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Widow to widow

Elaine Froese for *Progressive Dairyman*

January is a great time to snuggle with a cup of tea and a great book. It is also a time to reflect on the lessons of last year, and for me, that lesson a few years ago was learning to walk alongside friends who have become young widows. If you are a widower on a dairy farm, make the translations for yourself and see if there are parallel learnings for your situation.

I asked a widow her favourite resource for dealing with her new role of widowhood, and she named *Widow to Widow*, a practical book written by Genevieve Davis Ginsburg. It is now my preferred gift to new widows.

How do you help a new widow?

Ginsburg says, "Have your loss acknowledged, your husband mourned and your grief recognized. That's how others help you and how you help yourself."

Our small town has more than 80 widows. These women totally understand each other, and Ginsburg says widows are attracted to be friends with each other since they share common scenarios and hurts.

In 2009, two young farmwomen – one a close friend – became widows, and their journey has taught me many things.

One widow says the most important thing she has learned is

to have relationships with expert advisers, like a trusted financial adviser, before you actually need that adviser.

A young farming widow appreciates time to herself or a

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night out with the girls. She deeply appreciates child care provided while she has some fun on her own. She also appreciates playtime at another house where her children can connect to other male adults.

"No widow is prepared for the barrage of feelings within her," says Ginsburg. In our town, the widows meet monthly for supper at a local restaurant, and they do lots of sharing. They are a wonderful support group for each other. Ginsburg calls her book a "support group between covers," and her quest is for "wholeness."

Regardless if you are single, widowed or with spouse, what does "wholeness" mean to you?

Some married women are looking for a new sense of "wholeness." I am saddened by the conversations with older married

farmwomen who really would like to change their residence and farm roles for a different life in town or away from the busyness of the farm. They don't want to admit that widowhood sometimes has an attraction: time when they would be in charge of their own decisions without tensions from their spouse. On dairy farms, this sense of entrapment can be very intense if the spouses don't talk about what the other spouse is missing or needing.

Tips for widows

◆ Make mornings more livable by doing something cheery and healthy for yourself. This might mean great tea in a cheery pottery mug in the sunbeams of the winter sun or walking with a friend.

◆ "Take time for yourself." Write

this on a sign and tape it to your bathroom mirror.

◆ Write down everything. Use a spiral-bound notebook to keep track.

◆ "On the other hand ... is the coat of arms for widows – just do it." You are allowed to change your mind and see things from a new perspective.

◆ "Begin to be captain of your moods ... depression is normal and so is happiness. Don't be a cheerful faker. Be kind to yourself."

◆ The person who wants to change has to be the person who makes the change.

◆ Divorce and widowhood are not the same.

When I call my young widow friends, I am careful to listen and wait. I challenge them to tell me what they need at the moment. The sense of "overwhelm" is huge in the first year as the family adapts to all the firsts without dad and hubby.

I talk to my husband about his comfort in giving manly hugs to my widow friends, because I remember my widow friend who said she missed the "embrace of a man's arms" the most.

When my aunt was widowed, she

moved to an apartment in town. She said it was hard to move, but after six months, she confessed that she should have moved much sooner. Changes are hard to make, and every neighbour will have an opinion on how widows should do "their lives," but whose life is it anyway?

Loneliness is likely the deepest hurt of those who find themselves coping with a new sense of singleness. Use these wintry months to extend hospitality to the single folks in your circle of friends.

Connect by phone or email. Send cards with a note of encouragement and a piece of scripture.

Widowed farmwomen who are managing a large dairy farm operation need to look at designing the next chapter of their lives. Do you have your lifestyle needs planned for? Do you have a successor? Would you like to change your role for the next decade of your life? Are you having fun? Is it time to let go of some ownership?

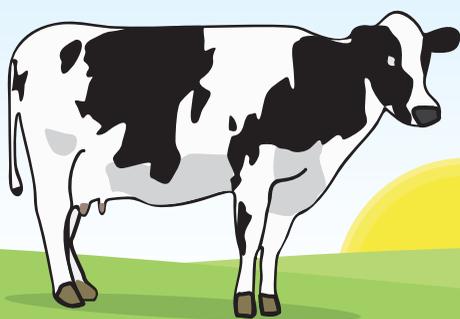
"Widow is only a word, not a condition." Walk alongside a widow. There are widows and widowers in your community who would appreciate your friendship. **PD**

Elaine Froese helps farm families execute plans to help them prepare for future scenarios. Visit www.elainefroese.com for more information and resources.

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