

Name

**Suddenly Single - Making the Shift from "We" to "Me"**

***by Michael Domingos***

“I take you to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or worse, for richer or poorer in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until death do us part.”

I remember hearing those words, but never imagined I would actually face them at such a young age. I was 29 when my wife died. Virginia wasn’t just my wife. She was my best friend and the mother of our children. We did everything together. Our social activities usually included our families and other couples and parents. My whole identity revolved around being a husband and parent. But my identity died on November 4, 1998 with Virginia.

It did not hit me until I was sitting in the Social Security office that I had completed my vows. I was no longer married. I had been married for five years. Now I was single. I did not know many single people. Single life was an adjustment I was not prepared for.

As I ventured into this unfamiliar territory, I found that my self-confidence had left along with my identity. I was so used to making joint decisions with Virginia that I was unsure and indecisive when faced with making my own choices. Now I understand why everyone says to wait at least one year before making any major decisions after such a loss. This doubt can be dangerous.

While I tried to understand who I was in the wake of my wife’s death, I empathized with my daughter, who was learning to walk. Lauren would slowly stand up and, as her legs wobbled, cautiously take a few steps and then fall. Denying her the cushion of the soft, padded carpet, the end table often caught Lauren’s fall.

Like the sharp edges of that table, the vividness of my memories often cut me as I fell. With the experience that comes with time, however, I learned to stand up again. Every time I stood up, I gained a little bit of confidence and took a few more steps before falling.

I’ll never forget how confidently Lauren smiled the first time she was able to walk past that end table. Like her, I’ve kept taking small steps too, until I have learned to walk with my memories of Virginia, instead of crashing into them.

Today, Lauren is a fearless seven-year-old who will charge after opposing players in a soccer game. It’s hard to believe how much she’s grown. I, too, have grown. I am no longer the same person, struggling with my identity.

I grew, and became aware of my growth, by writing in a journal. If Lauren had known how to write as a toddler, I imagine she would have had plenty to say about that end table. As she continued to grow, the focus of her writing would have shifted from the end table to her walking. Likewise, I began by writing in my journal about death, and then slowly transcended into writing about life.

It is amazing to go back and read what I was feeling six months ago, three months ago, one month ago. Just as looking at a road map helps me to see how far I’ve driven, looking at my journal helps me to see how far I have traveled on my healing journey of grief. As I look back on the pages of my life, I can see how my confidence was building. I can see my compassion for others increasing as well.

I also grew by becoming part of a support group. It was the experience and wisdom of other widows and widowers in my group that helped me through this experience. I learned that I wasn’t alone. Others reaffirmed the intense emotions that only a fellow journeyer would understand.

Now, when I reach out to our fellow journeyers, as these good people did to me, I can turn individual healing into community healing. By allowing others to help me make the shift from “we” to “me,” I can shift the healing from “me” to “we.”