

Ep #48: Widows Like US: An Interview with Melissa Sogavo



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Krista St-Germain

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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 48, Widows Like Us: An interview with Melissa Sogavo.

Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, the only podcast that offers a proven process to help you work through your grief to grow, evolve, and create a future you can actually look forward to. Here's your host, certified life coach, grief expert, widow, and mom, Krista St-Germain.

Alright. Welcome to episode 48. So, this episode is something I'm really excited about bringing for you. So, it's part of a series called Widows Like Us. I won't be doing this series one after another. I'm just going to kind of intersperse them into the regular podcast lineup.

But one thing I know about the widowed experience is that so often, we feel alone. We feel misunderstood. We have very few people in our regular everyday experience who actually understand what it's like to have our life experience, what it's like to walk in our shoes.

And so, Melissa is someone I'm excited to introduce you to. She is a former client of mine and she actually reached out to me. And I'm so glad she did because, honestly, it's been something I've been thinking about doing; bringing you stories of real widows. And I'm so glad that she reached out to me and initiated that because I just love Melissa. You're going to love Melisa.

She's very authentic and honest and I just think you're going to enjoy hearing her story. And I want you to hear stories of hope. I want you to hear what it's like for other widows, what they've gone through, and I want you to draw hope from that and inspiration from that and use it as something that lifts you up when you need it.

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So, I really hope you enjoy this interview with Melissa. More to com like this. As always, let me know if you like the podcast episodes. Ratings and reviews are so, so helpful. I also love to get emails from people. Tell me what you like. Tell me what you could use more of and I hope you enjoy this episode and that you love Melissa as much as I do. So, with that, we'll get going.

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Krista: Alright, everybody. Welcome to the podcast. I'm so excited because today on the podcast, I have friend and former client Melissa Sogavo. So, welcome, Melissa.

Melissa: Hi. Thank you for having me. This is really fun.

Krista: Yeah, it's kind of like full-circle, right?

Melissa: Right, yes, absolutely.

Krista: So, Melissa reached out to me, I don't know, about a week ago on Facebook and said, "Hey, what if I came on the podcast and talked about what life is like as a widow and what it was like to coach with you and where I was and where I am and all that stuff?" So, here we are.

So, I think it would be great and I think people would like to know just a little bit about you. Tell us about your life. Tell us about your husband. How did you become a widow? What's your journey?

Melissa: Yeah, so my story is, I was married to Bizo. Kind of like bozo but with an "I". I was married to Bizo for 12 years and we met in college. We were college sweethearts. We have four children together, four boys, and he is a native of Papua New Guinea, which is on the other side of the

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world. And we were living there together raising our family and working. And I was teaching art at a school and he was starting a business.

And in 2017, which is – I've been a widow for two years and four months. So, in 2017, it was December 7th. My husband was playing soccer. He was an athlete, a rugby player and a soccer player. And he collapsed playing soccer. And they did everything they could and his heart could not be revived. He had a heart arrhythmia, and we knew that, but it had never been an issue. And then all of a sudden, he was gone.

Krista: And your boys were how old at that point?

Melissa: They were 10, eight, five, and just barely two.

Krista: And you lived on the other side of the globe.

Melissa: Yeah, on the other side of the globe, that's right. Yeah, New Guinea is a pretty old, old – I don't know how to describe it – stone-age culture. I mean, if you've seen National Geographic with headdresses, that's New Guinea. So, it's kind of a wild place and it was kind of a wild adventurous life. And so, when he died, that was like, you know, here I am alone in this country that isn't mine. I had friends and family close by, but not my family, his family. And yeah, I mean, it just changed everything, obviously.

Krista: Yeah, and so I think women who listen to this podcast, they're in all sorts of stages. Some of them find it right after their husband died. Some of them, it's been up to years. But I think it would be good for people who maybe have had a more recent loss to hear what it was like for you in those early days. What was acute grief like for you?

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Melissa: You know, it's not hard to go back to that, even though it's been two years. Initially, I had to tell my babies that their daddy was gone. I'll never forget that moment of sitting on the floor and just being at the bottom of myself, you know, how am I going to say these words out loud to these little babies? Daddy's gone. That really early, that first night, I didn't sleep for a second, you know.

I just remember sitting in a chair just staring and just, you know, it's total shock, total disbelief, cannot believe this is happening. And it's so tricky, I think, as a momma to figure out how to try and be present in those moments for your own kids. You're not even thinking straight. I mean, I look back on that time and everything I've read was telling me that I was in a fog, but I don't think I knew that. And now I look back and I go, "Oh wow, was I in a fog," you know.

It's like a total disconnection from reality. Some of the specific things that I remember, Krista, are things like every time I would take a shower, I would end up curled up on the bottom of the tub crying. And I would just lay in the shower, and I would just cry. That felt like the only place where I could really let out some of that guttural weeping.

Krista: No one's watching...

Melissa: No one's watching. I didn't want to eat, initially couldn't eat. You know, sleeping was hard. People around me would say, "Just lay down. Just try and rest." And that was hard. And if I did fall asleep, it was always this moment of panic, waking up to the realization, you know, this is real, you know, he's really dead, he's not alive anymore.

I also just I would say, I just felt this constant anxiety. I remember moving a lot. I remember kind of wringing my hands and just kind of always fidgeting. And it was this constant feeling of, "I don't know what to do. I just don't

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know what to do. I don't know what to do with myself. I don't know how to be. I don't know what to say. I don't know where to go." Like a desperation really.

I started running. I had been a runner earlier in my life and I hadn't run for a long time. And that whole anxious piece, I just couldn't settle. I couldn't sit still. So, I finally decided to just put my running shoes on and that first time that I went running, I just kept running. I ran and ran and ran and ran. And it felt really good. And I would say that's probably one of the first memories of something that actually felt good in my grief, you know. You know, because it was exercise and it was, whatever, getting those endorphins going.

So, it wasn't that I was like, "I think I'll go for a run today. It was like, "I don't know what the hell to do with myself, so I'm going to go for a run and put some music on." And I would just cry. I would just cry and run, you know, and pray and scream. There's so much I could say, so many stories.

Krista: I want to know more, when you said – you just used this phrase which is so beautiful. And it's one of the things I love about you, that I think you can express yourself so precisely, especially when it comes to emotion. And you said, when you went to tell your boys you were at the bottom of myself, "I'm at the bottom of myself." I wonder, was that the bottom for you? Was there a bottom for you?

Melissa: I think that was just the beginning of the bottom. I really do. Because I think that was the shock initially. And here, it's happened, I see that my husband is no longer warm. Like, I see him in his state of not being alive. But I think the bottom comes later. At least it did for me.

I think the bottom comes when some of that shock has worn off, some of the meals stop coming. And people are still loving and kind and everyone

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wants to help and do something for you, but there's only so much people can do. They can't grieve for you, you know.

So, I think the bottom came later. So, we had to move back from overseas, back home. I moved in with my parents and I'm so glad I did. They've been a huge support for me. But I think my bottom was in that maybe nine months or a year, hitting that time and kind of going, "What now? What the heck? Who the heck am I? Where am I going? What am I doing?"

Because you're kind of – I mean, depending on who surrounds you and what your support is like, for me, I had a lot of support. I had tons of support, in New Guinea and here at home in the states. And I think when some of that sort of died down, that was the time then to kind of start, I don't know, maybe some more of the real grief. Because then you're more alone. And I think that's when you came into the picture for me.

Krista: Yeah, I think so much of what you articulated is what I hear all the time, right? Which is just that, number one, I think we have such an amazing survival mechanism, that the way most of us experience grief, it really does come in kind of stages of realism, where there's that initial shock that, I think if we were to be hit with the full depth of the reality of what had happened, it would so overwhelm us that we couldn't handle it. So, it's almost kind of a relief that we knew intellectually that it's happened, but the realization sometimes doesn't truly sink in until so much later.

And I don't think that's always universal. I think everyone has a unique experience. But I'm not surprised to hear you say that the bottom came so much later, after the food went away and when really you look around and go, "Oh, this is real." So, at what point did you reach out to me and what made you do that?

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Melissa: Yeah, so we moved back home. So, Bizo died in December. We moved back home in June and I started a new teaching job that fall. And I think, I remember sitting in our classroom having our first coaching call, just to find out is this going to work. And actually, before that, I would say I spent a lot of time in bed in my grief. And maybe a lot of people resonate with that, you know, the oversleeping, the, “I just want this all to go away and so I’m just going to go back to sleep because I can’t handle it.”

And so, I had come across your information online and I just thought, “I don’t know if I’m going to get through this. I just don’t know if I can survive this. And I’ve got to have someone help me.”

And I was doing counselling with a great therapist and she was super-helpful. But I also felt like there was something missing. I felt like there was a piece missing to that. And so, I reached out and I thought, “Well, I’ll just see.” And I remember talking to you. And I just remember thinking, when we hung up the phone, “Oh my gosh, I’m going to make it, Krista.”

And not that you’re a savior or a magician or any of those things. But I just knew that you had tools that I didn’t have yet. And I just knew that that was the thing that was going to get me through. And it was going to teach me to move through the grief, and that’s what I needed.

One of the things that I was thinking about when I was thinking about doing this call was just the whole phrase, you know, you can give a man a fish and he eats for a day, you can teach him how to fish and he eats for life. And I really think that that’s true about you. And not just you personally, but being coached through this kind of season, this kind of loss of a spouse when you’re a momma.

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I think you gave me skills that I didn't have that carried me through that grief, but then is carrying me through other new seasons of life too, you know.

Krista: I probably won't get through this episode without crying, but that's exactly what I want. Because I can't be there. And you don't want me there for the whole rest of your life, right? But there are skills that we can all learn that allow us to support ourselves through whatever challenges we have, that allow us to see where we're being held back and how to unblock ourselves and move forward and really figure out whatever the next challenge will be, because it will be. You've got four little boys.

You're going to have lots of challenges in life. And how do you set yourself up with the self-confidence and the self-belief and the tools that you need to navigate whatever it is that you can't even anticipate, like plot twists. Hello, COVID-19, right?

Melissa: I couldn't think of a crazier plot twist than COVID-19. Oh my word, seriously. I actually just listened to – I fell asleep last night listening to your most recent podcast about, what's the word I'm looking for?

Krista: About numbing?

Melissa: Yes, numbing, thank you. And because I've reached this point in the stay-at-home quarantine situation where I was like, what is happening to me? What is going on? I need a reset. I need something. Something needs to happen here.

And I listened to it last night and I just thought, "Oh my goodness. There's Krista again, saving the day." Everything changed last night again. And because the reality is that even the things we learn, even the things that I gained from you through coaching, I still need reminders of those things.

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Coaching is still useful to me and I think it will continue to be for forever because it's that growth mindset and it's learning and it's always trying to overcome the primitive brain, right?

Krista: Which we forget we have, right? That's why I will always have a coach. So, I totally relate to that. What was it that you learned about yourself or maybe that changed about you during the process? And I'd love to know, what about it maybe surprised you?

Melissa: Oh, you're so great. It's so good to talk to you. I love it. Well, here's what I remember. So, I would do my calls with you in the car in between teaching classes, because that was the time I had. And so, I just remember sitting in my car weeping my eyes out with you, a lot of the time crying my eyes out before I called you, and then trying to pull it together to call you crying through it. And then hanging up the phone and going, "Okay, I guess I can make it through this another day. I can do this another day."

I think one of the biggest takeaways for me was around shame. I was really wrestling, and continue to wrestle with numbing out. I do. As much as I'd like to say that I'm present and emotionally present and all those things, I've struggled because the pain is so deep. You know. It's so strong. It hurts so much to have the person that you loved, that was your person, that knew you like nobody else knows you gone and not here anymore. It sucks.

And to have that, you know, you feel robbed. There's just so many things, right? And I think I was heaping shame on myself for the way that I was responding to that. Either I was grieving too much or I was numbing out...

Krista: And those were your thoughts about how you were handling it, that you were grieving too much?

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Melissa: Yeah, or just interactions with other people that made me feel like I should be getting along. And you know, what you say and what all the experts say is that there's no timeline, your grief is your grief, you do it in your own time. I guess what I'm saying I learned with you is that shame was keeping me a prisoner and was the difference between the suffering, like grieving well and saying, "It's okay to grieve," and then suffering in it and really just making that distinction.

And I would say the other thing that I learned from you was to really listen to my thoughts, to really pay attention to my thoughts because they're the catalyst to the emotions and to everything else. And I wasn't doing that before I was coached by you. And it's made a world of difference because there are some days where I listen to my thoughts and I go, "Oh my goodness, I can't believe all the things that I'm thinking that are negative, that are in turn making me feel negative things, and then the negative actions and responses that come out of that." So, by being able to learn how to listen to my thoughts and really kind of take that captive, I've really been able to work on changing some of those negative patterns and yeah...

Krista: And first, it comes with – I think this is probably why you had the experience that you had – so many women are judging themselves for how they're handling their grief and they're experiencing that same shame that you were talking about. And that is just such a roadblock. There's no way to change any of our thought patterns when we're judging them.

Melissa: Yes, and it just makes it worse. It's that downward spiral, when the shame come in when you're saying, "I'm an idiot," you know, and saying all the things that, just, none of it's helpful. It doesn't make a path to get through the grief.

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I guess that's what surprised me is, I would say, my bottom were different times along the way, kind of going, "If I didn't have my kids, I would have nothing to live for. I don't want to do this anymore," you know. I wouldn't say that I was suicidal, but I would say those ideas were swirling around in my head because the pain was so great.

And I think I was surprised that that didn't have to be the truth. I was surprised that, with what I learned from you and the tools that I gained by being coached, that I really was capable on my own without you, you know, of moving through this and getting to the other side. And I still struggle.

I just had a dream about Bizo the night before last and it kicked my butt. Like, I woke up and I was in total shock again. And it felt like that first morning after Bizo had died. And I just was a mess. I was a total mess. This was 48 hours ago, just weeping on my mom's shoulder.

And I went upstairs to my room and I laid on my bed and I cried some more. And then I kind of went, "Okay, what's the process here? What's the next step? And it was, you know, A, recognizing that I'm not an idiot because I'm still crying about my husband two years later. It's perfectly fine. It was sitting in the emotions, which is another thing you taught me, you know, the primitive brain – you tell us the primitive brain keeps you wanting to avoid pain. And the opposite of that is running into it and saying, "Wait a second. This pain, it hurts. It doesn't feel good. It's not fun. But if I allow it to just kind of run its course and sit with it for a little while, eventually it dissipates. It goes away."

And there's new moments and new thoughts and new ideas and new movement and, you know, I guess I would say where I am now is so different from two years ago and a year ago because now I'm able to just allow those tsunami moments to hit and kind of go, "Okay, here we go. It's

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washing over me.” And again, it does not feel good. Nobody’s saying this is a party or this is fun, you know. But kind of allowing it, allowing that grief...

Krista: Yeah, dropping the judgment of it, dropping the resistance of it. Letting it run through you.

Melissa: Yes, it makes me think about labor actually. I just thought of this. You know that whole idea, when you’re in labor and they say, if you resist the contraction and resist the pain, it’s that much more painful. But if you’re able to try and say, “Okay, I’m going to anticipate this pain. It’s coming. I’m going to let it.” Then when you have less resistance, you’re so much more able to breathe through it and journey through that awfulness. It’s the same thing.

Krista: 100%. And we don’t go into labor thinking it’s not going to hurt. And we don’t judge ourselves when it does hurt. We don’t make it mean we’ve done something wrong because it hurts, because it still hurts.

Melissa: Yes, that’s so true.

Krista: Yeah, why don’t we have our backs in grief like we have our back in labor?

Melissa: Yes, there’s not a setup in culture, I think, to embrace grief. And I think part of your work is sort of fighting against that and allowing people to say, “Wait a second, this is a natural part of life. People die. They die all the time. And why can’t we develop a system where we love each other in this?”

Krista: Absolutely, instead of trying to fake it until we make it and make everyone think we’re okay and be strong and, you know, pull ourselves up

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by our bootstraps and all that stuff that I think is just so – not only is it not useful; it can be really harmful.

Melissa: Yes, I totally agree.

Krista: I remember a moment, I wish I had written down exactly what you said. But I remember a moment in one of your coaching sessions where you were talking about your grief and you basically expressed the idea that you wanted to, like, love your grief. Do you remember that? It's probably one of the Melissa gems that...

Melissa: I do, yeah. I mean, yeah I remember just talking about, well, just the idea that – I mean, it kind of goes along with that. The longer you resist it, it's going to be there, like, the grief – nobody gets to surpass grief. You know what I mean? Nobody gets to say, "No thanks..."

Krista: Right, "I'm just going to pass."

Melissa: Yeah, like, nobody gets to do that. But we can resist it and we can numb out and we can ignore it and pretend and all those things. But the reality is that it's always going to be there. And when you, in a moment of not being on guard, there it is again. And so, why not kind of go – I think we said, what does it look like to allow grief to become your friend? You know, actually envisioning opening the door for grief and allowing grief to walk into your home and to be next to you and have coffee with you. It sounds really weird, what would that look like, to really embrace it and love it so that it can kind of run its course in a healthy way? I don't know.

Krista: It's going to be there. To your point, you can't get away from it. you can't just take a pass. It is going to be part of your life. So, if it's going to be part of your reality, then we do ourselves such a favor when we decide that it's okay that it's there and actually move towards it, make friends with it,

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kind of learn, in a counter-intuitive way, like, choose to love that part of our life experience. Because it's no less valid. It's no less useful than any other part of our life experience, even though we didn't ask for it.

Melissa: Yes, absolutely. And there are things along the way, I think, that if we allow ourselves to feel the grief and to process through it and all the things, there are things along the way that kind of lodge themselves in our hearts and in our minds that are good that come out of that, little nuggets of truth and being gracious with other people and patient with their pain and, you know, I think there's – I'm not saying again, I'm not saying that it's a party or that I'm so happy or thankful that my husband died. Nope, zero, that's not what I'm saying.

I'm just saying, it happened and here I am, here we are. So, I can either lay down and just let it ruin me, or I can say, "Okay, well here you are. You've come to the table of grief, so let's talk. Let's have it out. I don't know, let's engage. Let's learn.

Krista: Yeah, you get to choose – this is what I think. When it clicks for people, it's such a great realization that we cannot control the past, we cannot control other people. We cannot control death. There's so many things we can't control. But there is never a moment in time where we aren't able to choose who we want to be in the situation we're in. We never have to give that up. It's always within our ability.

Melissa: Yes, absolutely. I think too, another big moment for me in coaching with you was that I felt really stuck in the job that I was in. I was teaching and I had been teaching for the last several years prior, and I enjoyed it. But after Bizo died and then teaching at this new school and we had moved back to the states, I just felt super stuck. I just felt like, I do not want to do this anymore.

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This is who I was, but I don't know if this is who I want to be moving forward. Everything has changed. I'm a widow. I'm a single mom now. And I really wrestled with a lot of those feelings of – I think I felt like I had to stay in that job and I felt like I had to stay doing that role. And you really helped me see that I was not stuck, that if I didn't want to be stuck then I had every opportunity to get unstuck. And it wasn't without difficulty and challenge and hard work to move forward, but I'm unstuck now. I'm not teaching anymore.

Krista: How did you do that? How did you unstick yourself?

Melissa: Well, again, it was literally through coaching. I will never forget that conversation. I was sitting in the parking lot of Target doing our coaching call. And I think you said something to me like, "Well what are you afraid of by quitting this job and not doing this job anymore and doing something else?"

And I had a list of fears; what people are going to think of me, what if I can't do it, you know, what if I don't get into graduate school? What if I don't have enough money, you know, am I allowed to do that? All these negative things. And I think you just helped me see that those were all choices. Those thoughts for me were all just thoughts producing emotions of fear.

But you turned it on its head and just said, what if you thought about it differently? What if you thought, "I'm going to be a great grief counsellor and I'm going to do an amazing job in grad school and I can support my children by making this leap." You just sort of flipped it around. And I kind of went, "Okay..."

It was like I couldn't even see it differently. And I think that's part of the fog of grief too is kind of just, I think we need people. I think we need support, but I think your coaching just helped me see it differently, you know, and

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say, “Wait a minute. Am I stuck? Do I have to be a teacher for the rest of my life? Why can’t I do something else? Why can’t I figure it out? Why can’t I go get a different job or go back to school or get training or whatever it is that I want to do?”

And you helped me, I think, push past – push past is the wrong word. You helped me kind of change that narrative in my brain that was saying all the different things that were keeping me afraid, particularly what other people would think of me, you know. I think I personally, as a widow, and I think this is common, is that we just feel judged. We’re damned if we do, damned if we don’t, you know.

She’s dating too soon. Why isn’t she getting remarried? She’s not taking care of the children, just all that kind of stuff. Why is she doing this? I don’t know. That moment was a transformative moment for me, of kind of entertaining the idea of thinking differently about my fear around making a different choice than I had made previously.

Krista: And I think that’s what it takes sometimes. It’s never because we’re choosing to see our future in a negative light on purpose. It’s because we just get stuck in these patterns and we have brains that function, as brains are designed to do. And they’re constantly looking for evidence of what we believe. And so, we find ourselves in these places where we literally can’t see out of our own thoughts because we don’t even know that the options are there. And sometimes, somebody just needs to come along and wiggle the possibilities around and be like, “Wait a minute, I could choose to see it that way. That’s available to me? I had no idea.”

Melissa: Yes, absolutely.

Krista: And then combine that with can you decide that fear is a part of your human experience and it’s not a problem and you can say yes to it. it

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doesn't have to be the barrier that keeps you safe in the cave, trapped in the cave really. And you use it as the path toward the new reality that you want to create. Because it's never not going to be part of the experience if growth is involved.

Melissa: It's still with you...

Krista: Anytime we're growing, we're going to have fear. It's just the way we're wired. So, when we figure out, this is the way of it and we decide to move toward it...

Melissa: Yes, it has to stay with us, just like grief. You know, it's not like I pushed past you and now you're over there and I'm moving forward. We have to anticipate it and expect it and go, if this is going to come up again, I'm going to be afraid again of these choices that I'm making. So, what does it look like to say, "Hello there, old friend, fear and grief."

Krista: However far into the future, right, when you find yourself and it's there again and you're not surprised anymore and you don't make it mean anything about you and you don't let it hold you back. It's just like, oh yeah, this is the part where I'm going to grow, and so I'm feeling fear. This is the part where some old grief stuff is coming up for me and it's okay. I don't have to let it hold me back.

I wonder, what is it that – like, if you could go back and you could give yourself some advice, or you could give some wisdom to another widow who is having a similar life experience to you, what would you tell yourself?

Melissa: Gosh, Krista, I feel like I could say so many things. I think one of the things I would say is let people be around you in your grief. I had really great support. I'd say those first six months or so I had good friends in my

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home every day, crying with me, listening to me, talking to me, asking questions, letting me sit in my grief, letting me be quiet.

But I had people that I really trusted and really loved with me. And that was a big deal. And then I would say that when we moved back to the states, so around six months, that changed. My community changed. And that, I think, is when things got exponentially harder. And while I had you and that was sort of a saving grace for me to get me through, I don't think I had good enough community.

I wasn't necessarily surrounding myself with enough community where – and I don't know what that looks like, Krista. I don't know what the answer is to that per se. I mean, I was going to a grief group, but even in the grief group, I didn't feel super-safe. So, what I'm getting at is I would just say that I feel like I kind of fell apart a little bit around that six-month mark.

And I think only in the last six months or so have I really found the footing to consistently not be numbing out. And I would say I jumped into new relationships too soon. I was numbing out with food, a little bit with alcohol probably. And this is me just being really vulnerable and saying, like, I don't think we talk about those things enough. So, I was so thankful for that podcast and I'm excited for part two. I would say, get coached by Krista. That's what I would say.

Krista: I should pay you...

Melissa: She's not paying me, people. I'm just saying it because I want to, because I want to help people too. And the thing is, when you've lived through it, you're like, this is horrible. And you just know that people need help through it, you know. So, I'd say get coached.

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I would say, you need to admit to one or two safe people around you how horrible it really is. Because I think we put on a happy face because we sort of feel like we have to, even if we're trying really hard to be aware of the grief and let ourselves grieve, I still think there is this push to still be okay in the grief. And you're not okay. People are not okay when they are grieving the loss of their spouse.

Krista: And it's okay, as Megan Devine says, it's the title of her book, It's Okay that You're Not Okay, but same thing. There's no shame in admitting that it's not okay.

Melissa: Exactly. Yes, and if you're pretending like it's okay but it's really not, you're just creating more grief for yourself really. I wanted to mention, probably, I've read a bunch of books along the way and my favorite book was buy a guy named Jerry Sittser. And it's called A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows Through Loss.

Krista: What did you love about it?

Melissa: Oh man, well, he singlehandedly lost his daughter, his wife, and his mother in a car accident that he was there with his other children. And I think I just, I kind of went, "Okay, if he lost those three people, those three women in his life at the same time, I will read whatever he says and live to tell others about it."

And I felt like he wrestled really well with the anger, in a way that maybe I hadn't read in some of the other grief books I had read. I feel like a lot of the grief books that I was exposed to, I don't know, it just felt to me like we know it's awful, but there's hope. We know it's terrible, but the sun will shine again. Shut up. Don't tell me about your silver lining. No, let's talk about how awful this is before we talk about silver linings. You know...

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Krista: Yeah, because otherwise it's like putting lipstick on a pig.

Melissa: Yes, it's so stupid. It doesn't make any sense. So, yeah, I just felt like his voice was just – I really resonated with his voice. I mean, it just was really true to how deep and catastrophic it was to lose those people. And I resonated.

Krista: Thank you, I appreciate that. I'll check it out. So, what's next for you? I'd love to know. And we'll wrap up soon because this might be the longest – and I'm so happy that my podcast has gone this long because I really want people to learn from you. But thinking about where you were with your vision for the future, like when you came to me, versus what's happening now for your vision of the future.

Melissa: Well, you know, you said, when we first talked, you said something like, "Give me a couple of goals that you have or things that you want to accomplish." One of those was to run a marathon. And I have run two now. And I am running the New York City Marathon in November, if it happens. Oh gosh...

Krista: It might be in your neighborhood...

Melissa: It might be in my neighborhood, people. A virtual marathon. So that was a huge accomplishment. I had always wanted to do it and I really thought, I don't know if I can. And again, that was part of changing my brain too and going, "Yes I can." There's absolutely nothing standing in my way. Yes I can, yes I can, yes I can. And I did it and I'm still doing it and it's wonderful.

The other thing was that I had said, you know, when I first started coaching, I was teaching and I was like, this is not what I want, I want to go to grad

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school. Anyway, I was just accepted to Adler University for their art therapy program. And I'm really excited about it.

That's another thing. My therapist that I worked with did some art therapy with me and that was really instrumental in my grief processing as well. And so that's kind of one of the things that I'd like to do is I want to help widows through art therapy.

Krista: How do you feel, like, when you think about your future right now? Because I think sometimes, the reason I ask this question is I think we get ourselves all wrapped up thinking there is some innate purpose we have to discover, we're supposed to have this long-term amazing vision for our lives, if we don't we're doing it wrong. So I'm wondering, what are your thoughts on your vision for your future and how are you navigating that and kind of letting it unfold?

Melissa: Yeah, I would say that one of the things that I'm trying to think about on a daily basis is what do I really want life to look like today and tomorrow and in a week and a year. And obviously, like you said, we have these tangible goals and these specific things. I'm going to go to grad school and I'm raising my kids. But I'm trying to also separate myself from those specific goals and just say, "What does a good day look like?" You know.

So, a good day to me is have I engaged with my kids in some capacity? Have I loved myself today, as opposed to, in contrast, have I lived in the should storm and in shame and all of that stuff? No, no, no, have I loved myself through whatever day it was? Whether I was thick in my grief or whether I was bouncing and running marathons, whatever day it was, have I loved myself?

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And then I would say, maybe, have I loved the world? Like, what have I done for someone else, for the world today? Small things, big things, or what tiny step am I taking towards helping others, you know? Does this answer your question?

Krista: It does. And what I think is so useful is that pretty much everything you said, it's so much more present-focused. It's less about grandiose creations. And not that there's anything wrong with that. I think everything you said, it's very values-focused and it's very near-term, like present. And I just think it's such a useful way to navigate what comes ahead. Because as we clearly know, number one, plot twists come out of nowhere. We think we know what's happening in the future, but let's be honest, we've no clue. You husband is playing a sport and one day he's here and one day he's not.

All of a sudden, our country is on stay-at-home orders and lockdown from a pandemic. So really, just redefining from a values place, what do I want to experience and how do I check in with myself regularly and make sure that that's what I'm creating for myself, and not get locked in...

Melissa: Yes, because sometimes, we get locked into, okay, this is the thing I'm going to do and it's going to be so great. Oh, what if it's not great? What if it falls apart? What if you lose your funding or your house burns down or you lose someone else in your life besides your spouse? All those things are possible. All the possibilities.

And so, what does it look like to go, "Here's what I have right now in this moment, in this day? These are kind of my loose tentative plans for right now, the next 24 hours. Who am I going to be?"

Krista: So good. Listen, it's been such a joy to watch you. And not because I have an agenda for you or think that I know how your life should go. But

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it's been such a joy to watch you just figure it out for yourself and apply what you've learned and be so honest about it and I am so blessed to have clients like you and do this work and the ripple effect of what you're going to create in the world is amazing.

Melissa: Thank you. You know what? Just one more thing that was so helpful, I'm remembering, when we had that first talk, you said, "I'm not your friend. I'm your coach." And then in a later conversation, you said – I was saying something like, "Oh my gosh, you're so amazing, thank you so much." And I was like heaping praise on you for how amazing you were, and you're like, "Yeah, that's great, thank you." But you're like, "You don't need me and, frankly, you can't have me all the time every day. You can't just have Krista in your pocket, in your living room."

And so, the idea was to really try and fly on my own based on the things that I was learning from you. And I think that was so helpful for you to say that from the very beginning, "I'm not your friend and I'm not going to be here for forever. So, I'm here to teach you some things so that you can kind of fly on your own."

Not to say that we don't still need coaching and help and therapy and all those things. But I don't know, I just think that set the stage for me having to take responsibility for what I was going to learn, as opposed to just help me, fix me, you know.

Krista: Yeah, because the truth of it is that, you know, I've coached a lot of women and every one of them has a different experience because every one of them creates a different experience, and to the extent that they own their role in it. That's when they really step into a place of power and change.

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And they might want to give me credit. And my ego might want to take it, but it's never me. It's never me because I give the same tools to everyone. But you're a prime example of what happens when you use the tools and you embrace it and you really own your own life and your own future. Bravo.

Melissa: Thank you Right back at you.

Krista: So amazing. So, hey, if anybody wants to reach out to you, if they're curious about connecting with you, are you open to that?

Melissa: Yeah, absolutely. No, I would love that. Yes, I'll give you my email and people can follow me on Instagram too if they want to.

Krista: Yeah, how would they find you on Instagram?

Melissa: Okay, Instagram is @bilasdesign.

Krista: Is that the best way?

Melissa: Yeah, it's probably the easiest I feel like.

Krista: We'll do that. I just think it's good for people to be able to connect to other women who have shared the same life experience, or similar life experience.

Melissa: Yes, yes I do too. I think it's important. Thank you so much, Krista.

Krista: Thank you, my friend. And I'm calling you friend now...

Melissa: Yay, we're friends now.

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Krista: Just not while I'm your coach. Keep in touch. I love you.

Melissa: Okay sounds good. Love you too. Bye.

Ready to start building a future you can actually look forward to? Get a free copy of Krista's Love Your Life Again Game Plan, and learn her three-step process so you can stop feeling stuck and start creating your next great chapter. No matter what you've been through, your past does not have to define what's possible in your future.

Text the word PLAN to 1-858-widows-1, or visit coachingwithkrista.com/plan and get Krista's Love Your Life Again Game Plan delivered straight to your inbox. A future you love is still possible and you are worth it. Text the word PLAN to 1-858-widows-1, or visit coachingwithkrista.com/plan and get your free game plan today.