

A HAIRBREADTH AWAY FROM LOSING CONTROL

A husband's journey

Stephen's 51-year-old wife Kathy died from sarcoma in 2011

BY STEPHEN HOCHHAUS, adapted from the book,
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Self care articles for the bereaved

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I thought I had to remain strong

I experienced firsthand the difference between how men and women react when they have lost someone they love. I never gave it much thought until I looked back on my own grief journey. From the moment my wife died, I said to myself, "You're a man. You can handle this."

I walked away from that hospice home knowing I had a job to do. There were funeral arrangements to make and a business to keep going. I was contacted by the hospice organization to take advantage of grief counseling and support groups that they offered. I received phone calls and letters telling me that they were there to help. I was a man! I could make it. For two months I kept myself going as if I were under control, only to collapse on my kitchen floor in a pool of emotion. I had to make the call, if only to save my own life. The next day a grief counselor was in my home.

Oh, yes, men are thought of as not showing emotion or worse. They often lash out in rage against anything that could trigger a public display of sorrow. In truth, it's not quite that simple. Men of my age were raised with the concept that men

are stronger. I read a book in college, *The Natural Superiority of Women*, by Ashley Montagu. It changed my understanding of alleged male supremacy, so I had an advantage in breaking from the norm.

I was able to admit my vulnerability as I lay there that day in a puddle of tears. When I began going to a grief support group, I noticed how few men were in attendance compared to women. What women may not know is how a man can be just a hairbreadth away from losing that control.

The emotion I find hardest to express is joy. I struggle to allow myself that feeling, for it was so far from sight in those first two years. Even now, I have a hard time trusting in it. When you have been off the ice for so long, you fear that the ice may be so thin that it will break under your feet. For me it is a struggle to allow myself to go there.

