

# Seven ways to come back to life after suffering the death of a loved one

By Jill H. Lawrence

After suffering the death of a beloved, most of us see no possible way we can recover or ever again find any joy in living. Mental and emotional darkness engulfs us. The moment consciousness returns each morning, the overwhelming reality of our loss takes us to our knees. Is it any wonder that the ultimate stress one can suffer is the death of a loved one?

Such extreme stress takes its toll. According to the *British Medical Journal*, chronic job stress leads to heart disease and diabetes. Imagine what losing a loved one does! It's been proven that the loss of a spouse can be fatal for the spouse left behind. In fact, one study discovered that people rate the death of a spouse as the number one stress of a lifetime. *The New England Journal of Medicine* revealed that the death rate of a spouse accelerated after their other half was merely hospitalized. The risk of death associated with a spouse's hospitalization is higher for men (22%) than women (16%). Not surprisingly, the year following the death of a spouse, the death rate of the surviving spouse spikes significantly.

Richard Ballo ([www.RichardBallo.com](http://www.RichardBallo.com)) is no stranger to the stress that occurs when a spouse dies. When his beloved 38-year-old wife Lisa died, it took every force of will he could muster just to get out of bed in the morning. He admits he might have just

stayed in bed and “waited for the inevitable,” if it weren’t for his six and five year old sons, Victor and Nick, who needed him more than ever.

After the excruciating loss of his wife to cancer, Rich’s life purpose became muddled; he no longer found joy or fulfillment. His emotional state was a constant roller coaster. Not only was he suddenly thrown into the unthinkable void associated with the death of his adored life partner, but he found himself wrestling with the death of his dreams as well.

Rich and Lisa had bought a house in Naples, Florida prior to Lisa’s death. Together they dreamed of watching their boys grow and thrive in this new environment. But fate laid another plan. Rich was unceremoniously shoved into solo parenthood. After Lisa’s death, he even lost his appetite for living including his writing career.

Rich’s health and wellbeing were in jeopardy and his emotions were in turmoil as he found himself and his sons moving to Florida from Massachusetts in an attempt to carry on his and Lisa’s joint dream. The only problem was, Lisa was not part of this picture. The stress was so great, Rich even wound up in the hospital with chest pains.

Zombie-like, Rich went through the motions, but his heart was crushed and life had lost all of its joy. Following the dictates of society that men should not show emotion, Rich wept in private. Eventually, his old urge to write took over and became a pivotal factor to save him. He silently turned to his notepad for comfort. Everyday he journaled his thoughts and feelings as he navigated the course of his new life. Journaling gave him a “safe” place to express the “un-expressible” and to ventilate his feelings. Without this outlet, the toll on his health would likely have been catastrophic.

Poetically, years later his grief journal became an award winning book - *Life Without Lisa: A Widowed Father's Compelling Journey Through the Rough Seas of Grief* ([www.RichardBallo.com](http://www.RichardBallo.com)). President of the Florida Publishers Association, chose *Life Without Lisa* as the President's Award because "it has the potential to help thousands of people through one of life's greatest challenges -- the passing of a loved one."

Now, more than a decade-and-a-half after Lisa's death, Rich speaks to people across the country, sharing his personal story, lending an understanding ear and revealing what most helped him pull out of the deepest, darkest hole and return to a meaningful life.

Without question, journaling was the number one therapy Rich used to regain his emotional and mental health. Little by little, his own written words charted his healing process. In addition, he took advantage of bereavement counseling offered by Avow Hospice in his adopted hometown of Naples, Florida, for both him and his boys. At hospice, he found a support system to bolster his shattered emotional body, guidance to assist in his decision making and programs to help his suffering sons.

When all was said and done, Rich gained help from a number of sources and activities. Here are his tried-and-true ways to return to health and happiness after losing a loved one:

1. Journal your feelings without holding back – allow yourself to vent every thought, feeling and emotion regardless of how "good or bad" they seem.
2. Enlist support and help from your local hospice or bereavement group

3. Give yourself permission to take “as long as it takes “to recover
4. Do something for someone else. Volunteer to help others.
5. Take care of yourself by doing things that make you feel better: get regular massages, take long walks, listen to music, sleep late.
6. Do something different at holiday time; find new ways to celebrate, establish new traditions
7. Talk about your loved one to friends and family; encourage them to speak your loved one’s name and share their favorite reminiscences with you

Because Rich took steps to help himself through his darkest times, he was able to avoid severe health challenges. Today he is well and happy. He sits on the board of directors at Avow Hospice in Naples, FL, is President of Kiwanis, and has funded scholarships at his alma mater, Suffolk University and, in Lisa’s memory, at Florida Gulf State University.

His boys aren’t little any more and have grown into strong, well-balanced, happy young men. Once again, Rich’s life is full, meaningful and happy. Despite the fact that he didn’t think that could ever be possible, the steps he took to help himself paid off in the most meaningful of ways.

(AUTHOR BIO: Richard Ballo is a death and dying expert and award-winning author of *Life Without Lisa: A Widowed Father's Compelling Journey Through the Rough Seas of Grief*, available in stores nationwide and at Amazon.com, Abebooks.com and BarnesandNoble.com. He has appeared on FOX Television News, and more than 50 local and national radio programs. To contact Rich and learn more about how to recover from losing a loved one, visit [www.richardballo.com](http://www.richardballo.com))

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