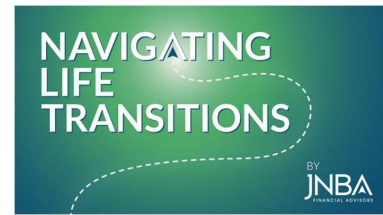


Podcast Transcript: Navigating Death of a Spouse



Kim Insley:

I am Kim Insley. Thanks for joining us for Navigating Life Transitions, a podcast where we bring together advisors experienced in financial life planning to talk about ways to navigate life's biggest changes, challenges, opportunities, and decisions from growing a family to empty nesting, from earning job promotions to planning for retirement, we discuss these pivotal moments that could benefit from the guidance a financial advisory team can provide. And today we're going to be talking about the emotional life transition of losing a spouse. With loss, you experience a whirlwind of emotions. There's grief, sadness, loneliness, confusion, and it can be overwhelming, especially when for a lot of surviving spouses, there's a mountain of legal and financial tasks you have to tackle, but it doesn't have to be this way, and you certainly don't have to do it alone. Joining me today is Elise Huston, an Advisor at JNBA, which serves clients in Minnesota, Florida, and throughout the United States. And also Dr. George Logan, who was widowed 18 years ago. And George, I'm going to start with you if you can tell us a little bit about your story.

Dr. George Logan:

Sure. Kim, thank you. And 58% of women over 75 and 28% of men will be widowed by the age of 75. But for everybody, even though that's a fairly common experience for everybody, it's a little bit different. And in my case, Jeanne was 53 at the time, but we had a couple of years between her terminal diagnosis and her passing. And so that really gave us the time to say goodbye, to make a lot of the transitions we needed to. And that was a real blessing. For other people, it's a little bit different. And I know Kim, your experience was different too.

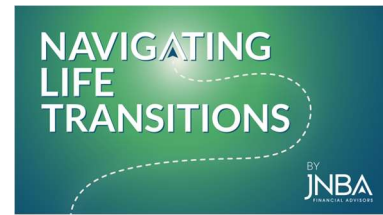
Kim Insley:

My experience was very different. So, my husband died suddenly, almost a year ago, and because it was sudden, there was no time to prepare, and we were at a point where we had done a little bit of planning, but not very much. And what we did was very out of date, and it's life-changing. You are left not only to deal with your grief, but to deal with so much, I call it business of death. That can be overwhelming.

Elise Huston:

Completely. And I think that's one of the, I guess, powerful parts of today's conversation is having both of you here, your experience was quite different just in terms of preparations in advance, not having that ability to prepare in advance, but then how you navigate on even after loss, whether you knew it was coming or not, is still harder I think, than some people anticipate it being. And the clients that we work with, we see all sorts. Or even as you get older, the idea that you may pass becomes more and more real, but even though you know it, it doesn't always make it an easy transition. And so, I look forward to talking with both of you today too about your unique perspectives and then how we help and work with families who are trying to navigate preparing for loss, but then also navigating sudden loss as well.

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Kim Insley:

And this is unusual for me. Normally I'm just asking the questions, but one of the things that I, and George, you've got some great tips we want to get to, but because you bring it up and the help that you offer people. I'm an evangelist now for make sure that you have a team and get a team early. I don't care how old you are, you should have a will or a trust. You should be talking to an attorney about that. It's not the expense that you think it is, and it will save you. Even my children, I am now getting them a power of attorney and a healthcare directive because you just never know when things are going to happen. So having a team, having financial advisors who can walk you through what's going to happen now is really, really important.

Elise Huston:

That's an interesting point, Kim, because actually 2024 Thrivent survey found that more than half of the widowed women in the United States experienced significant financial difficulties following the death of their spouse. But more notably than that, 41% of them admitted that they had never engaged in financial planning or any of those discussions prior to the loss. So not only having a team, but being familiar with your team and engaged with your team can help a lot in that post-loss navigating what next and having some of those resources available.

Kim Insley:

Yeah, it does seem like one or the other members of this couple will handle the finances and the other one is fine to let that go.

Elise Huston:

Right. Or oftentimes there's an assumption of who is going to be the surviving spouse. Statistically speaking, it's more common for men to pass before their female partner, but that's not always the case.

Kim Insley:

No. George, that was your case.

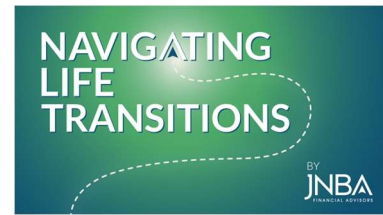
Dr. George Logan:

Yeah. And while our advisors and our attorney had everything worked out for the estate that the two kids would be provided for if Jeanne went first or I went first, or if we both went at the same time, they get into all the minutia. While that was all worked out, psychologically, given my family history, I thought, I'm sure to go first because all the male Logan's keel over in their fifties of a big heart attack. Well, here I am at 75.

Kim Insley:

Going strong. One of the things I wanted to talk to you about, and I know you speak to other people about this and it's more of the personal part of it. You were a caregiver for two years and in some ways that's a whole other layer of grief. What are your tips for people who are going through that when they do have that period of time where they know the inevitable or things aren't looking good and you're caught up in the heat of battle?

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Dr. George Logan:

And it's time to ask for help because it turns out that there are a lot of people that surround us all and want to help us, and we're all taught to go ahead and help people who are less fortunate, but no one tells us what to do when we're the less fortunate person. And what we discovered was that people wanted to help, but they were totally at a loss at how they could help. And to help that situation, we actually turned to CaringBridge. Nowadays, there's a lot of social networks that could help you with this, but we got things coordinated, and so people were bringing food to us and we were getting breaks some evenings. And so, it's really important. You don't want your overwhelming emotion when the loved one passes to be one of relief because you've been working so hard.

Kim Insley:

Right, and then you feel guilty about that, and there's already so much guilt no matter what's going on, everybody feels guilty even though you can't change it. You also talk about routines and the importance of a routine. So how does that factor in?

Dr. George Logan:

Right. Well, everything in your world's been just been turned upside down, and particularly if this is going to go on for some time, and it always is, you have to try to reestablish routines. And we had had the situation where we got to get together as a family for dinner every night. Well, our daughter was off at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, and so she was willing to eat a little bit earlier. So, we'd eat at six, she'd eat at four, and we would FaceTime dinner, and it was like the old days when we were all together. So, we did a lot of that.

Elise Huston:

Wow.

Dr. George Logan:

Yeah, we did a lot of, and of course this was before Wi-Fi, and so I had to run Cat 5 cable through the house. It was crazy. It all worked.

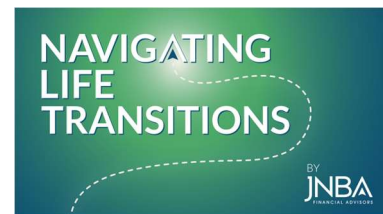
Kim Insley:

When you understood your wife's diagnosis, you're a physician, did that and you started to look at the financial part of it, did you change what you had already laid out?

Dr. George Logan:

We did meet with the advisors and the attorneys and said, okay, we don't know when, but we now know who's going to go first. And they said, okay, there are a few things we'd like you to do to retitle some things. And we had already done a lot to balance off our estate. As an example, the house was in Jeanne's name, and that could stay that way. That was fine. It came directly to me afterwards, but there were some things that needed to be retitled, and we went out and I did that. And so, when I met with them after her passing, they said, now, did you get a chance to make those changes? And I said, well, yeah, I did. And they said, really? I said, yeah. They said, oh,

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this is going to be really easy. And it was. It was. There was really minimal paperwork and no taxes.

Kim Insley:

And you're a pretty together guy. There are people who are so stopped in their life by their grief, and I'm sure you see people like that when maybe their clients you've already had or they come to you. It can be a very long process.

Elise Huston:

Yes.

Kim Insley:

What are your recommendations for people who are going through this?

Elise Huston:

Yeah, I think that getting a team in place and meeting with your professional team, be it your financial advisory team and your estate planning attorneys and team is really important early on. Another one of the things that I know, George, you've talked a little bit about too, is just people's willingness or comfort around sharing. But also, I think there's a layer of sometimes when someone does have a terminal illness or a diagnosis that's not great. There's also, I think in society we wonder, oh gosh, I don't want to bring it up in case they don't want to talk about it.

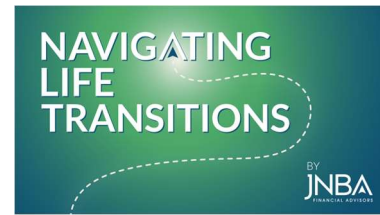
And these professionals in your life can bring it up and help you put a plan together to talk through the things while you're navigating the emotional component of it, they can start to think through the financial, the estate components of it too, to create a plan and help make sure it gets implemented, that you make the changes that they've suggested so that when that loss does occur, hopefully there's less surprises and frustration after the loss because settling of the estate, transferring and consolidating accounts, that can be a really difficult time for the family, especially as they're navigating their grief.

And I think most commonly when we work with families who maybe didn't have a professional team before the loss, that ends up being just a really overwhelming burden. They don't want to do anything wrong. They don't want to mess up some of that estate settlement process. They want to make sure things are getting transferred timely but efficiently. And it can take more time than often people realize just to go through the steps of probate and asset transfers and settlement too. So yeah, I would say the pre-planning, but even the post-execution work is where having that strong team and being willing to engage an attorney, being willing to engage a tax professional and a financial advisor can really help to create a cohesive plan that's a little bit more actionable and then stress-free hopefully. On the other side, you know what to expect.

Kim Insley:

Well, people, they hear the word probate and they get very nervous about that for good reason. But that's the reason why I advocate having a team and at least early on, making sure that will and everything is in place so that you have someone who can walk you through that. And in my case, I didn't have that beforehand, so I immediately went into that mode. George, I wanted to ask you this. I know it comes up a lot, is that after a spouse dies, you build this whole life on this

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plan that you have together, and suddenly they're not there. Your life has changed 180 percent, and you can do anything you want. And I know that for some people there's a lot of guilt if in your mind that plan is now different because what you want is different. Did that happen to you?

Dr. George Logan:

Yeah, I've certainly seen that happen to other folks. It turns out that a lot of our friends had commented over the years that if you asked Jeanne and I the same question and we were separated, we'd give you identical answers. So, the big change for me was that I was suddenly a single parent, which I had never done. I'd been part of a team, and so I could focus a lot of my energy and a lot of my interest in that area. And I still miss Jeanne, but I was relatively confident we were doing things pretty much the way she'd want. The only exception to that is that there's a couple of endowments, one up at the camp we all love, Camp Minotian, and the other at the kids' school, they're in her name. She wouldn't have approved of us changing that.

Kim Insley:

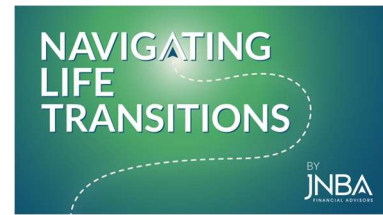
Well, I, as a single person now, so I am doing things differently and there's not any guilt. I'm actually fascinated. I was like, well, I wonder what Pete would've done in this situation. And I know that he would've done exactly what he wanted to do. And so, I don't have guilt about that, but I know that people do. And you probably run across that.

Elise Huston:

Yeah, a lot. And I think you see it, even when there's a loss of maybe not a spouse, but a family member where there's an inheritance, people feel a lot of guilt with doing the right thing with this money they've received. What would they have wanted me to do with it? Not feeling like it's their own, but especially when there's a loss of a spouse. I work with a few women who lost their husband when their kids were quite young, their kids were in grade school, and the conversation constantly comes up of, gosh, I wonder what he would've wanted them to do, be it private or public school or we hadn't really talked about that yet.

And feeling like wanting to honor their joint parenting style while still trying to navigate you now need to advocate for your kids and your family and what works for you so that you feel like you have this life balance as well as you're trying to probably navigate your own hobbies and interests while being a single parent, which wasn't the original plan. So yeah, we see that often and through a lot of, I think, conversations and just revalidating some self-discovery around your own goals and values, which likely when you were part of this couple, you did have shared values. So, there's ways to honor that person by being authentic to yourself, which it sounds like you've discovered too. He would've done what he wanted. So, me doing what I want is honoring him too. And I think that's coming to a point where you've given yourself permission, takes a lot of time, but hopefully through planning and conversations, we can help clients find their kind of new normal or what those new goals really are.

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Kim Insley:

The new normal. Exactly. So, our kids are in their twenties, yours were younger and single, widowed dad. There aren't a lot of them around. And physician, so for your community, the rocks that you leaned on, the resources that you turned to, how did you find that?

Dr. George Logan:

Okay. Well, almost accidentally, I was back to work a few days, about a week after Jeanne's passing and the memorial service and all of that, and a person was a colleague and later became a very dear friend, one of the oncologists. We were in a doctor's work area, and he said, well, how did all that go? Or some other very open-ended question. And I told him, and I realized when I got done talking, I had done a 45-minute monologue. And the interesting thing about that he was wonderful person. He just sat there and attentively and nodded. And the other thing that was wonderful about it is I never needed to do it again, but I had to tell my story and it had to be a peer that I told it to and I only needed to do it once.

Kim Insley:

Oh, interesting.

Dr. George Logan:

Yeah.

Kim Insley:

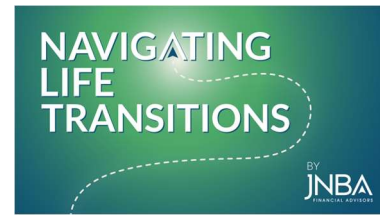
I have friends who introduced me to other widows of similar age, and that's helpful to go to. It's very helpful to hear other people's experiences. And so, people recommend grief groups and whatnot for that purpose so that you realize you're not alone. And that's the biggest thing is you feel like it is a unique experience to you, but you are not alone. Literally, if you're married, not a lot of us get to go together at the same time. There usually is someone left behind and divorce may produce similar feelings. So, I found that talking to other people who've been through a similar experience and even online, I always laugh when I say this, but there's a subreddit group for widowers, and it's phenomenal because you see people in various stages of grief, some farther along than others, some very negative, some positive in the sense that they are continuing with their lives.

But that's helpful too because it's anonymous, you can say whatever you want to say. It's not for everybody, but just finding those resources. And then I'm a reader, so the financial end and all of that stuff, finding those resources however you find it. I am sure you probably have similar resources. I just recommend even throughout your life on the financial piece, I love financial stuff because it's how you live your life. It enables you to live your life. It's not your life, but it enables you to live your life.

Elise Huston:

Yeah. It gives you some flexibility in your life too. And there's a lot of power when you can tie your wealth to your goals and values. And so, it gives you, again, it comes back to some of that permission, but living that more fulfilled life. When you find that those two things are working

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together, the thing I find reassuring but also interesting that both of you said was that telling your story has really helped you.

I attended a session from a professional, her name is Amy Florian, just in the last year. And she talked a lot about, a lot of her work has been around grief and having conversations around grief and actually trying to help other people who are maybe not the ones grieving, engage in conversations with those who are going through a moment of grief. And one of the things she says often is that grieving people need to tell their story. That saying the words out loud, talking about the person they lost really helps them to process it. But oftentimes for the person who is grieving or experienced the loss, for the two of Jeanne and Pete are present in your life, be it through your kids, your family. You see them everywhere. You think of them likely daily. So, when nobody's asking you about them or asking you about them specifically, that can sometimes feel also isolating or sad.

I also think we oftentimes fall into the habit of asking someone, how are you doing? And it's the same as when you ask somebody, as you see them in the hall, how's your day? Good, thanks. How are you doing? Fine, thanks. And it doesn't invite opportunity for that story. So, she also challenges you if you know someone who's grieving to ask them a question, same as your colleague did that provides a platform to share their story, whether it's how is today for you? Or where were you when you found out about the diagnosis? Or something that feels like you want to learn about them, they will tell you if they don't want to talk about it, you'll easily be able to read from that person if today's not a day they want to share, but they know you're willing to hear and they may come back to you later to have that conversation. And even years later, I think in the early stages of grief, you're probably flooded with meal trains and all the things that you referenced, but it's the years following that oftentimes you're still wanting to talk about them.

Or you are still processing as well, so having friends, family members, loved one's professionals who are not afraid to ask can also be, I think, a great comfort. So, I challenge those who are supporting someone going through grief to ask. They probably would love to talk about the person they lost.

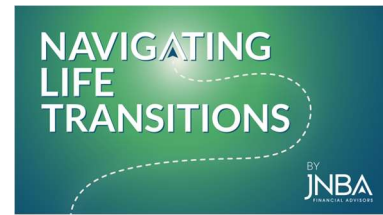
Kim Insley:

It's true. And if you're a family member or a friend and you happen to remember when that person's birthday is, when an anniversary is or whatever, send a note, a text or whatever, it doesn't have to be a long conversation, just remember it because those dates are important. And when nobody remembers it, it is really sad.

Elise Huston:

Yeah. I work with a client who, she said that every year on her husband's birthday, her closest girlfriends ask her out. They go to his favorite restaurant for breakfast and they all share a memory and laugh about, because he was a comedian at heart, he loved to tell jokes, and they laugh and laugh and talk about all the ways that he enriched their life. And she said the amount of joy and the amount that it fills her bucket, it is irreplaceable. But for her, it feels like a really wonderful way to remember him too. So, I couldn't agree more. Remembering those things-

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Kim Insley:

That's a sweet thing to do.

Elise Huston:

Is important. Yeah.

Dr. George Logan:

And I think it's important you pointed out that they laugh because people sometimes who want to be supportive, don't want to ask you about it because it'll be sad.

Elise Huston:

Right.

Dr. George Logan:

I said, no, no. When it's all said and done, you remember the good stuff.

Kim Insley:

Yeah.

Dr. George Logan:

The good stuff abides, it stays with you.

Kim Insley:

And that person deserves to be remembered.

Dr. George Logan:

Yeah.

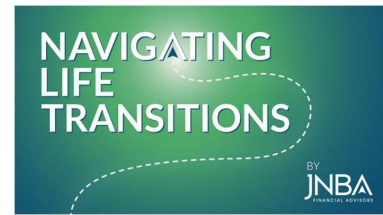
Kim Insley:

I don't know who to attribute this to as we wrap it up, but I have a note written here that loss is a part of life, loss is not all of life. And I love that because I don't want people to get stuck and think that their life is over. They still have so much to live, and you've been doing it for 18 years. And you have a partner.

Dr. George Logan:

And the wonderful thing is that I get to see in my kids every once in a while, one of them will demonstrate some wonderful ability or insight, and I said, you got that from your mom. So, she's still with us, very much through them.

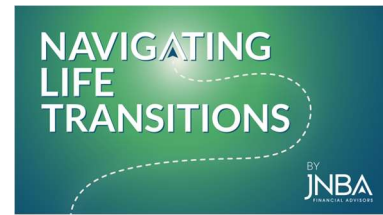
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Kim Insley:

A hundred-percent. Well, I want to thank you, Elise and George, especially for sharing your story, and we hope that all of you will listen to, we have many other Navigating Life Transitions podcasts. There's a full list of available episodes online at jnba.com, and all you do is you click on the insights tab and you'll find the podcast page there. And if you want to learn more about how JNBA can help you through life's many transitions, call them. And the number is (952) 844-0995, or you can use the contact form on jnba.com and you can schedule a complimentary, no obligation call with their experienced multi-generational team. And I want to thank you all for listening. I'm Kim Insley, and I look forward to more navigating life transitions with you on our next podcast.

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