



KNOW A WIDOWER? - YOU BETTER KEEP AN EYE ON HIM

By: Herb Knoll

Author: *The Widower's Journey*

Widowers are vulnerable. Very vulnerable! In fact, according to research performed by Dr. Justin Denney of Washington State University, widowed men have a 1.6 to 2.0 times the risk of death by suicide, compared to otherwise similar married men, and they will do so within two years of their wife's death. Still, another research suggests the rate may be even higher. And that is just the beginning. Widowers have an increased rate of diabetes, hypertension, and more. Widowers are at risk of being diagnosed with depression, which can negatively impact virtually every aspect of their lives. From raising children to maintaining their career, handling personal finances to on-going relationships with others, and yes, dating, the challenges are many. Sadly, few men are equipped to handle any of these.



"If we're all going to die, why is it that we are so ill-prepared to deal with it?" said John Von Der Haar (68), who lost his wife Mary Jane in 2013. Good question.

While there is no cut and dry answer, there are clues we can point to which have contributed to the problem's widowers face. From the time little boys are learning to walk, they are repeatedly told how "boys don't cry" or "Be a man!" Much like our fathers and grandfathers who came back from wars, rarely speaking of their days in uniform, many widowed men do not believe they are allowed to cry or grieve outside of the shadows of our society. It is as though they are *seeking permission to grieve*. Until they feel they can, they hold their feelings mostly to themselves, offering common phrases such as "I'm OK, just leave me alone with my thoughts." When family, friends, and colleagues leave a widower alone, they are contributing to the creation of an environment that is likely to make the widower's grief more challenging to navigate. Frankly, it is the worst thing that can happen.

Master Sergeant Chris Sweet - USAF (ret) has worked with military personnel who have been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a mental health condition that is triggered by a terrifying event. When asked if he thought widowers are at risk of PTSD diagnoses following the loss of their spouse, Sweet said, "*Absolutely.*" Sweet should know, he lost his wife Danielle (30), who contracted Leukemia in 2009, after the U.S. Air Force deployed her to Afghanistan. According to Sweet, "*All of the symptoms PTSD sufferers experience are precisely what I went through following the passing of Danielle. It's no different.*"

Men need a purpose. To provide, protect, and love their mate. When a wife dies, many men seem to lose their reason for living, providing the basis from which other problems can grow.

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Magnolia Plantation – 1730 Dogwood Forest Way, Lake Mary, Florida 32746 USA * herb@WidowersSupportNetwork.com * Cell: 615.579.8136

With so many problems facing widowers, you would think there would be a host of self-help materials available for them. I felt so too when in 2008, I visited a large box bookstore retailer following the death of my wife, Michelle, to pancreatic cancer. "Mister, we don't have a damn thing for you." These were the words spoken to me by the clerk after he had searched his store's database for available titles. The fact is, the publishing industry has abandoned men by their refusal to publish books that address the needs of men. Men don't buy books," multiple publishers have told me. My response: "Men certainly can't buy what isn't on the shelf."

SOLUTION: For all the reasons cited and more, I elected to leave my 38-year career in banking and dedicated my life to the comfort and support of widowers. After nine years of research and writing, I published *The Widower's Journey* in 2017. *The Widower's Journey* is a self-help book for widowers and those who love them, featuring the candid advice and best practices as expressed by over forty contributing widowers. The book's contributors hail from across America and represent a cross-section of social, economic, and geographic backgrounds, as well as a variety of circumstances surrounding the passing of their wives. Supporting the contributing widowers is a team of experts from the fields of law, psychology, sociology, financial planning, religion, and more.

If you are a widower, or should you know a widower that you want to comfort or assist, *The Widower's Journey* is the perfect guide to give them. Available on Amazon.com in paperback and all digital formats.

You will also find additional support available at **Widowers Support Network** (WSN). There are four ways to access WSN resources, all of which are free.

1. "Register" on the WSN website at www.WidowersSupportNetwork.com. Loaded with helpful information and a **BLOG** on its homepage where you are invited to present your personal questions or share one or more of your best practices with our community of widowers and their supporters.
2. "Like" **Widowers Support Network** on Facebook. Registered members on our website (#1 above) are invited to have their deceased spouse "Remembered" during the anniversary month of their passing on this Facebook page, complete with your spouse's photograph.
3. Join **Widowers Support Network – Members Only** on Facebook. A private men's only group page where widowers, caregivers, and subject matter experts support one another. All participants must be males.
4. "Follow" us on Twitter @WidowersJourney - An excellent source for more healing resources.

By completing all four steps, you will receive numerous comforting suggestions, time-sensitive grief recovery tips, and best practices from widowed men and various experts.

You are encouraged to write me at herb@WidowersSupportNetwork.com or by contacting my office at 615.579.8136.

Herb Knoll is a retired banking executive, an advocate for Widowers, a professional speaker, and author of the breakout book, [The Widower's Journey](#). Available at Amazon.com in paperback and all digital formats. Herb is the founder of the *Widower's Support Network* (WidowersSupportNetwork.com), featuring the [Widowers Support Network – Members Only](#), a private Facebook group page for men, and a second Facebook page which is open to the general public at [Widowers Support Network](#). Contact Herb at herb@WidowersSupportNetwork.com.

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