains important—reading Scripture even over and over again. Another source of comfort came from hearing God’s Word at services. I remember one Sunday morning, when my heart was heavy and burdened by the trouble brewing in my home life; I walked straight to the front of the church, sat down. Oh, the quiet and peace that filled my heart.... birds were singing above me, I looked up, then felt a bit foolish because there weren’t really any there.

God Gave Strength to Get Up in the Morning to Care for My Children

Early in my marriage my husband decided he didn’t want to live the life of a believer. We had two young children at the time. He wanted a wife who would party with him. Since I wouldn’t lead that life, he left. It was a big shock to me, and I felt that I would go crazy. I told another believing woman that, and she said, “No, you won’t.” I thought how could she have known, because she had never been in that situation. But she was right. I didn’t go crazy. I also had very supportive family members. They helped me in so many ways that I couldn’t begin to count. Friends were there for us too. It’s not always easy being a single parent, though, when your friends are part of a couple.

God gave me the strength to get up in the morning and take care of my children. It was hard on them, though. The oldest one said, “I sure wish dad liked you, because I miss him.” It was hard not to cry in front of them when you are hurting so much, but they don’t understand, and such reactions scared them.

I overcompensated in some areas because I felt sorry for these “poor fatherless” children. I bought them too much and said yes too often when it should have been no. Somehow that was easier. I wish I could have talked to them more about my feelings and about faith. I brought them to Sunday school and services, but wish I could have said more.

They saw their dad occasionally for several years, but then he moved out of town without so much as a good bye. When he passed away some years ago, they didn’t feel much sorrow—maybe instead a slight sadness for someone who had become a stranger.

Clearing the Fog

How could I on my wedding day imagine that someday, I would face divorce? When one is young and in love, it’s hard to think how it could end so sadly.

Anyone who is courting needs to ask questions and perhaps even seek the counsel of a trained professional and look realistically at life’s challenges, personalities, and attitudes. There were warning signs that I wish I had heeded. My gut feeling all along was that something didn’t feel right, mostly a lack of communication skills. And my faults were right up there to fuel our discontentment. I was too sensitive and handled things poorly, yet God kept me in His care all along the way. Many prayers went heavenward to solve our problems.

God prepared me to be a single mother, giving me many blessings along this journey to heaven. The angels on earth

who helped in so many ways, I don't even have the words to thank them. My parents gave such good advice years ago, when they noticed us not making an effort to attend Bible class. They lovingly said, "Try to be in the habit of coming every Wednesday, as it's easy to make excuses to not come. The more you attend, the more you will understand how your journey to heaven is helped." That has stuck with me all these years. Also, one evening shortly after the breakup, as I put the kids to bed and was in a sad state of mind, a dear friend sent a text message, "My dear one, you must feel so lonely in the evenings as you try to sleep alone now. Just know God has much love for you and always has! Even now you can believe all sins forgiven in Jesus' name and blood!" That was such a wonderful reminder, and I slept peacefully.

So many blessings have come our way; we marvel at the care and love shown to us! Even outsiders have helped with a meal brought over or offered to take care of the kids while I work. My counselor helped me see my situation through the eyes of a child to better my home atmosphere and face the inevitable breakup. She could feel the pain I had become numb to in order to live day to day in a sad home. Fortunately, my children and I have always had a strong bond, and the kids have also formed a strong bond with each other.

Any couple going through divorce where I live (and perhaps other areas as well), is encouraged to attend six hours of class taught by a professional family counselor who focuses on divorce's affect on children. It was very helpful to learn the signs of depression in children, how to not put the kids in the middle of the couple's differences, and how each child will face and handle the breakup in different ways. We found it important in our home to visit often. If we see one struggling, try to get them to face their sadness and talk about it. We often listen to sermons via the Internet, usually at nighttime, and make a habit of visiting believers often, as having friends is essential.

I would advise anyone who has to face divorce to take an older friend to the lawyer visits. My helper had some insights that I would not have thought of, looking back. An important consideration to include in visitation terms is the child's will. If they didn't want to go to their dad's on given weekend, they could just stay home. It's a good thing that was in the decree, as sometimes the kids had plans or didn't feel up to the change. It's also good to remember the lost one with love, as they must feel the guilt at times and still want to be in the child's life.

I was in a fog then. Nevertheless, I realized that dealing with the everyday sadness was my trial, and my kids needed me to be strong. Journaling helped to put my thoughts on paper, and to sit in nature watching the waves or taking a walk helped to clear the fog.

It's best to focus on the positive, rather than the negative, even if it's hard to do. Heaven will be worth the travel. Remember to pray for all the broken families.

I Can Only Thank God

The first time my dad left, I was five or six years old. I don't have many memories of that time, but we were a small family with a believing father and mother until our father gave up faith and left our home. Later, my parents separated, divorced, and eventually he remarried. Through my growing up years I always had a relationship with my dad but for most of that time I didn't have a father as a part of everyday life.

Especially as a young child I couldn't understand why dad had left. I remember feelings of guilt. What did I do to make him leave? His leaving brought a lot of sadness and fear, unsure feelings, and timidity. I remember lying awake at night wondering where he was when he wasn't living with us. My biggest concern was and still is for dad's undying soul.

Looking back I'm thankful that mom was given strength to continue taking us to services and to visit other believers. At services many dear elders would reach out, even in small ways, to show that they cared. I didn't realize the significance of this at the time, but as an adult I thank God for this care. Although they couldn't replace my father or bring him home, the believers' support and care brought security to my childhood.

We also visited other families on most weekends. This interaction with believers brought security and joy amid sorrow and trials. I was blessed that my believing grandparents lived close to us. Getting together with extended family always meant a lot, especially when we were celebrating a holiday without dad. It was important to have others who cared about me present at these times. My grandpa was a father figure. He taught me many of the practical things that a dad might teach a son, took me fishing, hunting, and so on. A father of a believing friend became my "father in faith." Still today after many years I consider this dear brother a special escort.

I remember praying often for dad—sometimes silently alone in bed and together with mom and the other kids. Taking these difficult matters to God brought comfort. I also remember how comforting it was many nights to go to sleep listening to mom singing songs of Zion from the living room.

Worry and distress seemed to disappear when we went to services. Mom also took us to camps that she served at and to family camps. Such experiences rooted me in faith and in the kingdom. I remember being especially sad about father and sons camps and not being able to attend with dad, but God helped there too by giving believing friends and uncles the hearts to take us boys to camp. I remember being at one such camp with one dear believing father. When going to sleep at night I voiced the wish that my dad would be there, too. The prayer we said together on my dad's behalf brought great comfort.

I didn't know how to speak much about my struggles as a child with an absent dad who wasn't in faith. I remember asking mom questions and talking to her about my fears and worries. Later in life I've received special believing friends and a spouse with whom I've been able to discuss the struggles and grief, especially of childhood.

I don't remember a specific "turning point," but things developed over a long period into feelings of hope and optimism about life and the future despite the trial I'd grown up with. It wasn't until I was married and we had our first child that I was able to process everything in a deeper sense. I began to understand how my father's leaving affected me and played a role in shaping who I am. It took many years for me to be "okay" with my childhood and to feel genuine love for my dad without hesitation. The effect dad's leaving had on me will always be a part of me, but I can only thank God that He has taken away feelings of bitterness and anger.

Our mother encouraged us to spend time with our dad. I sometimes fought against this, especially in teenage years. Perhaps it felt like the visits were being arranged from his side out of obligation rather from wanting to be with us. Regardless, mom encouraged us to go. As an adult with my own family, I have a relationship with him, but because of our past it's not a deep relationship.

I know that the pain one experiences due to family breakup may be hard to share, but it's important to seek at least one trusted individual with whom to share thoughts and feelings. Feelings of bitterness and anger weigh so much on a person, take away happiness and optimism, and can have an effect on other relationships. Even when it feels that matters can't be discussed because no one understands, it is still vital for a parent left alone to go to services and visiting and take the kids along. While visiting, mom was able to share her personal trial with others and didn't have to share all of her feelings with us. A child naturally sees the parent's distress, but I'm thankful that mom had believing escorts so she didn't

need to share the hurt felt as an abandoned spouse with us kids. Thus she was given strength to encourage us to have a relationship with dad and didn't try to get us to "take sides."

I encourage a parent with a difficult marriage relationship to seek help from other adults and also professionals. This helps to avoid "loading" on the kids or passing dysfunction to the next generation. Although the parent left alone may feel rejected and distressed, and a natural tendency may be to keep the kids away from the other parent, it's still important for a child to have a relationship with both parents if possible.

I have special memories that I cherish. I remember one time out in the yard with dad looking up at the stars. Another time dad was pulling me in a sled running down the road. These are simple memories, but very important for me even as an adult. For someone else that has a parent that isn't a part of your everyday life, it's okay and important to cherish the good memories even if it seems there are a lot of bad memories, too.

One of the brightest and most uplifting things in my life has been to look back and see how God has helped. It's impossible to explain the feeling of relief and thankfulness that God has taken all feelings of anger and bitterness away and replaced those with love and concern for a loved one, even one who caused great distress.

God helps us in life through His wisdom. Although I would give nearly anything to have had a close relationship with my father, there were also blessings hidden in this trial. Our life situation allowed me already as a young child to experience how God takes special care of His own. God also offered His kingdom and the company of believers as a place of refuge when there was insecurity and worry at home. I can't say that I have a lot of understanding here, but I believe that feeling this security has been a way that God has helped me in faith throughout my life. The enemy would want us to turn against and blame God for our trial, but it's the enemy who brings trouble to relationships through sin. It may be hard to imagine being happy again after a family breakup, but God helps.

Focusing on Blessings

After my husband left our home and marriage, one thing I found especially helpful was when friends listened, cared, and provided an opportunity for me to share my grief and struggles. These kinds of problems aren't easily "fixed," and often there is no more meaningful help than a shoulder to cry on and a listening ear—close friends, family members, and acquaintances. A couple co-workers were also very helpful, having experienced similar events in their lives.

I don't think I could have survived the experience without prayer and without feeling the support of family and friends. I made every attempt to attend services, as well as any other church functions. The devil stayed farther away when I was with friends and in the hearing of the Word.

I appreciated simple, direct words like: "I'm sorry to hear about your difficulties—how are you doing?" Or, "If you ever need to talk, just call any time...let me know how I can help." Someone I didn't know very well sent me a cheery card with a brief note inside, nothing profound, but it touched me so much that someone took the time to let me know they were remembering me.

The practical details of life were sometimes challenging, and it was difficult to ask for help. I didn't have family members close by or the financial resources to hire someone to do things for me. Being a single working parent was also relentless. I really appreciated the moral support I received from believers with children of similar age. It was especially good for mine to have some time in a healthier family environment than I was able to provide at the time.

I really appreciated invitations to go places and do things to unwind from the constant stress. It was a relief to get away from my troubles for a while and focus on other things, and even laugh. It was difficult to initiate such things myself, though, when my self-esteem was so low.

I didn't think it was helpful when someone commented how sad it was that he (my ex-husband) had ruined my life. The remark, "I don't know how you do it—I could never survive it," also seemed a bit strange. When the situation came upon me, I didn't have the option to refuse to cope with it. There is no escape from life's difficulties, whatever they may be.

An incident I remember—an old friend who had experienced significant difficulties in her own life sent me a message through a mutual friend that went something like this: "Tell her that she won't die!" I laughed because I knew exactly what she meant, and I was comforted that someone else really understood. During the darkest days when I thought I couldn't go on...this little reminder from a friend jolted me out of a negative mindset and encouraged me to look forward to the future.

One of the early difficult things I encountered after the divorce was a sense of not knowing where I fit in. I wasn't part of a couple anymore, but I wasn't a single person either because of my child-rearing responsibilities. I think it's a common problem for new widows and widowers as well. Couples don't invite you over as much, and single people perhaps aren't thinking about you either.

Sometimes I've thought how losing a spouse to death is something people know how to deal with—they come to the funeral and express sympathy, give hugs to those who have lost a loved one, buy cards and send flowers, etc. But knowing what to say or do for someone experiencing this other kind of loss is more sensitive, and there are no clearly understood social niceties or rituals around it. Even having experienced this loss, I don't feel that I have any special insight.

In the early days, I struggled with feelings of inadequacy and fought against bitterness. It's still difficult at times, and it feels like I'm missing out on something special that so many others have. But I've learned that those feelings pass, and not to compare myself with others, but to be content with the lot God has given me. This acceptance has been a gradual process. Scars remain today, but the pain is mostly gone. (A bit of fortune cookie wisdom: All unhappiness comes from comparison. It's really true when you think about it.)

Regarding professional counseling, I remember what the counselor said at the beginning: "Every day, all day, I listen as people tell me about their lives, deeply painful and personal things. I've heard it all, and nothing you say will be shocking to me. It all stays here in this room—so talk away!" In some ways it was helpful to vent to someone who didn't know any of the players, and would not carry any emotional baggage afterwards from the conversation. I left those feelings there, and walked away feeling lighter.

The old adage, "Time heals," is really true. As life continues, I have chosen to focus on the blessings in life rather than the losses.