

“So, how long has it been?”

As widows, we are all familiar with this question. Whether we ask it when we meet another widow for the first time, or we encounter someone who asks us this question. When someone finds out that you're a widow, they will often ask this question and as widows we also might ask this question to another widow we meet. Lately I've pondered this question in my mind, wondering *'why does it matter' how long it's been?*

Maybe it's because we want to try to empathize more, or show our concern when it's a recent loss, that we can relate and understand how difficult those early days and months are when we encounter a new widow and we've been through 'those days'? When someone who's not a widow asks us, I wonder why it matters to them? Do they think oh really, it's been that many years now? Are they thinking that you must have moved on by now and now it's not that 'bad' or 'hard'?

For me it's been 13 years and I still end up answering that question, 'so how long has it been' asked by other widows or people I encounter that didn't know my husband died, or some who remembered he died and now asks me, 'so how long has it been since he died'. Do the number of days, weeks, months, or years really matter? Like, does something magical happen after it's been two years, or five years? Lonely doesn't go away, the empty house it still empty, he's missing at the table, and I go for walks alone and wake up alone. The question makes me think about what really has changed in my healing journey as time has moved on?

I guess we measure time a lot, like how long did you have to wait for your doctor to see you, how long did it take you to drive there? But, measuring the length of time you've been a widow, makes me still wonder why that matters to them or to anyone? I hate to be asked by a new young widow who has had a recent loss of her husband, 'so how long has it been for you?' Does she expect an answer that says, it's been over ten years for me and gee, it gets so much better every year, is that what she's thinking she'll hear from me? Or, do I say, it's still really hard for me some days and each of us travels our own journey in our own time frame, just one day at a time.

It seems that I have more questions than answers for this 'question' as I'm still not sure, why the number of months or years matter. If you answer the question with it's

been five years now, they might return with the statement, well you are sure doing good now. Oh, I am now? You mean it's what you see on the outside, like looking at the clean windows and fresh paint on the outside of my house, but you don't really see what's going on inside my house. Do you really see what's going on inside of my heart, maybe there are lots of scars, still tears, frequent pain, and still lonely? It seems that they are thinking that I'm doing really good now, because it's been 'this long' since my husband died.

As widows we all have our own timeline. No one picks it for us, no one can tell us what our timeline will be on our journey of grief, as we are accepting the loss of someone we loved so much and so important in our life. For some acceptance comes sooner in our timeline, others it takes much longer, many years not just months. The loss of our husband leaves many shattered pieces, when and how we pick them up happens on our own journey. We will put the pieces back together, a few months at a time or one year at a time and we begin to resume our life, not measuring it with 'so how long has it been'?

"God of life, there are days when the burdens we carry chafe our shoulders and wear us down; when the road seems dreary and endless, the skies grey and threatening; when our lives have no music in them, and our hearts are lonely, and our souls have lost their courage. Flood the path with light, we beseech Thee; turn our eyes to where the skies are full of promise" Augustine

Whatever our todays and our tomorrows may bring, we do not journey alone, God is with us today and He will walk into tomorrow with us. In Him, we find strength, peace, joy, and comfort in our season and journey of pain, loss, and loneliness.

"God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things will have passed away." Revelation 21:4 RSV

'So how long has it been'? The grief journey is not defined or counted in the minutes, days, months, or years, it's our own precious journey carrying the mountains full of beautiful memories with us into each 'tomorrow.' We're all traveling this journey, just one day at time, remembering the days of beauty, love, and 'together'.

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