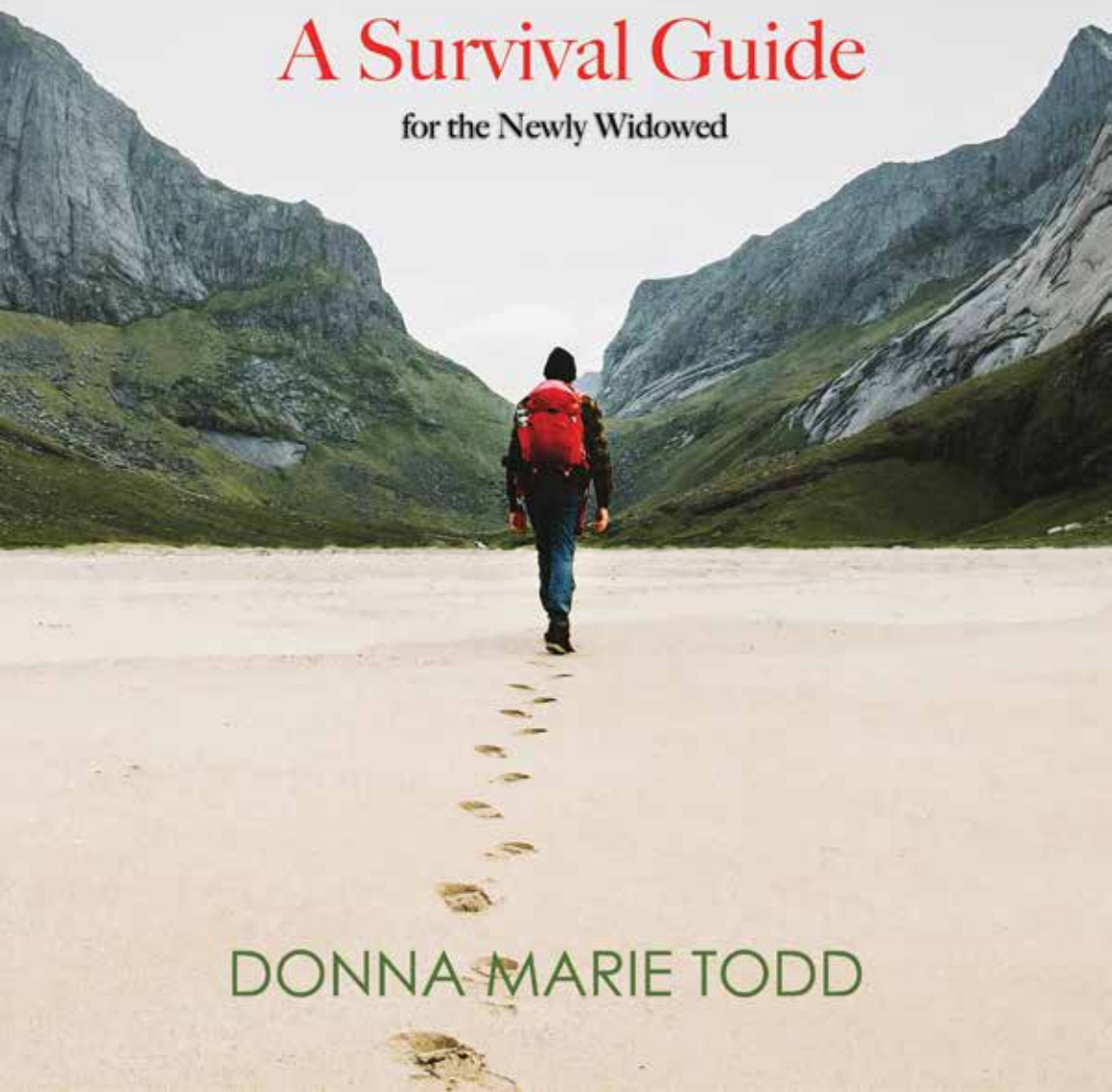


NAVIGATING LOSS

A Survival Guide

for the Newly Widowed



DONNA MARIE TODD

A WIDOWS TALE BOOKS

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Navigating Loss: A Survival Guide for the Newly Widowed.
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Bulk orders of Navigating Loss are available at wholesale pricing to physicians, hospitals, hospices, churches, and other organizations.

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I DEDICATE THIS BOOK TO YOU

My heart aches at the thought of what
you are going through.

“I’m sorry”
is not a strong enough phrase
to express everything
I would like to say to you.

I wanted to share more,
and help more, so I wrote this book.

Here you will find my story
and the strategies
I used to survive my husband’s death
and thrive in life again.

I offer this with the hope that
you will survive and thrive, too.

All my love,
Donna Marie

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How to Use This Book

While this is not a big, thick book,
there is a lot to digest in these pages.
This book is designed to walk with you
through your recovery journey.

It offers practical insights
and tools you can use
as you navigate your loss and grief.

The most helpful way to use this book
is to read one chapter per week
for eighteen weeks
(approximately four and a half months).

This will give you the full benefit
of absorbing the information
while having adequate time to
“Try It Out!” with the practical exercises
at the end of each chapter.

Chapter One

The Colossal Ways Your Life Has Suddenly Changed

Death has taken someone from you. Does it feel like your world is upside down? Mine was, when it happened to me. The emotions you feel and the way you choose to navigate this loss will be as unique as your fingerprint.

As you grieve, be gentle with yourself and only do what feels right to you. Navigating widowhood is hard, but I want to assure you now that you are stronger than you think. This book is a road-map to help you get through it. Being widowed was, hands-down, the hardest thing I have ever done.

When my husband died, my life fell apart. But nobody had a handbook like this then. I had to do something to get through it. Our teenage son was depending on me. So, I fought to get my life back together, just like you may be doing now. I built this resource to save myself, and since then I have helped hundreds of widowed persons across the country. They've contributed ideas to this book, too, and we all want you to get through this.

Here's how my story began: When I was 55, and our son was fifteen, my

husband Perrin died. His death was a shock. He was an athletic man who ran every day, owned a business, was a Rotarian, and a Scout leader. Perrin was in perfect health. I never expected him to die.

My husband was a great guy, but he never did housework. EVER. So when he told me, on New Year's night, that he was going to clean the house and do the laundry, I thought he had the flu and was delirious. In my heart, I was afraid something was wrong, and I was right.

A little before midnight that night, he had a massive stroke. A five and a half inch clot flew from his left carotid artery to his brain. My husband almost didn't make it. The doctors were baffled. They thought it was just a weird fluke. They said it wouldn't happen again. But they were wrong. Ten months later, it happened again, and it killed him.

His death was a big deal in our small town. There was standing room only at the church for the funeral. This was a town tragedy, a public spectacle. Whispers circled the air. "Did you know he was only 55?" "She's so young! Maybe she can remarry..."

Our fifteen-year-old son played flute in the band. The whole marching band showed up, in uniform, to play in front of the church as people arrived. I'll never forget those kids standing out there in the wind and cold of that

November day, the black plumes on their grey hats blown back by the wind, tears streaming down their faces and mine. To this day, that is the most beautiful thing that anyone has ever done for me.

The funeral was a proper affair. I was there, in the front row, wearing black, but the details of that day are fuzzy. (Of course, I can't remember most of my wedding day, either; it was such a blur!) But, oddly, I don't remember much about the funeral besides what I've just told you. I was in a fog. I was in shock. I can't even tell you what hymns we sang. Hundreds of people hugged me that day or shook my hand. But I don't remember any of them. It's all a blur—like a movie I watched but couldn't see.

Cards came every day for a week, maybe longer. When I opened them, I couldn't take in the words they expressed. I didn't want people to be sorry. I didn't want him to be dead. I'd been in shock since I woke on that autumn morning and saw him curled up in a fetal position. The minute I saw him, I knew in my heart he'd had another stroke. When I couldn't wake him, I feared the worst. After I called 911, I held him and wept.

I was in shock but so fired-up on adrenaline that I just kept going. I kept going through the hours in the Emergency Room, and the two days in the ICU. I kept going when we made the hard decision to remove him from life support and put him in hospice care.

The day he died, I drove myself home. I kept going as I planned the funeral, took our son's suit to the dry cleaner, and sat through the service. I kept going as I entertained family and friends at a catered lunch. I kept going as I froze the leftovers for our meals (I knew I'd need them). I kept going as I drove our son to school and activities and tried to keep up with my magazine editing responsibilities, and then, one day, I just collapsed. I simply couldn't keep going another minute!

Do you need to collapse? It wouldn't surprise me, and I wouldn't hold it against you. Collapsing doesn't mean you're weak—it means you're human. You've been through a lot!

Your emotions may be all over the map. You might cry for hours one day and feel numb and out of touch with yourself the next. Or, you may have trouble accepting your partner is dead even though you know it's true. That's normal. You have a right to feel this way, and it's okay. You're okay.

We all grieve differently, so I don't know what you are feeling right now. But I want you to remember that, no matter how you feel right now, you're going to be okay. But please promise me that you will take good care of yourself—starting right now.

Don't push yourself into "needing" to do this or that. You've had enough

one who can. Start by being kind to you. A great way to practice self-kindness is with Dr. Herbert Benson's Relaxation Response. This breath practice relaxes your heart and helps your mind release sorrow and worry.

Try It Out!

Here's the technique from Dr. Benson's book, *The Relaxation Response*. Sit quietly in a comfortable position. Close your eyes. Deeply relax all your muscles, beginning at your feet and progressing up to your face. Keep them relaxed. Breathe through your nose. Become aware of your breathing. As you breathe out, say the word, "one," silently to yourself. For example, breathe in ... out, "one", in .. out, "one", etc. Breathe easily and naturally. Continue for 10 to 20 minutes.

You may open your eyes to check the time, but do not use an alarm. When you finish, sit quietly for several minutes, at first with your eyes closed and later with your eyes opened. Do not stand up for a few minutes.

Do not worry about whether you are successful in achieving a deep level of relaxation. Maintain a passive attitude and permit relaxation to occur at its own pace. When distracting thoughts occur, try to ignore them by not dwelling upon them and return to repeating "one." Practice the technique once or twice daily, but not within two hours after any meal.

Chapter Two

Proven, Practical Information About Grief