

YES, I AM A SURVIVOR

A widow's journey

Valerie's 47-year-old husband Ken died from a pool drowning in 2009

BY VALERIE STAGGS, adapted from the book, *Grief Diaries: Through the Eyes of a Widow*
ISBN: 978-1-944328-64-1

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An iCare Aftercare resource
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One response has stuck with me

When asked whether I'm married, I suppose how I choose to field this question depends on the circumstances. I tend to prefer not to sugarcoat my status so I mostly go with "No, I am a widow."

Over the years I have made somewhat of a study of reactions to this response. The most common is a flustered, "Oh, I'm sorry!"

A fair number of people, though, can't stem their curiosity and want to know details. They ask bluntly, "How did he die?" or, better yet, treat their inquiry as a game show of sorts. "Heart attack?" or "Car accident?" they guess, hoping to light on the correct answer as though some sort of prize awaits.

One response has stuck with me over the years, though. "So, you're a survivor then," replied one man after I told him I was a widow. I hadn't thought of myself in that context, but this is, in fact, an accurate description of me. Yes, I am a survivor.

I wore my husband's wedding ring around my neck for about a year then eventually only when I felt the need for this small comfort. My wedding ring is now in a safe deposit box along with one pair of earrings my husband brought back from India. I was not wearing my husband's wedding ring the day burglars broke into my home and stole the contents of my jewelry box. The earrings and wedding ring happened to be in another place in my home so the thieves did not see them. Collectively my jewelry was of little value; I am not the blingy type. Yet we hold on to the memories of those we lost through the things that we can still touch and feel, evidence that, yes, that person was once there.

Perhaps whoever took them will one day understand the heartlessness of his actions.

