



Finding **PURPOSE** *in Life Again*

by Rachel Blythe Kodanaz



I have facilitated a Widow(er) Baby Boomer Group for over five years and it continues to warm my heart each session as I watch the group members walk their own personal grief journey. The group meets at the HeartLight Center in Denver, Colorado twice a month with an on-going group format allowing people to come and go as they need support. The first session of the month is geared towards introducing new people to the group, encouraging them to tell their story; meeting fellow widows and helping members feel safe in the group. The second session of the month is designated as a “topic” night where a subject matter is chosen in advance. The evening is kicked-off with a welcome and re-introduction of the members followed by an hour-and-a-half of discussion on the specific topic.

The member’s ages range from 38-62 with the majority in their early to mid-fifties. The group has experienced all types of deaths from illness, suicide, car and plane accidents, natural causes and

sporting accidents (skiing, hiking, scuba diving). Some of our members have young children at home while others are empty-nesters or have never had children. The group represents all professions, religions, socio-economic backgrounds, education and lifestyles.

Regardless of each individual’s situation, once a new member enters the building they are all one and the same, walking this journey together. The connection they feel toward one another is a bond for life, and an experience that is only understood by fellow grievers. The member’s arms are always open to one another; each story has its own meaning and sadness and the care for one another, both emotionally and physically, is real.

Last month the group chose the topic, “Finding Purpose in Life Again”. When it was suggested, the topic received a nod from many of the 60-plus members of the group. Later as I prepared for the evening, I struggled with the word purpose. My personal journey of losing my

husband did not make me question my purpose but rather my passion regarding everything in my life, including being the mother of a 2-year-old. As I wrote my notes to help facilitate the discussion, I waffled with the notion of purpose versus passion. How would I begin the session to explore the notion of losing one’s purpose in life?

As the session began, I eagerly listened to the group talk about their role as a caregiver of their spouse/partner for many years. Since their beloved companions have passed on, and they were no longer caregivers, the members expressed feeling a lack of purpose in their lives. Other members believe there is no reason to go on with “life” without their significant other now that their retirement and future together has been taken away by the loss. Others shared how they found *purpose* in volunteering for a variety of not-for-profit organizations, including cancer centers, religious affiliations, medical research and fundraising. I was fascinated how each individual viewed the *purpose*

of their lives and how the loss closed their eyes to other aspects of *who they were prior to the loss*. Many described how difficult it was to get out of bed in the morning or finding the energy to meet their responsibilities. They were looking anywhere and everywhere for direction.

For some reason, I could not let go of the idea of *purpose* versus *passion*. We spent the hour-and-a-half sharing and listening, and we concluded that we would continue the conversation in the coming month. At the end of the session, I asked the group, “Did you doubt your purpose before you experienced the loss?” because I believed in my heart that purpose is an individual attribute and when shared in a relationship, “direction and passion” create *purpose*. While it might become cloudy in the depths of your grief journey, it will be redefined as you gain strength to explore new paths.

As the days passed, I found myself continuing to reflect on the conversation. Specifically, my own personal loss had triggered the lack of *something* in my life but I could not always articulate what it was. When I think about my experience back then, I felt as though I was a tornado spinning around in the air and one day my feet would land promptly on the ground. I never thought about when the tornado would stop spinning and that I would not have all the answers when I hit the ground. What I did know, is that I had a family that loved me, I had a two-year-old that needed me, I had a life before I met my husband and that although I was in so much pain, I had the power to figure out the next steps in my life.

So whether you are searching for “purpose” or “passion” in life again, it has to come from within yourself and your heart. It really is an individual process where you search your soul for the next chapter of your life, regardless of your current situation. Many times it is hard to start over, as your desire, of course, is to be with your loved one and that is no longer an option. Finding what works for you may take longer than expected and is often as difficult as the loss itself which makes it overwhelming for most of us. Listening to some of the members of the group share their new experiences and what they’ve learned about themselves along the way is heartwarming and encouraging for others. Working through your own pain, sorting through so many unanswered questions and trying to figure out what the future holds is scary, but it can be exciting when you allow your heart to lead the way.

My personal journey has changed me forever – what once provided me with enthusiasm and excitement has shifted. Now, I find *passion* helping others through their grief journey and purpose in everything I do, from enjoying a meal with my family and friends to reaching out to fellow grievers. After 17 years, I am still amazed at how much a significant loss can change ones outlook on all aspects of life.

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Rachel RECOMMENDS:

Whether you are looking for “purpose” or “passion” again after the loss of your spouse, spend time reflecting on what you are passionate about and activities that might generate your interest and enthusiasm.

Tips to start finding your purpose in life:

- Reflect on who you were before you were married – determine what gave you pleasure in life. Create a list of what excited you, for example: travel, team athletics, volunteering or spending time with kids, etc.
- Brainstorm a list of ideas that you could become passionate about – an athletic goal, planning a trip, obtaining further education on a career or hobby (masters degree or photography class) working with a charity or nonprofit organization, moving closer to family or facilitating a grief group.
- Prioritize the list possibly working on two ideas congruently.
- Reflect on the journey and honor your past!



Rachel Blythe Kodanaz entered the grief world in 1992 when her husband suddenly passed away leaving her with a two-year-old daughter. She spent several years trying to find her path through grief and as part of her recovery became active in supporting others who were suffering a loss. Currently, Rachel is the Executive Director of HeartLight Grief and Loss Center located in Denver, Colorado. She facilitates numerous groups including a Baby Boomer Widow Support Group (5 years), multi-day workshops, keynote addresses and training classes. In addition, her experience in large corporations led her to develop and publish material to support the workplace when dealing with a grieving employee or workgroup, with emphasis in educating managers and co-workers. Rachel presents to corporations, communities, not-for-profit organizations, funeral directors, and conferences. Rachel has published numerous articles and participated in a grief segment on Good Morning America.

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