

SQUARE ONE

AT 51

What I did the day after
I buried my life

Hedria Lunken

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Square One at 51:

What I did the day after I buried my life

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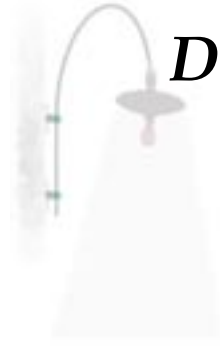
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Dedication

To Paul, my first love,
there would be no book
without you.

To my wonderful children,
Nettie, Gene and David,
who are here because of Paul
and who helped me mature
and grow with them.

I am so proud of each one,
and know Paul would be, too.

To my dear husband, Bob,
who has watched this project evolve
and supported me all the way.

To my wonderful, supportive
family, friends and colleagues
who helped me make this journey.



Acknowledgements

Although life presented me with obstacles and sometimes hardships, there were always people to help make this journey possible. Many were there for me as I moved forward into uncharted water after Paul's death. Thanks to Vicki Marshall – my friend, colleague and work mate – who taught me much about succeeding in the world of seminars, continuously encouraged, cajoled me, laughed and cried with me, and convinced me of the value of putting my thoughts into print.

This book began as a journal, which I wrote in the moment and in stream of consciousness form. I thank Jean Stoess, my first editor, for her yeoman's job of putting my rambling thoughts together and making sense of them. Years later, Randi Minetor divided the thoughts into chapters. Thanks to my current publishers WME Books for their help in the final steps of getting this to you.

My wonderful parents provided me with the foundation for going forward into the world. They emphasized the joy, commitment, and obligation of involvement in one's community. Speaking out on issues and taking a stance were a natural part of our household. My big brother Saar was always there looking after me.

The reader will meet many other family members and friends by name in this journal. There are so many others not mentioned, but I needed to make the journal readable and less confusing. Please know that mentioned or not by name or deed, I love you and appreciate all your friendship and caring. In addition, the journal represents only the first three

years of my journey. Since it began, however, over fifteen years have passed and many other people have become part of my life. Thanks to you all for your part in who I am today.

An important part of my journey began when I discovered the field of Creativity. It changed my life, and later, when my life changed, it was my newly acquired creativity tools that helped me succeed. I received a Master's Degree in Creativity from the Center for Studies in Creativity at Buffalo State College, where I learned to facilitate groups with the wonderful Creative Problem Solving process.¹

Their founding organization, the Creative Education Foundation, has presented an annual conference for over fifty years called "CPSI" – the Creative Problem Solving Institute – where I go to practice my tools, learn new ones, meet others in the field, stay connected to colleagues, and expand my network. I recently served on the Creative Education Foundation board as president, which allowed me to give back to the field that has given me so much. I am fortunate to personally know the founders of the field of creativity: Ruth Noller and Sid Parnes,² whom I thank for their personal mentoring and their determination in organizing and supporting the organizations that helped me and many others succeed, and Alex Osborn who gave us "Brainstorming" and a field for the study of creativity.³

1. Parnes, Sidney J., *Source Book for Creative Problem Solving* (Creative Education Foundation Press, Buffalo, NY, 1992).

2. Stoller, Ruth, Parnes, Sidney J., and Biondi, Angelo M., *Creative Action Workbook* (rev ed. of *Creative Behavior Workbook*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1976).

3. Osborn, Alex F., *Applied Imagination: Principles and Procedures of Creative Problem Solving* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1953).



Ithaka

by Cavafy

As you set out for Ithaka
hope your road is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.
Laistrygonians, Cyclops,
angry Poseidon – don't be afraid of them:
you'll never find things like that on your way
as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,
as long as a rare excitement
stirs your spirit and your body.

Laistrygonians, Cyclops,
wild Poseidon – you won't encounter them
unless you bring them along inside your soul,
unless your soul sets them up in front of you.

Hope your road is a long one.
May there be many summer mornings when,
with what pleasure, what joy,
you enter harbors you're seeing for the first time;
may you stop at Phoenician trading stations
to buy fine things,
mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,

Ithaka (continued)

sensual perfume of every kind –
as many sensual perfumes as you can;
and may you visit many Egyptian cities
to learn and go on learning from their scholars.

Keep Ithaka always in your mind.
Arriving there is what you're destined for.
But don't hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for years,
so you're old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you've gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.
Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her you wouldn't have set out.
She has nothing left to give you now.

And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
you'll have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.



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Introduction

It took fifteen years to get here, a place where I can look back and say, “Now I can publish the journal. I have enough distance. I’m in a different place, and ready to share what I experienced when Paul died. In addition, I am able to include a reflective look from afar at what I was doing, and see how I did it.”

I am in the inspirational teaching profession. I speak to groups and present seminars to business, not-for-profit and educational clients on Creativity and Innovation. My passion is facilitating groups and consulting with individuals to bring Creativity into their lives, to help them live fuller, richer lives. I designed a seminar two years ago called “Navigating Change” and a year ago I developed a keynote speech, both a reflection of my process of moving from grief to success.

But only recently could I face the actual words I wrote at the time of Paul’s death and share them, first with my children ... and now with you ... through my *Dear Paul* letters.

I wrote to Paul because I had to talk to him. He had been there for me since I was fifteen years old, and I could not be without him. I missed him terribly, painfully. Writing was my way of keeping him near me, and at the same time giving me the strength to move on. I needed to share my ideas and thoughts and successes and failures and pleasures and pain with him. I needed Paul and the closest I could get was my computer, so I wrote and wrote and cried and cried and laughed and shared and solved problems and challenged myself and grew.

It was a very sad, painful, funny, thought provoking, enlightening and then transforming experience. Now I invite you to follow my steps from total shock to a new beginning.

You'll see how I discovered my special mottos:

"Life doesn't get better, it gets different."

"Change is constant, Growth is optional."

"Slow down, accomplish more."

And read how I pushed myself to grow professionally and personally by creating and then accepting new challenges.

If you've lost your soul mate, or faced making major changes in your life, you'll recognize and understand the experiences I describe. Use this book to help you through your challenges and find your way over the hurdles.

I revisited a difficult time in my life by searching the pages of my journal to see what motivated me during those weeks. Where was I in the grieving process? More important, how was I coping and what was I doing to move forward?

Throughout this book, I will describe the tools I used to face my challenges and will explain how I used them to find my way to the other side. I wasn't any stronger than you; I had no special magic to move past the shock of losing Paul, but I was fortunate to have my creativity training. This book will share my Creativity-inspired insights, tools and techniques with you, so that you, too, can find the strength and resolve you never knew you had.

Let's begin the journey together.

Each chapter begins with a short set of *Insights* to help you navigate through my letters to Paul and their expression of my self-examination and growth.

Then, after reading the chapter, you'll find three sets of **Tools** to help you.

Reflections: Selected quotes from the journal, reflecting on what I wrote in that chapter;

Ideas: Suggestions for your personal and professional growth; and a

To Do: Action items based on the *Ideas* to help you get going!

I suggest you select a special journal to record your thoughts, reflections, and insights as you read through my journal. Or, just get started writing your thoughts out in the spaces provided right here in the book.



CHAPTER

1

Shock

Insights

What do you do with thirty-plus years of sharing when it appears to stop abruptly and absolutely in on millisecond? In this chapter, you'll see how I took stock of my situation. After my husband, Paul, died suddenly and unexpectedly, I was completely lost and missed him terribly – I wanted both to tell him how much I appreciated his love and to ask if he knew how much I loved him.

My response was to begin writing to Paul every day. Without even knowing it, I discovered an outlet for my frustration and longing by writing in a journal to him. I needed to share how I was feeling with him, and, as I wrote, I felt him listening to each thought as I guided my fingers over the keyboard!

SQUARE ONE AT 51 • Hedria Lunken

Monday, February 11, 1991

1 week

Dear Paul,

It's been a week since you passed away. I still have trouble believing it actually happened.

Paul, where are you? Where have you gone? I look for you in every room in the house. I wait to hear your voice. The house is so empty. I'm not afraid to be in the house alone, but I am lost and lonely without you to share with.

You have been there for me since I was 15 years old, and I need you as much if not more now that I am 51. Who else knows the real me? Everyone thinks I am strong, but you were my strength. You held me in the night. You encouraged me and cheered me on in all my endeavors, whether or not you understood what I was trying to accomplish. You were 100 percent behind me.

I don't think many other husbands would have been as understanding and supportive as you were during the past five years as I returned to school, became independent, and realized I was a feminist. It was a period when the growth and change in me affected our life together. In some ways it was a major milestone for us, just as were the births of our children and later when they left home. You enjoyed the new me. You encouraged me and laughed with me. That is what I will miss the most, I think. I still will have a sense of humor, thanks to you. You taught me it was all right to laugh at myself and at us, and not to take myself so seriously. Thanks for that, and so much more.

Thanks for letting me know you loved me dearly and I was the most important thing in your life. You made me understand that in your eyes I was always great and special. You gave me the courage to try new things, to take risks in order to accomplish all I wanted to do. I knew I had the independence to tease and flirt and laugh with others because I knew you were always there for me. I knew I could always come back to you, my love.

I think you knew how much I loved you. You were my special person who made me special. I hope you also felt special and loved.

Some interesting and funny things have happened since you passed away, and I want to share them with you before they fade from my memory. Maybe by putting things down on the computer and sending them to computer heaven, I can help you share with me once again.

Barb was so wonderful the night you died. She was the head nurse in the emergency room when I brought you to the ER. She understood what had happened and told me some of the things I could expect to deal with. She said this would be the last time I could be alone with you, and gave me time to hold you and hug you and kiss you. You were so peaceful. Your beautiful hands were so warm. It was unbelievable that you couldn't respond.

While Dorothy and I were standing next to you, Barb asked me what I wanted to do about donations. I suggested that Temple Beth El had started a fund when my dad died, and it would be nice if people donated to it in your memory.

Then your sister gave me a look that said "remember Temple Beth Israel" and that you were the President.

I looked at Barb and said, "Yes, of course, our temple in town, too."

Then Barb said that was not the kind of donations she meant. I finally caught on – she was referring to organ donations. I said you weren't too keen on that.

Then Dorothy and I, together, like the Bobbsey twins, said, "But you can have ours."

I was so happy Nettie had Jed to rely on. He answered the phone and broke the terrible news to her. Paul, how could you do this to them and me, just a week after announcing their engagement? How do you expect me to go on and do the wedding without you?

I reached David at home in time for him to get a plane out immediately. Here he was the farthest away, in Indiana, but the first of our kids to come home.

Gene, although he was here in town, was the hard one to contact. We didn't reach him until later that night. I had thought to try the computer lab but not the library, which is where he had been. We left messages on his tape telling him to call the hospital and, later on, to call home. A friend left a message of sympathy on his machine; and we wanted to tell him about your death before he arrived home and learned about it from the message, so we sent cousin Alan to locate him. Gene went to see you at the hospital before he came home. He said he needed to tell you a few things.

The day after you died, I brought the paper up to the room and read the obituary to you. I said now that you were in the obituary section I guess that meant you weren't here anymore. That corny old joke we had always laughed at isn't funny to me now.

Love, Me

Same day

Dear Paul,

On the day of your funeral, when we walked into Temple and entered the Sanctuary, Nettie cried out, almost hysterically, "But he was supposed to walk me down this aisle and give me away!"

Right there and then I resolved to maintain my composure and not break up because it would start a chain reaction. So I remained calm on the outside.

Uncle Tzvi presided at the funeral – he was superb.

And the kids were great. Gene wrote the eulogy, and David read it at your funeral.

How proud you would have been.

Eulogies

To A Super Dad and Uncle:

When I spoke to all the kids before writing this eulogy, one theme kept recurring: Dad was always there for us. Whenever we needed him, for a problem, advice, or to go to breakfast, he was always there. He always had time for everyone. We thought he would always be there for us, but we forgot that he was already living on borrowed time.

Sixteen years ago we almost lost him to a heart attack. It was a crucial point in his life. He saw the need for change and, as hard as it was, he learned. And he grew. He learned to enjoy life and to smell the flowers. We all taught him to hug and to kiss and to open up. He learned to live life to the fullest. But even before that point and ever since, he was always there, ready to give whatever help and advice we needed. Many things we did in life were easier, some even made possible because of the unwavering support that Dad gave.

He was a father, a damn good one, not only to Nettie, Gene, and David, but also to Dorothy's kids and Ellen, too. He was always interested and caring, and gave each of us a job at the store. He taught us all the basics of retailing with enthusiasm and dedication that expressed his love for his lifetime career.

We are all so glad that he went quickly and painlessly. We talked so often about going without pain. The last sixteen years have been absolutely wonderful. He left at a time when everyone's life was going well. Mom is on the road to success. David is pursuing his MBA. Gene, now back in the

United States, has finally gotten his act together and is on his way to graduate school. Nettie, Daddy's little girl, is getting married. How happy she was with the vision of Dad walking her down the aisle and giving her away.

Dad made time to visit every one of his extended family – Gene in Israel, David in Boston, Nettie in Washington, and Wendy in London. He was especially pleased with Laurie, Jeff, and Keith and the new additions they brought to the family. And he was proud of Ellen's success at school.

Whether he was Dad or Uncle Paul, he played the same role. Whether it was swimming at the beach, Ellen and Laura in the pool, or Mitch raking leaves, he loved all of us.

One of Mom and Dad's favorite times of year was Thanksgiving. The joy that we all felt by being together was the highlight of the year. We all looked forward to sitting at the big table and talking, storytelling, and eating.

We will never forget Dad and what he gave to each of us. He was special in ways that we will never completely understand. We always thought that his perfect halo was tilted a bit, but now it's not. We miss you, Dad. We love you. Good-bye.

Uncle Tzvi's elegant eulogy acknowledged not only your qualities but also the contributions you made to those around you and the community. Here are a few things he said about you:

His greatest priority was his family. He was a good brother to Dorothy. When he was younger he would tease her but grew up to become a true big brother. Lester, of course, played an important part in his life. Paul was a wonderful uncle to his nieces and nephews, and an extended father, mentor,

and advisor to all, particularly, Laurie, Jeff, Keith, Wendy, and Ellen. Saar and Toni were more than in-laws; they were like his brother and sister.

And how he loved his children, Nettie, Gene, and David. He was very proud of them and their accomplishments. What joy he had just last month when Nettie and Jed became engaged. He was so pleased that Jed had called him for permission to seek her hand. Paul looked forward to the wedding and welcomed Jed warmly into the family. When the wedding takes place, Paul's presence will be felt at the ceremony.

He had a wonderful relationship with his family. COD ("Call On Dad") was the watchword when anyone needed anything. Of course he didn't like to be interrupted: "I'm talking," he would say – but he enjoyed being teased by his family, who presented him with a halo that was a little off on one side. He would respond, "I'm perfect."

But he will be missed most by Hedgie, his wife of 32-1/2 years. They were each other's first love. They knew each other for four years before they married. I recall the wedding. I spoke to them under the chupah [see Glossary] not only of togetherness but the importance of recognizing each other's individuality. They helped each other to grow as individuals, Paul in his field and Hedgie in hers. Paul was so proud of Hedgie as she gained expertise and recognition in her special area of creative problem solving.

Together they shared each other's simchas and joys. They comforted each other in difficult times. Together they raised their children shepping naches from them as well as experiencing the tensions and anxieties inherent in all parent/child relationships. They were good for each other.

*They were more than husband and wife.
They were partners. They were companions.
They were friends.*

*Paul and Hedgie spent last Monday together.
It was a beautiful day. They walked together in the
woods, talking and feeling like kids. When they
came back to the car, Paul said he was tired, and
died in her arms. What an important message to all
of us: take advantage of every little opportunity.*

Barb was annoyed that so many people were talking and visiting in the Temple before the services. Then she started to laugh when she realized that you would have been in the middle of everything, talking and visiting, too.

Arnie said you would have been thrilled with the crowd; you always liked seeing so many people at service. We had a packed house – over 500 – and about 70 carloads of people came to the cemetery. What a turnout!

We didn't want to get a limousine, and planned on using a cousin's big car. Then I got this great idea! Knowing how much you loved your car, red or not, appropriate or not, we arranged for it to follow the hearse, complete with its "2 SHIRTS" license plates.

During *Shiva*, someone said I had to go back to the single life, and I laughed! I had never been single; you were there since I was 15. Paul, how am I supposed to be without you when you have always been there for me?

The kids made me retell the story of our courtship. You were so old-fashioned, always saying courtship.

I clearly remember your being my Sunday school teacher. You tried so hard, but we were such a handful for you. Remember the letter I wrote to you when you left for the army a few months later? People were asked to correspond with the soldiers; and since you were the only one I knew, I wrote to you. Little did I know what it would lead to!

You always said it was when you returned for the holidays and I kissed you outside of Temple on *Rosh Hashanah* that you were smitten. Soon after, you came to my home to invite me out. I remember it so well: I was in rolled-up blue jeans, with dirty saddle shoes, and practically ignored you until you mentioned going out. I knew I wouldn't go out with you unless it was for the big Sammy (*Sigma Alpha Mu*) dance because I wanted to be there. That is what you asked me for, and I accepted.

I thought Mom and Dad would have a fit – me, 15 years old, in high school, and you, 24 a college senior returned from the service. You always said that when you saw me come down the stairs that evening in the white brocade dress, you decided then and there that we would get married. That was the beginning – and four years later, I was your bride! And today, at 51, I am your widow.

MISS YOU MISS YOU MISS YOU MISS YOU. I want to share so many things with you.

Got my Master's of Science diploma today in the mail. Remember how I said I was going to give it to you as we earned it together? Seemed rather hollow getting it now.

Jed has been great with Nettie. She is so happy and yet so sad. She misses you so much. The wedding will never be the same without you, but we are going ahead with it. It will be October 12, 1991. Thank G-d you and I had already done so much of the planning. It's uncanny how much we accomplished in one week; without it, I would be plagued with making all those decisions now. But it's too bad you and I didn't start on the invitation list. Now I will have to guess how you would have done it.

David is actually interviewing with corporate America. I am so happy you and I visited him at Indiana University last month. It was a visit he will always treasure. He said he would never give away the shelves you two made together.

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Paul, why did you stop taking your medicine? Why didn't you exercise daily? Why, why, why, why, why, why, why, why, why?

Paul, what a beautiful last day we had, sleeping in late, making love, and sharing a leisurely breakfast. Then you went your way, and I worked at home. So many people remarked that they saw you that day, downtown on Main Street, at the mall, and other places. It was as if you were visiting all your special places and special people.

You came home early, and it was such a glorious day for February we went for a long walk in Art Park. It was such fun, you sharing your day and me sharing mine, discussing and talking and laughing and holding hands like two kids.

I told you to wait while I walked up the hill and got the car, but you were right behind me. Oh, G-d, why did you walk up that hill?

When we got in the car you said you were so tired, so I suggested we just wait a few minutes and rest. And then you looked at me with those blue eyes and said you had a headache – and I knew you were dying. I loosened your jacket and ran to call an ambulance. When I came back, I held you and told you how much I loved you. Did you hear me? I don't think you were in pain. It all happened so fast!

Oh, how much I love you,

Me



Saturday, February 16, 1991

2nd week

Dear Paul,

Not even two weeks since you died, but it seems like two years. I feel as if I'm having an out-of-body experience and watching all this from far away. It's a very strange sensation. I can see myself typing, and it is like I'm in the ceiling looking down, I'm on automatic pilot, watching myself perform. I feel as if I am encased in plastic, and this protects me somewhat from the world.

I can do simple activities by rote.

I do all the "have-tos" to get through the hours that seem like days, and the days that are more like weeks, and the weeks that are stretching out like months.

I went to Temple last night with Mom and Dorothy and Lester for Shabbat Services. It was OK. When I went back this morning, Gene was there. I wore your *tallis* and had an *alyiah*. It felt good, but not right. Remember how I always said that I didn't want an *alyiah* if it meant you didn't get one. Well, I got one. It is all helping me to realize that this is real.

The days are long and the nights forever. I wake up more tired than before. I'm having so much trouble realizing this is true.

Love, Me

1 TOOLS

Reflections

- *2/11/91 Thanks for letting me know you loved me dearly and I was the most important thing in your life.*
- *2/11/91 I think you knew how much I loved you.*
- *2/11/91 MISS YOU. I want to share so many things with you.*
- *2/16/91 I am having trouble realizing this is true.*

Ideas for the Reader

Journaling: How many times have you been at the sink thinking, or driving, or not able to sleep and wished you had a place to capture your thoughts? Journaling, which has been a wonderful outlet for me, is a perfect way to unburden your mind, to work creatively, to create, to vent frustration, to grow, or simply to record what is happening.

I had just finished writing a Master's Thesis, so I was very comfortable going to the computer to type. If this is not comfortable for you, and you have not yet started writing,

buy yourself a journal to record your thoughts in. Although many beautiful journals are available for purchase today, a notebook will do. Or, get started by writing your thoughts here in this book – whatever feels comfortable to you.

To Do:

Journal: Start writing. Put the date down and just write the first thing that comes to your mind. It doesn't have to make sense. No one is going to see it but you. So just begin right now, wherever that is for you at this moment.

Date: _____



CHAPTER

2

Support

Insights

Having suddenly and unexpectedly lost the husband who had been my first and true love for more than 30 years – since I was 15 – I needed support from others. I could not go on alone.

It had been three weeks since Paul's death and I was struggling with daily routines. I thought my existence without Paul was wrong – it was a betrayal.

However, as the days passed during that third week, I began to feel a numbness setting in. Feeling numb helped mask the painful sadness, anger, emptiness and loss I was experiencing. Grieving takes a tremendous toll physically and emotionally.

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Monday, February 18, 1991

2 weeks

Dear Paul,

Just two weeks today. I went to work at DuPont, thanks to Blair and Dennis, but it was so hard. Every time I looked at the clock I remembered what we were doing two weeks earlier. It was such a wonderful, loving, fun, sharing day; thanks for that.

I have told people you had the perfect scenario for death. But that only helped for the moment; now I want you here.

While I was driving home, I found myself at Ft. Niagara. I walked the lakeshore, but it was so cold and wet that I had to leave.

And, of course, when I came in the house you were not home – and not coming home. What an empty feeling. I couldn't stop crying.

I went to Mary Jean and Howard's so as not to be alone. But I still am alone although I'm with others. It is not the same.

Love, Me

Tuesday, February 19, 1991

3rd week

Dear Paul,

Can't get myself started. It takes forever to get dressed. But everyone is so wonderful: phone calls galore, empathy, and concern. We are all having a hard time believing you are gone.

I speak with the kids daily and some of our friends and, of course, Mom and your sister. I can't even open the cards that come. I find it too hard, so Dorothy and I do it together.

2 Support

Paul, you would be thrilled with the number of people who have written that they loved you and are hurting for you. Even our friends' kids are sending cards.

Could hardly get myself going today. I went to the Social Security office to apply for Survivor's Benefits, the grand, one-time lump sum of \$255.00. They told me to come back when I am 60. What a shame after all the years you invested in Social Security. I do have a good accounting of where we are financially, only I always expected we would be able to share the burden.

We always said you were worth more alive than dead, and it was so true. When you were by my side I could conquer the world. Now I have trouble moving.

I also went to the bank today. Since everything is in my name and yours, there is nothing for me to do now. I thought I would go to the bank alone, but I was so happy Rose went with me. Needed the support, as it was very difficult.

I understand now how people can stay in bed all day and not leave the house. Going out is so hard for me. People who knew you always say, "I'm sorry." It's so difficult to accept their condolences and keep going.

My mom needs you. I am getting so impatient and sharp with her. You were so good to her and so calm. I just can't give her the time and energy you devoted to her. Mom has been terrific and so brave through all of this. It is only eighteen months since Dad died, and you know how long he was ill before his death. I don't know how she keeps her composure when I break up. It's all too much for her. She is aging in front of my eyes.

I hope I don't turn into a bitter, caustic, nasty ... *widow*. Oh, how I hate that word.

During *Shiva*, it blew my mind to realize I was in the same situation as the other widows there. What has happened to me? How different my life is going to be.

People keep telling me I'm strong. What is "strong?" I have always done what I had to do, but this is impossible. I never dreamed of doing it without you to share with. I don't know how to play this one. There is no script!

Plans for the wedding move on. Nettie and Jed had their engagement pictures taken. We will be going to Washington to parties for them, and have set aside the July 4th weekend here for a shower and meeting each other's families. Only you won't be meeting anyone.

Paul, I miss you. You should hear what people are saying about you: nice guy, gentleman, always there, always interested, learned by listening. You always listened, and I always talked. You were right – I'm not a great listener, not compared to you.

You were the epitome of the poem that says a man does not take his riches with him, only his good name. What a wonderful legacy you have left for all of us.

Goodbye, my darling. I must go face another day and night without you.

Love, Me

Wednesday, February 20, 1991

3rd week

Dear Paul,

I happened to wash the white placemats with some bleach the other day, and they came out so great. I ran up the stairs to tell you about it, knowing you would have been surprised. I had forgotten I couldn't share these little things with you.

I was at the dentist today. Would you believe the hygienist gave me a new toothbrush and asked if I would like a black one? Then she looked at me sheepishly and said, "I guess that wouldn't be appropriate."

2 Support

"I guess not," I said. Then I thought, "It is bad enough I am a widow. Do I need to have a black toothbrush, too?"

Then I went shopping. I tried on a sweater and broke up when I realized you would not see it on me. I can't imagine buying something and not sharing it with you.

Since we're talking about sharing, I just remembered how we shared even when you were in the hospital all those years ago for open-heart surgery. At that time, I wanted to record all the funny incidents that happened in the middle of that horrible but funny year, and I can still remember some of the high spots.

Remember the time you started to fade on me at the house and your self-winding watch stopped because you were so inactive? It was both scary and funny.

And the sight of the EMTs taking you out to the ambulance was pure comedy. First, the gurney wheels didn't work, and you went bump, bump, bump, down the stairs.

When they opened the door to take you to the ambulance, I put the blanket over your face because it was -2° outside. Then we started to laugh, as we realized that the neighbors would think you had died. I'm glad we were able to laugh at such morbid thoughts because it kept us going.

Someone gave me a great suggestion: Don't look at the rest of my life as one very long period I will face without you. Just think about getting through the next day. Take one day at a time.

I think that's very helpful.

Love, Me

Thursday, February 21, 1991

3rd week

Dear Paul,

I slept last night but am still very lethargic when I get up and throughout the day. But at least I feel like I finally got some "real" sleep.

Gene checked in last night. He is being so helpful. He is praying every day – attending *minyons* and prayers. He's so disciplined, it is great. I hope it is comforting for him.

David had an interview with Purina yesterday. That's the one he had told us he was hoping for. His final comment on the phone was, "Well, I am interviewing with corporate America. Maybe I will get a job, maybe I won't."

I am going to pick up the engagement pictures for Nettie ... bittersweet.

Love, Me

Friday, February 22, 1991

3rd week

Dear Paul,

Somehow I got through the week. The days are so long!

Went to the psychologist today. I called her when I was falling apart earlier this week. My concerns centered on why didn't I baby you more, like some wives do? Why did we walk that last part up the incline? I know the doctor said not to think that's what did it, but how can I not think your death wouldn't have happened if we hadn't walked up that hill? Why did we walk that last part up the incline?

Why did I pressure you about finances? Why did I blow up and cry about the ruined sweater that morning? You know I always said I didn't cry over inanimate objects. How wrong I was. Now I would give anything to have just you and nothing else beside me. How foolish we can be!

2 Support

I was jealous of others who knew how to manage their finances better. It wasn't that we had spent – I always felt we did just what we wanted – but I felt we could have done it with more finesse – and now I have to figure it out by myself. My strong point was always having you near me.

You're the only thing in this house that really mattered to me and I didn't realize it fully. Now I would give anything to have just you and nothing else. I took you for granted.

It was good to tell the psychologist all the things I can't say to our friends because they give me the "proper" responses, which is what I would give them, too.

We talked about how much I loved you, how I always spoke of your great love for me, and how supportive you were. I miss your cute smile and soft sweet ways. You gave me wonderful memories, but I still want more. Who is going to hold me when I cry and understand me when I don't understand myself? Who is going to hug me in bed tonight? A friend who had never met you said she told people she had met a married woman "who had this wonderful love affair with her husband." She added that we had gotten it right on the first try.

When I was making the bed I thought of the comment the furniture-store delivery people made 32 years ago when they delivered it. I was so embarrassed when they said, "What a playground!" Well, I'm not 19 anymore and certainly don't embarrass as easily now. But they were right – it was a wonderful playground to share with you.

I will make a master list of all the things that should be done and then make a daily list based on it. Maybe that will help me overcome the lethargy. Although I know in my logical mind I am prepared to go on, I am better off than many other widows because I know how to take care of things like our finances and taxes, and I'll survive and won't have any financial worries. But I still feel so alone.

I am so happy we had that great party for your 60th birthday and my graduation. It was fun to celebrate our

milestones together. We foolishly didn't use all the dinner coupons we got for presents, but I thought you would always be here and going out fancy was not as important as being together. You always said I was a cheap date. I loved just going to McDonald's, as long as we did it together.

Remember the Valentine's Day when we had no money? We went to the drugstore and picked out the two cards we would have given each other (one funny, one mushy). We read each other's selection and then took the money they would have cost and went out to dinner at McDonald's. It was such fun!



Last night as I was getting ready for bed, I hugged your flannel nightshirt that still has your scent on it. I remembered how just before you died you came looking for me in the middle of the night. It made me remember all the other nights I couldn't sleep and you would come to see why I was awake. I never realized it until now, but if I was typing and busy you just left me alone. But anytime I was upset and wandering through the house, you sensed it and were there for me.

Remember the night I cried and cried that I didn't know where I was going but needed to keep trying? And you held me tight in the hallway and said you didn't know either, but that I should go for it – and you would be there.

Paul, I still don't know where I am going and now it will be so much harder without your support.

Love, Me

Saturday, February 23, 1991
3rd week

Dear Paul,

As if I had to remind you, today is my 52nd birthday. Has it been only 19 days since you died? I wish I were dead.

2 Support

The hardest things for me still are getting myself going and making/faking lightness in my voice. But what else can I do when I speak to the world? I need people, and they won't want to be around me if I am morbid.

For brief periods I am okay, which feels like such a betrayal of you. I guess I don't so much wish I were dead, as I wish you were here. Remember that old song by Eddy Fisher with the lyrics, "The stars are not as bright this year, wish you were here." I know I'll go on and there will be good times and I can laugh and I will get this profession going. But there is such emptiness inside me now.

I got through the day. G-d bless Jerre Ann; she had a birthday party for me. It was lovely. I spoke with everyone today wishing me Happy B-Day. Big flower arrangement from Saar and Toni, lovely fresh-cut flowers from David.

Nettie said both boys checked in on her today – nice.

I stopped by to hear Mary Jean and her brother practicing music for Nettie's wedding. Someone said that if you were there you would have been saying, "Mary Jean, play 'Try to Remember,'" your very favorite tune (from *The Fantasticks*). But she wouldn't play it today because she knew it would have broken us all up.

Good night, my love. I feel a little more peaceful tonight than this morning.

Love, Me

Sunday, February 24, 1991

Almost 4 weeks

Dear Paul,

Somehow I got through the day better today. Got out of bed quickly and started doing things. Watered plants, dusted, cleaned freezer (all the little "widow" packages of left-over food from *Shiva*) and had birthday breakfast here with Ellen and Gene.

I felt like a numbness has set in, and I was doing okay.

Gene stayed over, which was good because if he is here I will make myself retain my composure. He is teaching me how to send computer email. It was so upsetting for him when we came across a message he had sent you. It was one of the last things you did together. He is staying home more, which is a comfort for me, although there are times when I need to be alone, to cry and scream.

Love, Me



TOOLS

Reflections

- *2/19/91 People keep telling me I'm strong. What does being "strong" mean?*
- *2/19/91... I don't know how to play this one. There is no script!*
- *2/22/91 I never dreamed of managing life without you; I always thought, and you told me, you'd be here.*
- *2/23/91 ...my 52nd birthday. I wish I were dead.*
- *2/23/91 For brief periods I am okay, which feels like such a betrayal of you.*
- *2/24/91 I felt a numbness set in ... although there are times I need to be alone to cry and scream.*

Ideas for the Reader

Networking: There is no script for this. NO time tables, no right or wrong. You need to do what is right for you ... think about what *you* need and how *you* need to do it.

Use your network of friends, co-workers and family. When people ask, "What can I do?" don't be afraid to let

them know: lunch, dinner, movie, a phone call. Think about it – what do you need?

Listen to others, but make you own decisions. And one important decision is not to make any big decisions (like selling the house) for a year.

Lists: I made lists and lists and lists. I still do!

Phone call lists; to do lists; shopping lists; gifts lists; “things to get around to” lists.

Lists are liberating – once I make the list, I don’t have to remember it all.

To Do:

Networking: In your journal, write all the names of your friends and co-workers who have called you. Think about how they can help you, and call and tell them. You’ll find that people are sincere in wanting to do something for you, and they will come through.

<i>Friend</i>	<i>What they can do/ how they can help</i>
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____

3. _____

4. _____

Lists: Make lists for yourself of anything you want to list. Get it off your mind by getting it on paper.

Write your list of things to remember

Write your list of things to do

Write a list of the things you are thinking about



CHAPTER

3

Magic

Questions

Insights

The numbness was wearing off, and reality was starting to kick in. I managed to step back and take stock of my situation both personally and professionally. Paul had been supportive and encouraged me to be self-confident, but he had been the “decision-maker” and the one “in-charge.” Now that he was gone and – although I was having trouble doing anything ... anything at all – I realized *I* was now “in-charge” of my life, and Paul was never, ever, coming back.

The first thing I needed to do was find out who I was, and I couldn’t do that alone. I turned to close friends and family to see myself reflected in their eyes. Amazingly, I began to realize that others had faith in me – they saw strengths in me that I had not yet discovered or acknowledged. I didn’t feel strong, but I learned that I was ... and knowing that others thought I was strong gave me strength!

When I led seminars or did a personality assessment with an individual, I listened to the questions I asked them and answered these questions for myself. Soon my self-awareness began to grow, as I saw myself through a new pair of eyes: the eyes of a single, reluctantly self-reliant *me*.

I started finding answers in my own life by using the problem-solving tools from the Creativity training I gave others.