

WIDOW FOG, IT'S A THING



By: Mary Helen Robinson

I had never heard of “widow fog” or the fog of grief until I became a widow. You probably hadn’t either. It’s not something that non-grievers discuss. That meant that I was caught totally off guard when memory problems arose after Pat’s death. I really questioned if I was losing my mind. It really did feel as though I were in a fog.

Specifically, I had trouble remembering my “to do’s”, even when I wrote them down. I had trouble remembering things I needed from the store, again, even when I had a list. I had even more trouble with dates and times. I no-showed for a couple of hair appointments with the stylist I adore (she forgave me). I even showed up a day late for eye surgery, and yes, I wrote that date down everywhere.

I’m happy to tell you that my ability to go to the grocery store for 3 or 4 items without a list has returned, although times and dates can still trip me up, but not as often now. Your memory problems may take a different shape, maybe the names of people you meet or even familiar faces. The important thing to know is that all of this is perfectly normal when grieving the loss of someone you loved dearly. It will clear up, although it takes much longer than you would like. Two years I wandered around a little hazy before I felt more like myself. It was worrisome, for sure!

So what can you do?

First, acknowledge that you’ve endured a huge loss and that forgetting things is the brain’s way of exhibiting overload. It really is normal. Next, adopt some strategies. Make as many things as you can routine. For example, place your keys in the same place every time when you get home. Same thing with your credit cards, money, bills, etc. Stick to a morning and evening routine. Take any meds at the same time everyday. Having an “evening wind-down” ritual will also help you get to sleep more easily.

Use lists, reminders, and planners. Stick post-a-notes in obvious places if there is something important you need to remember. Leave them on your mirror, the refrigerator, or the front door. Do whatever you need to do to help you get through your day without creating more chaos. And then? Forgive yourself if you still mess up!