

Ep #66: Widows Like Us: Surviving the First Year with Jamie Galyon



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Krista St-Germain

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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 66, Widows Like Us: Surviving the First Year with Jamie Galyon.

Welcome to the *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 truly look forward to. Here's your host, Master Certified Life Coach, grief expert, widow, and mom, Krista St-Germain.

Hey, everybody. Welcome back to another episode of the podcast. Coming up on late August. Holy cow. I don't really know where the summer went, but it seemed to go by very fast in a very strange way.

If you follow me or get my emails – which if you aren't getting my emails, you're welcome to go to coachingwithkrista.com and opt in and you can start getting my insider emails. But if you're following my emails, you know that I did kind of a crazy thing and I bought a Peloton.

I've never been a cyclist, never taken a spin class, but I've been watching some friends and a client really just love the Peloton experience. And so, I just decided to take the plunge and do it because COVID doesn't seem to be going away and I'm not going back to the gym just yet and I need something to do, exercise-wise safely from home.

So, I have opted into Peloton. So, if you are a Peloton rider, let's connect on Peloton, right? Why not? It's kind of fun. My name on Peloton is simply Krista_St_G. So, if you're on Peloton, follow me and I'll follow you back because I'm just learning this whole thing and I'm letting it be new and awkward and hard and I'm terrible at it and I'm just going to keep getting in the saddle and showing up for myself until I get better at it. And I'm enjoying it.

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So, that's what's going on with me. I'm going to read you a little listener shoutout, and then I'm going to tell you all about my interview with Jamie, which is amazing, and I'm glad you've tuned in to listen. So, a little listener shoutout because I do appreciate everyone who listens and especially those of you, because I know that you're busy, those of you that take time to leave a review. That's what helps the podcast grow and find new listeners.

So, this one is from Sarah Larkin Thinks You're Awesome. That's the username, which I adore. And it reads, "I'm not a widow, but I'm a divorced mom. I'm divorced and I didn't want to be. So, while my coparent is still alive, the relationship that we had is not. The future I was looking for is not. The financial security I once had is not. My dreams of more children are not. While it's not the same, I experienced grief. Krista talks on topics that anyone can relate to. She has a beautiful speaking voice that mirrors the clarity of her words and concepts. She shows us a way of living that's possible and beautiful and simple. I love that she has the courage to say that she loves us because, for me, it isn't enough to reduce our output of negativity and hate. We must push further and generate tons of love. Her warmth and love and dedication to helping others spills out of her. If this sounds remotely interesting to you, subscribe. You will be enamored with her. I know I am."

Okay, if you write a review on this podcast, it does not have to be that amazing. Sarah, thank you, seriously. From the bottom of my heart, thank you. And I do love you. And I'm glad that that's something you like hearing. I think some people, it might weird out. But listen, I'm on the same page with you. I do think that we want to add more love to the world. And I do love you. So, there's that.

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Okay, let's talk about this episode. So, I am so happy to bring you this interview that I did with Jamie, my client Jamie. And even if you are well past the first-year mark of your partner's death, I really hope you will listen to what Jamie has to offer. Because yes, I really wanted her to tell the story of what her first year was like, you know.

She just passed that milestone fairly recently. What she's learned since then, how it compared to what she thought it would be so that those of you that haven't yet been there could benefit by learning from what she's been through and what she's learned about herself and about grief and about parenting children who are grieving and all the things.

But, if you're past that mark, I encourage you to listen anyway because so much of the wisdom that Jamie has gained in this first year is relevant, no matter where you are in your journey. So, I hope that you will enjoy listening to Jamie. She's one of us. She gets it. And I hope it's useful for you to hear her story. I hope you will use it as inspiration and know that it's not easy. It's hard. And if women like Jamie can do it and come out stronger and learn about themselves, then so can you. That's what it's all about.

So, take a listen. I hope you enjoy. Here's Jamie Galyon.

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Krista: Okay, so welcome to the podcast, Jamie. I'm really excited to have you here because I think people are going to benefit from hearing about your journey since you lost Eric. And it's been almost a year, right? A little over a year. July?

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Jamie: Yeah, July 25th.

Krista: Okay, well why don't we start by just having you tell us just a little bit about you, about Eric, about your life.

Jamie: Okay, well Eric and I were married straight out of college and waited a few years and had two amazing girls. And we had just moved into the house of our dreams, settled in, work was good. And then two falls ago in 2018, my stepmom got sick. She had been battling cancer, but we thought she was going to be okay. But she got sick fairly quickly and passed away in November 2018. And while we were there for her memorial, Eric started coughing. And it took about six weeks for us to get a diagnosis, but it actually ended up being stage four colon cancer. And he was diagnosed the day before he turned 44.

And so, the next six months, it looked like a completely different world for us. I became the caregiver. My parents, either my mom and my stepdad or my dad or my sister, and even once my stepbrother from states away came and my sister came from across the ocean. But we had kind of a rolling group of people staying with us to help us with the girls and so that I could focus on Eric. And so, just past six months from his diagnosis date, he passed away. And then here we are.

Krista: So fast.

Jamie: Very fast.

Krista: And how old were your girls at the time?

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Jamie: So, when he passed, Aubrey was nine and Alex had just turned 13. She turned 13 five days before he passed.

Krista: Yeah, that's actually almost the age of my kids. What was Eric like?

Jamie: He was quiet and gentle but so funny. He would just have these little zingers that would just have people rolling. And some of my favorite memories of him were when he got laughing so hard that his face turned red and his eyes started watering. So yeah, he was very kind and gentle and quiet. He wasn't the loud boisterous one. But he would just quietly add these little zingers into the conversation.

Krista: That's kind of a lot like you in my experience too. You're not the boisterous one either. You're, kind of, always quiet, but you always have some witty little thing.

Jamie: Yeah, that's why we get along.

Krista: I can see how that would have been a good fit. So, what I would love for listeners to benefit from – because I think the first year has a lot of stigma attached to it, a lot of expectations, some of which are accurate, some of which are wildly inaccurate, some are useful, some are incredibly not so useful. So, I really want people to benefit from hearing about your experience the first year after Eric died, what it was like for you, what you would recommend. So, those are the kinds of things I'm really looking forward to sharing with them. Can you talk just a little bit about maybe those first initial acute grief months for you, or weeks, or whatever it was for you? Can you talk about what that was like first?

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Jamie: Yeah, I feel like since we saw it coming – we didn't see it coming for a long time, but we had at least some notice – I feel like acute grief for me looked like some days of just thinking, "I can't do this. I shouldn't be going to the funeral home to plan my husband's memorial. This isn't a thing. This isn't the way it should be." There was a lot of arguing with the reality of it.

And then I feel like acute grief fairly quickly turned into numb for me, that I had less weeks of, "I can't get out of bed. It's just too hard." And fairly quickly turned into, you know, not, "I can do this," but I did a lot of buffering. I did a lot of buffering with TV. I did a lot of buffering with food. I did a lot of buffering with, "I've got to take care of the girls and not think, not get worried about emotions." And I didn't feel a lot of those emotions for a few months really.

Krista: Do you think you were, like, intentionally numbing, or was it just survival?

Jamie: I think I didn't know the difference at that point, but I think it was just survival. I think my body said, "This is too much to take in all at once." So, it would let me – I would have moments of intense grief followed by just numb. I wasn't happy, but I was just numb. I couldn't feel anything. I couldn't feel sad, angry, mad, happy, joyful. Like, all the emotions were just numbed down so that I could handle them, I think. You know.

Krista: Yeah, I think that it's kind of a gift in a way, for some of us, that our body does that and our mind does that. Because I kind of try to imagine, what would it be like to experience the full width and depth and breadth of all of that emotion at one time. I think it would just be more than a human could almost handle.

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Jamie: Yeah, absolutely. I just think my body was like, “Nope, this is too big.” You know. And would just let little bits out at a time. I would go for really long bike rides and that was really the time that I could feel, my body could let that emotion pass through me because I was moving and I was getting it out and, you know, so I kind of used bike riding a lot in those first couple of months.

Krista: Yeah, it’s such a great coping mechanism to be able to physically move your body. What was going on with your girls and how you were relating to them in those earlier days?

Jamie: In the first few weeks, leading up to the memorial, they shocked me so much that they wanted to sing at his memorial, they wanted to talk at his memorial, they wanted to do their sign language choir at the memorial. Like, I wrote my speech and had one of my best friends read it because I couldn’t even stand up and speak. So, they just shocked the heck out of me, you know. I was shocked. So, they obviously showed a lot of grief and there was a lot of moments where it was, you know, why did this happen, how could this happen?

My younger daughter, Aubrey, slept with me for quite a few weeks because she just didn’t want to sleep – they both were sleeping in the bedroom with my sister when he was towards the end, which was a blessing that she could be there with them while I was with Eric, you know. As soon as he passed, then Aubrey moved into my bed and was there for quite a while and I think that’s fairly common.

But because we had had so many people in our house kind of nonstop for six months, it was a little different for us in that after the memorial, you know, people offered to stay. People were willing to stay. But all three of us kind of felt like, I want my space, you know. And that has continued, even

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on the anniversary of his death. We just want to be the three of us, you know.

I mean, we've obviously seen family since then, but I think to some extent, they sort of shockingly were ready to figure out how to do this, like how to do this together, how to keep moving forward. They weren't stuck the way that I kind of had expected them to be. And I think it's a function of how he passed.

Krista: Because they had a little bit of a warning.

Jamie: Right, and because it had been so intensely emotional for six months with him being sick. And I think all of us, we started calling them no-mores. And it was things like no more worrying about what's going on at the hospital while I'm at school and no more worrying about what the test results will look like and no more having you be at the hospital while we're at home.

And there were a lot of things that even though we all said we would pick Eric here no matter how it was any day of the week, there were things that were not as emotionally tough as it had been in those months leading up to it, you know.

Krista: Yeah, so it sounds like they could see some of the benefits without doing what some of us do, which is, like, forcing them.

Jamie: Yeah.

Krista: What was your experience like in terms of cognitive functioning? I think a lot of women are really surprised when they go into widow fog and

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they really don't expect that and nobody kind of warns them. Did that happen to you? What was your experience like?

Jamie: Oh, that widow fog is legit. It is intense. So, my company, the company I work for is just incredible and had supported me for the full time that Eric was sick. So, while I was in that numb stage, I thought, okay I can do this. I can go back to work. And when I got back to work, I was like, "Nope. My brain does not want to focus on work."

I'm a civil engineer and I have to do a lot of math and concentrating, and concentrating is not something that was possible for me for about six months.

Krista: When did you try to go back to work?

Jamie: I tried to go back in September. So, a month and a half later. That lasted less than a month. And then I tried again in November, and again, that only lasted a couple of weeks. And thank goodness my work is incredible and is fine with me trying to figure it out, you know. And then in November, I joined your group, and so I spent – December was living with intention. And I worked really hard on the thought that I can do this, that I can go to work and be a mom and, you know, run the household. And when I got there in January, it was a different ballgame for me. By January, I could do it. But up until then, there was no concentrating to be had.

Krista: I always kind of wonder, you know, because people will ask me, when are they ready for coaching? And that's always one of my concerns is just making sure – because widow fog is so common, and I had it definitely for sure, I really struggled. I remember reading comprehension being an issue. I wanted so badly to educate myself and I would read things and

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they just wouldn't sink in. I would read it and re read it and re read it and just get so frustrated about that. So, when you started the program in November, was there any challenge in terms of actually doing the daily work?

Jamie: I don't think so because it was a small amount. You know, it's never an overwhelming amount of work. And that doesn't mean there aren't some days where I'm like, "I can't do it today. It's not happening." But I think I was so determined to find something that would help, that would make me feel like I was heading in a direction, any direction, that it was between the two, being a small amount, and being something I was really determined to do, I could make it happen, you know.

And knowing that – I mean, there were times, I remember a coaching call where I said, I can't concentrate. I just can't do this. And knowing that there was grace there, both from you and for myself, that I could do what I needed to do, you know. I relate widow fog, when I told my bosses – because it feels like people who haven't experienced it really just don't get it. And I said it's sort of like trying to lift a weight that you just physically can't lift. Like, I physically cannot make myself concentrate. It's not because I'm sitting here crying. It's not because I'm in the depths of despair. It's because my brain physically cannot concentrate on something.

Krista: Yeah, I think the best way for me to explain that and think about it is it's like that little buffering wheel that you get on your computer when it's thinking and spinning and processing. It's like it's trying to hard to focus on whatever it is or process whatever it is, but the bandwidth is just gone and it just spins. Do you still have any of that? Has it lifted all the way do you think?

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Jamie: It's definitely not all the way gone. But I can identify it and I can give myself more grace for it and understand what it is. I feel like COVID has not helped because being home and having the girls with me all the time, I feel like there is less opportunity for me to do things that – you know, we talked in the beginning about how you don't want to buffer, but you also want to give yourself that break from emotions.

So, at the time, I was working on quilts and started doing some arts and crafts that would keep my mind focused on something else and give it a break from the grief. And I feel like with COVID, my brain is going from work to mom to housekeeping to grief to work to grief to mom to – you know, and it has less of that break. So, I find it coming back and I've had to go – every morning, I go for a walk and I have time that is mine that I can do what I need to do to give myself...

Krista: Yeah, can you talk more about that. How do you carve out time for yourself? Because I think a lot of people think that's self-care is massages and pedicures and it's floofy. What is your self-care like? What works for you? How do you make it happen?

Jamie: It is tough. And I go through waves where 've got a routine and I'm good. And there's other times when I'm not. Right now, it looks like going for a walk every morning with my dog. It doesn't matter how everyone woke up. Mom's out the door, you know. And it's usually at bedtime. I get the girls to bed early enough that I have some time afterwards. Alex always asks, like, how are you up so late? Because I need a half-hour by myself. And my girls are old enough so that they can understand.

So, we do a lot of talk about, like, I need some alone time. And they both now are able to say, "I need alone time." And we all respect each other's need for that. And Mom Goes On program has also become my time, you

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know, that I say, “I’m going to go work on Mom Goes On.” And that doesn’t mean the half-hour or hour I take isn’t all Mom Goes On. There’s 15 minutes to a half-hour that’s truly workbook time. But it’s kind of my way of saying I’m taking some time for myself.

Krista: I love that. I love it. At what point did it feel like – I remember thinking of it for me as like I came up for air – what point was that for you?

Jamie: Again, it’s such a rollercoaster. I feel like I felt like I was coming up for air when I was numb. But then when I stopped being numb, I was like, I was more numb than I realized I was, you know. I feel like at about six months was when I was like, “Oh, no I can do this.” You know. I can do this and find some joy.

The girls and I went with my sister and her family to Disney World in January and I thought, leading up to it, I was like, it’s going to be hard, it will be okay, but it’s going to be hard. And we found so much joy, even finding Eric in the parks in places, because Disney was his jam, you know. And so, that was one of the first times that I could see grief coming along with us and not feeling like it ruined things, just that it was with us and that was okay, you know.

Krista: So, we started coaching only four months after Eric died, five months?

Jamie: Not even, three.

Krista: So, I know – you became aware of me because of your cousin?

Jamie: Yes.

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Krista: So, Jamie's cousin is my virtual assistant, the amazing Becky. I'm curious how that came to be. Because I never really talked with her about that or you, I don't think. How was that received. How did she bring it to you? At what point did you said, "Okay, I think I'll give it a shot?"

Jamie: Yeah, so she started being your virtual assistant before Eric passed and is smart enough not to tell me such things while Eric is sick. So, I did not know. But after he passed, maybe even a month after, she said, you know, "I work with someone who might be a good resource." She gave me your email, but I didn't email right away. But she pointed me to the Facebook group. And through the Facebook group, then I started listening to the podcast. And that's when I found out about the group and became one of the first, you know, in that first month of the group. Trust Becky to know exactly when to tell me about it.

Krista: Did you feel ready for it when it became time?

Jamie: I wasn't sure and I felt like I had to trust your expertise in that, in that first interview call. I felt like, I don't know grief. I know that I'm coming out of numb. I was definitely out of numb by then. But without knowing what was going on, I wasn't sure. I felt like I was making the right steps. I was working on myself. I was working on how to support the girls. But I wasn't sure.

And I had just decided before we got on the phone that I was going to trust you to know whether it seemed like – I was going to be honest and tell you, you know, not hold anything back and trust that you would know whether I was ready or not, you know.

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Krista: I'm so glad you did. I was looking back through my notes from that very first call that we had. And it's amazing to me to see, not because of me, but because of you, how far you've come in terms of how you think about yourself and the way that you think about grief. I would love for you to share that with listeners. What did you know or think about grief before and how does that compare to what you know now?

Jamie: I think the biggest thing is that I thought feelings were something to be fixed, you know, that if the girls were upset, I needed to comfort them in a way, you know, not just comfort them and be with them, but to say, yes, you know, it's not fair but we're going to be okay. It's going to be alright. We will make it through this. And now, supporting them in their grief and supporting myself in my grief, it hurts. What is this emotion? What do you have? And I think the girls get sick of me sounding just like Krista.

Krista: Sorry, girls.

Jamie: They've started to come around. But for me, one of the biggest things we've actually talked about recently was the idea of being a screen in the water instead of a dam and to stop trying to stop the emotions and just let those feelings come. And it's a very different experience of grief.

I think, in the beginning, I wanted it to follow some linear path, where in the beginning, we're going to cry seven days a week. And then in a month, we're going to cry six days a week. And then in two months... yeah.

Krista: The engineer in you is showing.

Jamie: Yeah, and that is so not the way it works. But when we have hard days now, it's just a hard day and that's all that it is. And it doesn't mean

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something. Like, I think I was spending a lot of time in the beginning making those grief storms mean something, that it meant we weren't handling our emotions well, or if we weren't having a grief storm, that meant we weren't thinking about it, we weren't acknowledging him, we weren't missing him.

And now I get that it all moves together, you know, and that I can be grateful that he is not sick and hurting and that doesn't mean I don't miss him with every fiber of my being, you know. And that I can be super-upset one day and it doesn't mean I'm going to be upset the next day or the day after that. They're just feelings and they will pass through us and we will handle them as they come. And I think it is such a different experience of grief once you learn that feelings aren't a problem, you know.

Krista: Yeah, I think that's probably my favorite part of watching you is just becoming – I've seen you become so much more confident about how to navigate your own feelings, and then I've watched you share that with your daughters. And when you relay conversations to me about how that unfolds in your family, it's my favorite part of coaching because I know that – I'll cry if I think about it. But not only does it help you. But it transfers into your family and it impacts your whole family. And kudos to you for taking that skill and sharing it with your girls and changing the way that now they're going to parent if they someday choose to be parents.

Jamie: Yeah, and I think for me, it's easier. I think it's a typical mom thing, that it is easier to see it in your kids and be proud of it in your kids than it is necessarily to see it in yourself or be proud of yourself, you know. So, when I see us as a threesome handle things with strength and grace for each other, even fights, even sibling fights, that they're handled differently now than they used to be, that when someone's angry, I used to feel like, nope, anger is not okay, we've got to shut that down, you know. And now it's like

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anger is just another emotion. And there are ways to handle it that are not okay in our family. But the anger is not the problem. And so, it's just the way we interact entirely, the whole way we handle each other is different and has so much more calm and grace than it did before, you know.

Krista: And in the middle of a pandemic.

Jamie: That's an extra challenge.

Krista: Yeah, I remember, the first time we talked, that one of the things that you said was you were hopeful that you could become a family of three, but you just weren't really sure if you really could do that.

Jamie: Yeah, I felt like, you know, without Eric, what does this look like? Because we would just smile at each other and say, "Oh man, we just make a great team." That was our thing, we are partners, you know. And even things like going through security at the airport, I just remember thinking both of us telling each other, like, man are we good or what? We just know, somebody takes care of the shoes and somebody takes care of the liquids, you know. All those kinds of things that – my mom used to say you look like you're just dancing. Like you just know what each other's steps are and you just do that. And I thought, without that person with me, I don't know how to do this, you know

And I feel like still I miss it. I wish I had that. But I've become more confident in the fact that I can do it. I can. And sometimes it's moment to moment. Sometimes it's day to day. Sometimes it's weeks at a time. But I can handle it.

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Krista: Yeah, and from where I sit, you've gotten yourself there because you worked for that belief. I remember coaching conversations with you about the idea, your beliefs about whether you could do it, what you could handle, what you couldn't handle. And you really worked for that.

Jamie: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely, yeah, it did not come easily, you know. It was definitely something that needed a lot of work and a lot of practice in making decisions by myself.

Krista: Talk to me about that. How has the experience of decision-making changed for you?

Jamie: Well, so Eric and I were together my entire adult life. I mean, I went from being a kid in my parents' house to being a college student dating Eric, to being married. So, until Eric passed, I had never made a large purchase by myself, ever. And he was not an engineer, but he was in technology and had that same engineer brain. So, we would make spreadsheets and pros and cons, you know.

And so, I think the first thing that broke was my refrigerator and I remember thinking, I can't do this. Like, who do I call? How do I get this fixed? How do I make – and now I look at it and go, "It's a refrigerator. It's fine." You know. But at the time, I felt completely frozen in it. And then to have it become that there's not a right or wrong decision, that really changed it for me, the idea that I was going to make the best decision I could and that made it the right decision. Not that there was inherently a right or wrong decision, you know.

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Krista: I want everybody to rewind and listen to that again. There is no such thing as a right or wrong decision. You get to decide if it was the right or wrong decision.

Jamie: Yeah, and so, I mean, we've had a string of things break around here. I feel like that might be a common theme for widows. Like, seriously, why now? Why is everything breaking? But I think I told you that, a month ago, our oven broke. And instead of going, "Oh my gosh, I can't do this. How am I going to handle this?" I was like, this is a good time to practice some decision-making. And I can do this, you know. It's just an oven. No big deal.

And I didn't spend that time spinning and thinking, "What would Eric want me to do? What would he think the right decision is?" Because the fact is, part of the reason we were such a good team was because we thought alike. And I feel like I have him with me in that, you know. And that was another huge one, was the idea that he's with me because I decide he is. That was huge. That was mind-blowing.

Krista: How did that unfold for you?

Jamie: So, I thought, when he first passed, that I should just feel him. I was desperate to feel his presence and I thought something was wrong with me that I couldn't. And therefore, now that I know this, my brain looked for all the evidence that he wasn't with me. And as soon as we got to that part of the program and I realized that it was my thoughts about him that formed the relationship and my thoughts about him that caused my brain to look for his presence, then I started seeing him everywhere. And now it goes in waves, that I won't be thinking those thoughts, and I don't see the evidence. And then I will be thinking those thoughts and there are beautiful sunsets, especially with the fires right now, I'm blessed with sunsets.

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But sunsets, butterflies, yellow birds, like, they're everywhere because my brain is looking for them. And so, I've kind of chosen to believe that I can make these decision on my own because I'm capable and because I know him so incredibly well that if I feel the need to know what he would think, I know what he would think, you know. I know that he would actually not approve of the oven I bought because he would want the one that you could control from your smartphone. Which I think is ridiculous. But he would be like, "Yes, yes we should be able to control it from our smartphone."

Krista: So good. Yes, I think it's such a big deal to know that we can generate a sense of connection with our brain. We can choose to believe they're with us or we can choose to believe they're not. But we get to choose and we don't need anybody else's permission. It's pretty freeing.

So, okay, so you just go through your first deathiversary. Talk to us about what that was like? How did you expect it was going to be? And then what was it actually like for you?

Jamie: I knew it would be a hard day. And I knew, with Alex's birthday five days before, I was determined to let her lead that ship. But when she said she wanted to try to just have the best birthday she could and not make it – you know, we had a conversation that was like, do you want to go to the cemetery? Do you want to do something relative to daddy for your birthday? Or do you want to just do your birthday?

And she said since the anniversary was coming up, she just wanted to focus on her birthday. Okay, no problem. So, I was working really hard to make it as happy a birthday as it could be. And we still had moments, but you know, tried to focus on that. And then basically the day after her birthday, I felt like all those days leading up to it were really, really difficult

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for me. I felt that wave of emotions and it was overwhelming, even though – I say I can handle feelings. Like, some amount of feelings is still really overwhelming. So, I expected the day of to be equally hard.

And by the time we got to the day of, it was a beautiful day. We went and got donuts in Starbucks and we sat at the cemetery and there's a bench right next to his headstone and we sat there for hours laughing and pointing things out and talking about daddy and it wasn't morbid and it wasn't sad and it wasn't depressing. It was a celebration of him. And so, it was actually the days leading up to it that were hard and the actual deathiversary was less difficult, you know.

Krista: How did you prepare yourself for that and what made it – I'm thinking about listeners who aren't there just yet and they're kind of dreading that day. What would you tell them was useful for you to make it easier when you actually got there?

Jamie: Yeah, for me, I just had to keep telling myself that we were just going to deal with it as it came. I felt like if I put this big plan into place of how we were going to spend the day and how we were going to handle the day and how it was going to look emotionally, that I was bound to be disappointed, that I just knew I can't predict what this day will look like, you know. And so, I think just giving yourself grace to experience it as it comes, whatever that looks like, you know.

And I think there's probably some people who want to be with all their family and all their friends and have basically another memorial. And that's beautiful. You should do that. For us, we discussed it as a family and the three of us were like, "No, I just want it to be the three of us." We have a tendency to handle hard days that way. We cocoon. And with COVID, there's not a lot of choices.

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But I think even without it, I don't think that would have looked differently. You know, that that's how we could handle it. and my kids are old enough to play some decision-making in that, that we can talk about it and say, you know, is there anything that is really important to you that we should work hard to make happen? And all of us agreed, that was going to the cemetery.

But beyond that, one thing that was really important, I just said, "We will just see how the day goes." If we want to go for a hike. We'll go for a hike. If we want to lay on the couch and watch TV, that's okay too. And we just took it as it came.

Krista: Yeah, so basically, do it your way. And stay in the present moment. Don't try to plan the future to great detail. Just kind of adjust and adapt as you go. Communicate. I never really have sensed any – I know a lot of people struggle with this. I don't know that you have as much. But I haven't really sensed a whole lot of people pleasing issues with you. You seem to always be pretty grounded in advocating for what's good for you and what's good for the girls as opposed to trying to please other people who might have expectations on you.

Jamie: Yeah, I had a lot more of it in the beginning. I felt like even things like when Eric was cremated and we buried his ashes at the cemetery, that's what he wanted. And I felt like, my gosh, there are expectations from people, who should go and what kind of ceremony we should have for that and is that what he would want? Is that what they would want? And I was able to find it and say, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what other people want. It's what is best for the girls and I, you know. And I think it's one of the blessings of having kids. Even though I think grief is harder with kids because you have to see them grieve and you have to help them with their grief. But the blessing of it is that I can be unabashedly, like, their advocate.

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And being a momma bear, like, all that matters is my girls. And I don't want to hurt anyone in the process, obviously. But if what my girls need is for it to be just the three of us, then it's going to be just the three of us. And that's all there is to it.

Krista: Love it. What have you learned about yourself since Eric died?

Jamie: I've learned that I'm strong. And it's funny because I feel like when people used to say that, I'd be like, I don't have a choice. I'm just doing what I have to do. And now I've been able to take ownership of that and be like, "Yep, I am." And that I'm capable of doing hard things and that I'm capable of handling those things with as much grace as possible with calm. But just that I am capable really and that I do know what's best for myself and I can make those good decisions for myself and for the girls without hurting anyone else, but without it being about what other people want me to do.

Krista: Yeah, so good. If you could go back and you could talk to yourself right after Eric died, or maybe right before he died, what do you think you would tell yourself? What is it that you know now that you would have told yourself then?

Jamie: I think that feelings aren't a problem, just let them be there. and honestly that buffering isn't a problem either. That it's healthy to say, "Too much, I need a break." You know. But that I think also to have faith. And I don't mean faith in anything outside of me. That faith that I will make the right call that I will take care of myself, that I will take care of the girls, that I will ask for help when I need help, you know. But just faith that we will be okay and that I am not to the point, only a year out, that I can say this happened for a reason, that this is the way it should have been, but that I

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have gotten to the point where I can say it is what it is. I've stopped arguing with it.

I spent so much time saying, "This isn't the way it's supposed to be." We've been working on that a lot lately in the group. And I spent so much time arguing with reality, you know.

Krista: Yeah, most of us do. I think it's such a big milestone, not that it is linear. And I think we do it in some areas and not others faster. But I think it's such a big deal to be able to get to that place of acceptance and no longer arguing with what is. Not that we have to love it. Not that we have to have wished for it. Not that we have to be grateful that it happened. But just to stop giving our precious energy to arguing with that it did happen.

Jamie: Yeah, and I think in the beginning, I felt guilt that anything that wasn't grief-centered, and any time we felt happiness, there was a part of me that felt like I'm not acknowledging Eric's not here. If we acknowledge some of those no more's, no more trips to the hospital, no more worrying constantly, you know, there was part of me that felt like that was dishonoring Eric. And now I feel so confident that I can say, I can be happy, I can love my life and it doesn't mean anything about how much I love him. And I do love him and I always will love him. And that those can live together.

Krista: Definitely, and how did you make that transition?

Jamie: That one took a while for me. I feel like even like I said, in Disney World, there was part of me that was like, I shouldn't be having this much fun. Like, this is just wrong. And I think, I remember you and I having a coaching call about it after Christmas when I thought, Christmas was a

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beautiful day and it should have been hard. It should have been awful. It should have been the worst day. And instead, it was a beautiful day. And what does that mean? And so, I feel like it's been a slow change for me to be able to say these can live together. You know, these can live side by side.

Krista: Yeah. I'm curious, right after Eric died, what your thoughts were, if you remember, about the future, compared to what they are now?

Jamie: Yeah, I think – so, right after he died, I felt like I just kind of have to buckle down and raise my girls. And then I'll probably be alone for the rest of my life, but I'll deal with it. There was not hope for the future. It was survival, right? It was, I need to make my girls' childhood as good as possible, but that's about all I can hope for. I'm just a mom now. I'm not a woman, I'm not a wife, I am just a mom. Even though that's the only job I've ever wanted, at some point, they don't need you as much. And at some point, being just a mom isn't a very hopeful future, you know.

And then, I think I switched to thinking, in order to find – we always talk about finding a life you can love, that in order for me to find that, I had to change something, right? That probably meant I was supposed to be something other than a civil engineer. It probably meant I should live somewhere other than Broomfield, Colorado. It probably meant I needed to buy a new car.

I thought that in order to love my life, I needed to change my life. And then at some point, I realized, no, I chose this life with Eric because it's the life I wanted. I didn't choose civil engineering because he forced me into it. I chose civil engineering because I like it, because I'm good at it. And we chose this house together, but that doesn't mean that without him, I don't want to live in it, you know. And realizing that I could love my life because

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it's still the life I chose, even without him by my side, you know, that now I can choose things differently. I chose a bedspread that he would hate.

But it also means that I could choose the bedspread that I know he would like. And that doesn't mean that I don't, you know, that I'm living in the past somehow, you know. I just feel like it's calm. I can look towards the future and think, you know – I also think I went through a time, we talked about it, that I thought the only way I will love my life is if I somehow find someone to love again. That is the level. You watch every movie, you watch every TV show, being in love is all there is to it.

Krista: That's the message we're fed.

Jamie: Yeah, and I feel like I've gotten calm in the idea that it's like, if I find someone someday, fine. And if I don't, that's okay too. And not being as desperate that that's the only way to love my life. And just knowing that life is going to unfold the way it's going to unfold, and the way that I approach it is all that matters. And I've really settled into the idea that I need to learn to love myself and I need to love on my girls while they're home. And if romance comes along, along the way, fine. If it doesn't, I'm okay with that. It's no longer, "I'm going to die alone."

Krista: Yeah, or it sounds like too, you've figured out that it's not things, or anything outside of you that creates a life that you love. It's not a different job or a different city.

Jamie: Right, and it's not change. I just felt like I had to change things in order to love. Because you hear so many people who have gone on, who have grown from the passing of their spouse, that they grow by – I mean your story. You went from a corporate job to now being a life coach and

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having a podcast and a life coaching group. Like, if you look at that and think that's what needs to happen, I need to make big changes, that's what growth looks like. But my career is what I want, you know.

I already have the career I want, so why do I need to change it? It's just a different – it might be a different life than I had with Eric in that he's not here, but there's a reason we made all the decisions we made. And they're okay. I don't have to change them just because he's not here, you know.

Krista: So good. I'm so happy for people to hear that from you. To me, loving your life is all about living it with intention. Choosing what you want on purpose instead of just letting the same crappy thoughts that show up in our brain, keep us repeating the same patterns, you know, and really figuring out, what do I want, and liking your reasons for it. Which is what you're doing. And you like what you already have. You don't need to make big changes. So good.

What would you tell other widowed moms that are maybe in their first year, this is a new experience for them? What have you learned that you would tell them?

Jamie: I think just let it come naturally, you know. Don't fight the emotions. Don't fight to either make all the bad emotions better or give yourself a guilt trip for feeling the happy ones. I think, if I had gotten advice when I was in the early stages, just let it come. Because you can't control it. I think so many of us want to control things and control how it goes. And if I do X, Y Z, we will be okay. Alex has been in therapy for a long time. Aubrey just started. She didn't need it earlier. Now she does.

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I'm not going to look back on that and go, "I should have gotten her in earlier." No, it's just when it happens, you know. And I think just have faith in yourself that you can always find the resources if you need them. But just let it play out more organically and stop thinking there's a right way to do it, you know.

Krista: Yeah, just relax a little bit, from the abyss of what we cannot control. And we control it the best we can, or at least our portion of it. Very good. Is there anything else you want people to know or were hoping we could talk about that would be useful?

Jamie: I don't know. I feel like we've covered the gamut. Yeah.

Krista: It's been really fun. It might sound strange to say that, but it's what I do all day every day is work with widowed moms, and so it's been really fun from where I sit, to watch the changes in you, to watch you change, to watch the way that you deal with emotions change, to watch your outlook change, to watch your self-concept strengthen, to watch you be so much more your own champion and be nice to yourself as things unfold.

Jamie: Oh man, being your own cheerleader is everything. Because if we can't be our own cheerleader, no one else is going to do it, you know.

Krista: You're right, nobody else is going to do it. Well, thank you so much, Jamie. I hope people get a lot out of this, especially women who are in that first year. Because I think there's just something that we kind of present as almost magical is going to happen after the first year is over. Actually, I would love for you to weigh in on that. Because sometimes, people will come to me and they're like, "I thought, after the first year, that it was going

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to be like the light switch was just going to flip on and everything would be rosy and amazing.”

And also, people kind of expect, “Okay, you’ve gotten through the first year now. Aren’t you moving on? Shouldn’t you be over it?” So, I’m curious about your expectations and your experience just with that year milestone.

Jamie: So, I think – I was lucky enough to hear that message early on, that this is not a time thing. Even though I did have a couple of people tell me that, “Once you pass the year...” That’s not a thing. And so, I had that message in my brain early enough that I didn’t let that idea sink in too much. Actually, the idea that sunk in and scared me was that people were like, actually the second the year was harder.

Like, oh gosh, please don’t tell me that. Don’t tell me that because I know – and my friend and I would joke, that, like, “Okay, well on July 26th, we’re good. Okay, we’re fine...”

Krista: Checked that box.

Jamie: Right, so I knew that wasn’t a thing. But then, hearing all these widows tell me that the second year was even worse, I was like, please don’t tell me that. And I feel like the thing that kept me from getting too scared of that thought was I decided to tell myself, whether it’s true or not, I decided to tell myself that the people who struggled more in the second year, it was because they were believers in the first year of just bustle through it, right? Don’t deal with it.

Krista: I think you’re right about that. I think it’s because they don’t learn the skills that you learned. They don’t learn how to feel their own feelings.

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They're just busy through, push through, you know, make it through. And it's very tight and resistant and they don't learn the skill of allowing emotion. And then, bing, like there it is. It turns out it waits

Jamie: Oh it turns out... Yeah, that's what my dad – he lost his wife, my stepmom just months before Eric was diagnosed. And then he jumped into being basically my caregiver while I was being Eric's caregiver. So, he put his grief on hold and so we've talked about, to some extent, we're on the same timeline, even though he's really eight months ahead of me. We're really not because he didn't deal with it, you know.

But yeah, so that's what I've decided is that the second year is not harder for those of us who have actually dealt with the first year. So, don't just muscle through it. Let yourself deal with it. I think the only thing that was different for me was once we got past the deathiversary, I feel like there was part of me that went, "Okay, we're through all the firsts."

There will be firsts. There will be the first high school graduation, first grandbabies. There will still be firsts. But we're through all the first birthdays, the first holidays, the first diagnosis date, the first deathiversary. And I thought, like, to some extent, that's a milestone. It doesn't mean that the second birthday isn't going to be just as hard, but it means we've done it once. We can do it again if it's hard. And maybe this one won't be as hard, you know.

Krista: Yeah, like leveraging that. We've done it once. We can do it again. It's no longer the great unknown.

Jamie: Yeah, and I think that's been true for COVID too, that I told the girls, as long as we get through this healthy and strong together, we've already

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had the worst day of our lives. If we've experienced that, we've already gotten through it, we've already gotten through the hardest thing that hopefully we ever have to deal with, COVID, like okay, kind of sucks but we can deal with it, you know.

Krista: Yeah, and once you get good at feelings and you realize that the worst thing that can ever happen is a feeling, that you get good at allowing and processing feelings, then those unknowns are somewhat less scary I think because you already have that skill and belief in your ability to handle the feeling side of it, which is, for most people, kind of foreign.

Listen, thank you so much, thank you for sharing your story. I know it's not always easy to do. Thank you for showing up the way that you show up inside of our program. It's been real fun to watch you.

Jamie: Hey, I made it through without crying, so success.

Krista: Well done, well done. I love it. Hey, are you open to this – I don't know, we didn't talk about it beforehand. If people want to reach out to you, is there a way that you can do that?

Jamie: Yeah, absolutely. I am not on social media because I decided that that was not a healthy place for me to be. But maybe if they contact you, you can give them my email? I'd rather the email not just be in the...

Krista: I've got it, love it. Okay, alright, krista@coachingwithkrista.com, very good. Thank you so much, Jamie.

Jamie: Thank you.

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Krista: Bye.

Jamie: Bye.

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If you like what you've been hearing on this podcast and want to create a future you can truly get excited about, even after the loss of your spouse, I invite you to join my Mom Goes On coaching program. It's small group coaching just for widowed moms like you where I'll help you figure out what's holding you back and give you the tools and support you need so you can move forward with confidence.

Please don't settle for a new normal that's less than what you deserve. Go to coachingwithkrista.com and click Work With Me for details and next steps. I can't wait to meet you.