

MY FRIENDS ARE STRONG AND RESILIENT

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*
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**Self care articles
for the bereaved**

From the award-winning
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I owe them a huge debt of gratitude

My friends were wonderful during the days my husband was in the hospital and throughout the planning and organizing of his funeral.

Different circles of friends worked together to create memory boards of Ken's life, cook oodles of food for the reception, and help make this very difficult time a little easier for me and my son. I owe them all a huge debt of gratitude for their labors of love.

While many of them kept in touch with us in the months following, and some still today, I think it is unrealistic to expect people who have not experienced profound loss to truly empathize and support a friend who is in grief.

I was still invited to the parties and still considered one of the friends, but I found the absence of my husband by my side to be overwhelmingly difficult. And, imagined or not, the pity my friends now had for me was unbearable.

Over months, and in some cases years, we mutually moved away from each other.

**I was too changed to
continue in the ways of our
old relationships, and they
were too inexperienced to
know things could never be
the same.**

Although I do count widows among my circle of friends, these friendships can also be tricky. People choose to deal with grief in countless ways and when their choice is strikingly different, it can be difficult to relate.

My circle of friends now consists of women who are a little more damaged, survivors of loss in different ways. My friends are widowed, divorced, single moms struggling to raise kids, women who are fighting back after bad relationships, etc. My friends are strong and resilient. They are living lives they never expected, yet face the challenges with determination, faith in themselves and, most importantly, good humor. They understand that sometimes it takes everything you've got just to get out of bed in the morning. These are the friends who bring you back from grief.