

Ep #73: Grief and the Law: An Interview with Meredith Holley



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Krista St-Germain

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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 73, Grief and the Law: An Interview with Meredith Holley.

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 to another episode of the podcast. I've got another interview for you today. This one is with my dear friend Meredith Holley. And Meredith is not only a lawyer, but she's a bestselling author and she's also a life coach.

And Meredith has had her own unique grief experience, which I think is probably partly what gave her the idea of talking to me about something we could do for the podcast. But when Meredith was – it was her very first law school final when her mom died, that day. Not that it's the same at all, as the walk that you are probably facing. But I think having lost her mom in the way that she did, Meredith just kind of has a perspective that maybe other people don't have.

So, anyway, I want you to listen to this episode because Meredith is going to teach us how we can work with a lawyer and make our lives easier; how we can manage our mind around whatever we're dealing with and let a lawyer help us, if that's what we need.

Maybe there's a wrongful death case. Or maybe we don't need to work with a lawyer. Maybe we need to be able to take a mental health day for grief, even if it's years after the loss. So, that amongst any other things are some

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of what I hope you're going to take away from this podcast episode with Meredith Holley. And with that, we'll jump in.

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Krista: Alright, welcome, Meredith. I'm so excited to have you on the podcast.

Meredith: Thank you for having me, Krista.

Krista: Yeah, so Meredith and I have known each other for, I don't know, a couple of years. It's been a while. And I never really thought about it until she came to me and said, "Hey, I might be able to help you and your clients." And I was like, "Really? You're an attorney. I don't understand." And so, I'm excited to talk with you today because I think, clearly, there are some things you brought to me that never even occurred to me.

And if they've never occurred to me, they've definitely never occurred to most of my clients, unless they're attorneys or have attorneys that are close to them. So, before we jump into all of that though, I would love it if you just tell us a little bit about yourself and what you do.

Meredith: Of course, I'd be happy to. So, I'm Meredith Holley. I am a lawyer and a life coach and I founded Eris Conflict Resolution. And at Eris, we help employees stop toxic work environments without quitting their jobs or losing their jobs.

Krista: Just the idea of a toxic work environment and what that must be like to deal with, it sounds like something you'd want to have someone in your corner for.

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Meredith: Yeah, I mean, I think that a lot of us are taught – and this is one of the things we're going to touch on – I think a lot of us are taught that if we're tough enough and we're smart enough, we can go through anything and come out on top and that we should just be able to push through and ignore problems. And that's, a lot of times, what we see people do when there's a serious work environment issue.

They come to us and they say, "Well, this started eight years ago, but I thought, if I ignored it for long enough, that it would get better." Which just doesn't work. And I think that this is one of the things that I was thinking about for your people because I think that with grief, the same thing can be true. We think, like, if I just ignore it, I'm going to get over it and there won't be a problem anymore and...

Krista: Yeah, and then when we kind of have an inkling that it is still a problem, so often we judge ourselves for it. And instead of asking for help and support, we make it mean there's something wrong with me, you know, X number of months or years have passed and I'm still not feeling great, but no one else will understand. I must be doing it wrong. There's something wrong with me, you know, I don't want anybody to know how I'm really feeling or doing.

Meredith: Yeah, and I think you even go to other people and they reflect that back to you a lot of times because they don't have the skills to help. They say, "Well, it's been a year so..."

Krista: Yeah, "Haven't you moved on already?"

Meredith: "I know it was hard, but I'm sick of hearing about this..."

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Krista: Or, I think what also happens is we're so good at hiding it. And people want us to feel better, or what they perceive is that we're so strong. And so, we're being told a lot, "Oh, you're so strong. I could never imagine going through what you've gone through. Look how well you're holding it all together." And so, that's the feedback that we're getting on the outside. But then, on the inside, maybe that's not really what's happening at all.

Meredith: And then we think, "Well, I can't tell them how I actually feel because it will crush their image of my tough exterior."

Krista: Right, or then they'll pity me... Ouch. So not fun at all. So, here's what was most interesting to me that I want to know first about, because I didn't even really know this was a possibility. So, talk to me about mental health days for grief.

Meredith: Yeah, so what a lot of people don't know when they first come to me – I had somebody come to me, actually I talked to her yesterday about this. So, we talk to a lot of people who are in sexual harassment situations. So, this woman came to me and she said, you know, "My supervisor's been sexually harassing me, groping me, all this stuff, for a couple of years. And I've reported it and nothing's changed and I can't go back to work. I think I'm just going to quit," she says.

And I think that the same thing can be true when we even have an external trauma like grief, like somebody we love dying. We can go to work and think, "I can't show up today and have this feeling that just even getting up and going to work is too terrible and causes so much anxiety," that will have panic attacks and stuff.

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And so, once we've gotten to that point, you know that you've gone too far. You know that, before that point, you could have gone to a doctor and gotten a doctor's note, like you would with a physical injury. You get a doctor's note and you have protection under the Family Medical Leave Act. States have protections also that are on top of the Family Medical Leave Act.

But mental health is protected the same as if you got the flu, the same as if you broke your leg. So, what you want to do is you want to actually have a diagnosis from a doctor that becomes protected. And a lot of us don't want to get mental health diagnoses. We think that means something's terribly wrong with me. That means I've done something wrong. That means I'm a weak person. But it really doesn't.

It means you have a certain level of legal protection for an injury that you have, as though you broke your leg. And you can recover from it. If you have a mental health diagnosis, it doesn't mean it's a death sentence and you're going to be like this for forever. But it just gives you this legal protection to take time off to be actually healthy.

So, most of us, I think, are sort of taught that the goal at work is to be minimally competent and survive; just to live at a survival level. And most doctors don't actually agree with that. They think you should be actively healthy at work. So, most doctors will support what you need to do to take care of your body, including your brain, your mental part of your body, to get actually healthy. And so, I think we need to reframe how we think of our legal protections to use them to create health in our workplaces and health in our lives, instead of just survival.

Krista: Yeah, I think my experience was just so easy and friendly, with my employer, that they gave me all the time off that I wanted. My husband had

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worked at the same company with me, so everyone there was incredibly understanding because they understood that they were feeling the pain of the loss too. They called in grief counsellors to support the staff when it happened. And it couldn't have been a more supportive work environment.

And so, I think for me personally, I take that for granted. And I don't really know what it's like to work in an environment where you have to advocate for yourself a little bit more. So, yeah, it's not been part of my experience.

Meredith: I think that the important thing to know is that many employers very clearly know that when that initial incident happens, when somebody dies, you have a lot of protections, especially if you're married, if you're legally married to the person. Most employers are solid about the protections for what you need to do to plan a funeral, what you need to do in that space.

But many people sort of believe that then you take two months and you grieve, and then you get better and you go back to work and everything's okay. And so, what people, I think, don't realize is that your protections don't necessarily always just attach to the incident of the death. They attach to your mental health and your mental wellbeing and they can extend for longer.

So, the rules are, employers who have a certain number of employees, right now federally, it's over 50 employees. So, it's more large employers. But there are other protections that apply to smaller employers, that employees who work for those employers get up to 12 weeks of medical leave a year.

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Sometimes, the diagnoses people have, like chronic anxiety, depression, PTSD, other very common diagnoses count as disabilities also. So, you're protected under disability law, which applies to smaller employers and gives you more protection.

So, most of the time, when there is an incident, in my experience, an employer knows that around that incident, you give the employee space. You let them go to the funeral. You let things happen. That there can be hurdles for people who are not legally married. But my experience is that's less common than people not realizing that, if you're a year out, if you're two years out and you're still having mental health symptoms, you still have protections around it to find the tools to actually get healthy.

Krista: Yeah, and so what you're saying is there really is no time limit if you have the appropriate diagnosis from a doctor.

Meredith: Yeah, and if you have symptoms, you likely have the appropriate diagnosis – if you are showing up at work and feeling depressed and feeling anxious and having panic attacks and you're still being impacted by the grief that you experience. That doesn't mean that there's something wrong with you. It means that there's support available, and use all the support you can get.

Krista: So, let's talk about the difference between something that's kind of more ongoing versus something that just seems to kind of crop up on, say, the deathiversary, or a particular day that for whatever reason might have some meaning or more intensity felt by the individual. And so, what is the difference in approach?

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Meredith: I mean, if you know, if you plan ahead and you're aware of yourself and you know that a deathiversary is – a lot of us, what I experience is I have a couple of deathiversaries in my life where, when they come up, I'm like, "Why is everything terrible right now? I don't know what's going on." And I think a lot of people experience deathiversaries like that, like, "I don't know why I can't do anything today." And then I'm like, "Oh, my mom died on this day..."

Krista: Yeah, "So this is the calendar day we're on." Or, often then, the same thing where it's not actually the day so much as it is sometimes the buildup to the day.

Meredith: Yeah, or even the fallout after. There's a range of dates, I feel like, the birthday of the person who died, any other anniversaries. So, I think if you know that you can plan ahead about that, that's where disability protections come in and where the protections attached to your health status and to your internal experience and to your diagnoses.

And so, you want to check in with your doctor and really work closely with a doctor that you trust and make sure that you're working with them. You can plan ahead for those things, but if you just notice it coming up, you can call in sick, like you would call in sick if you had the flu. Like, your mental health and your physical health are tied together and both are protected.

Krista: Okay, so with no advance warning to your employer...

Meredith: If you're sick, you can call in sick. And that's called emergency leave. And what you want to focus on with that is the symptoms that you're feeling, your physical symptoms...

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Krista: As opposed to the...

Meredith: The reason for them. And this is where I think having a coach like you is really important, to understand the difference. We work with the model, which separates our experiences in life into different categories. Anytime you're talking to your employer, to even a doctor or a lawyer, it's really helpful to know whether you're talking about a circumstance, your thought about the circumstance, your feeling, what you're doing about it, or the result that you're getting.

You want to know each category that you're talking about. So, right now, what we're talking about is the physical symptoms in your body, which would go in the circumstance line, right? And that's what you report. And then your thought about it is the reason that you believe that you're having these.

Krista: And so, if someone were not wanting to share, wanting to play their cards close, then it's enough to just share what's happening with you physically symptom-wise without going into the detail of...

Meredith: You don't have to ever share the reason.

Krista: Yeah, I think that that would be good to know because I think a lot of people would hold back. And if they can just clearly articulate what's actually happening in their body that would prevent them from being effective at work or being able to do their job without the judgment of it or understanding why it's happening...

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Meredith: Exactly, and I think that that's key to know because if you have a sore throat, you're not going to call your employer and be like, "Well, I was playing with kids yesterday so I need to take the day off."

Krista: Right, it would seem rather irrelevant at that point. The main issue is the sore throat. Yeah, so I can see how that makes total sense. We just talk about what's happening with us physically and it really doesn't even matter why.

Meredith: Yeah, and then, if you have a doctor's note ahead of time for it, then that's great. But if you know you're sick, then you get to be sick and you get to get healthy. I mean, I would advise anybody, talk to a lawyer in your state to really make sure you understand what protections that you have. And the thing I see people get wrong with this is that they just don't show up at work and think that they have protections without calling in, or they call in and say basically the equivalent of, "I was playing with kids yesterday so I can't come to work." Which is like saying...

Krista: My husband died five years ago...

Meredith: Yeah, and unfortunately, not everybody understands that. Some employers will be sympathetic. But that doesn't provide the protection your physical symptoms...

Krista: As opposed to, "I'm having panic attacks."

Meredith: Exactly, yeah, "I have a diagnosis of anxiety disorder and I'm having panic attacks." That provides a lot more protections.

Krista: Anything else on your mind with regard to mental health days?

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Meredith: Yeah, I mean, I think what I would say is we work with people to enforce their disability rights and to work with their employers around their disability rights. I see people hold back a lot about the symptoms issue, and instead talk a lot about the reasons for the symptoms and we don't even realize that we're doing it. But our brains can tend to work against us sometimes.

What I see a lot with people is the get defensive about their physical symptoms. And so, they start to say, "I'm not late all the time," or, "I'm not a bad employee," or highlight all these other things that are not relevant to their protections. So, if you don't feel like you can do this on your own, talk to an attorney in your state or talk to us and attorneys will help you effectively enforce your rights.

The other thing I'll say is that not every doctor understands how to effectively fill out the protection paperwork. So, it's never a bad idea to sort of have a lawyer on your side, even to review your doctor's paperwork, just because they don't always get training on the legal side of things.

Krista: Even if they mean well, they just might not have the knowledge required to do it in the most helpful ways.

Meredith: Usually, especially when they mean well, they try to do things that help that, unfortunately, don't always help because it is a little bit of a tricky area of law.

Krista: Okay, so good to know. Also, what comes to mind is the wrongful death, the malpractice, the legal issues that sometimes happen after your spouse dies. I just see all sorts of challenges for people around here.

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So, I personally dropped a malpractice suit. And that was a very painful decision for me to make because I had a lot of judgments about myself for how long I should pursue it. And I've seen my clients go through the same thing, where it's hard to know, how much effort do you give something that you're not really sure is going to turn out the way you want it to turn out? And how do you even navigate those things when your brain is completely foggy and, you know, the widow fog is legitimate and there's a million other things on your plate and you're just completely overwhelmed? So, I think there's a lot to it to talk through.

Meredith: Yeah, so I would say, when people come and work with us, we work through a whole program with them to help them navigate that and navigate what they want to do and make a decision in their favor about how they're going to think about having a lawsuit.

My view of a lawsuit is that it's paperwork that gets filed in a certain location and so it doesn't have to be a charged experience that's heavy on you. It can be just a process. Like, you probably weren't, like, "Maybe 'm not going to file my taxes this year. I guess it's just too much burden on me. I won't file my taxes." You were like, "Oh, obviously I file my taxes. It's just a process and not emotional..."

Krista: Meredith, that's so fascinating. That never occurred to me. But even the phrase, lawsuit, has such an emotional charge for me when I think it. How did you say you think of it? It's just paperwork being filed in a particular location.

Meredith: Yeah.

Krista: That does not feel nearly as dramatic.

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Meredith: Yeah, it's not dramatic. And that's the other part about it that surprises people as they're going through a lawsuit is they're waiting for the drama. They're like, "When's the dramatic part going to happen?" And I'm like, "Never. It's always going to not be dramatic."

And every once in a while, something fun-dramatic happens or you have to give a deposition. Like, you figure out somebody lied. I like figuring out when people lie. I think it's fun.

Krista: The fun drama. So, that's a totally different concept that you actually could go through some sort of legal procedure and it not be intense or dramatic.

Meredith: Yeah, I think if you are going through it and it feels terrible to you and it feel unhealthy, then you need to focus on your health. You need to be well, like your physical, mental, emotional health is way more important than any kind of legal proceeding. But I think, like we talk about, changing the circumstance doesn't change your feelings.

It really is how you think about it. And so, I teach my clients to just think about this as a process that's running on in the background that they don't have to worry about. And it's a challenge to train yourself to think about it that way. But then, you have to notice the burden that you're putting on yourself if you think about it as this dramatic thing, right?

Like, you wake up in the morning – and I'll have clients who say, "I wake up in the morning and I just think I need to move on. I need to be able to move on but I can't move on until this is resolved." And then we resolve it and they're like, "Oh, I'm not necessarily moved on. How am I going to find the thing that's going to move me on?" And really, it's deciding.

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Krista: Yeah, because it's never the thing that moves us on. It's a decision that we get to make.

Meredith: Yeah, and sometimes, we're not ready to move on. Sometimes, having that lawsuit seems like the dramatic burden, sometimes it can connect us to whatever we lost. It can feel like even a negative connection point.

Krista: Yeah, I do see that. And it does – you can kind of associate, “Well, if I give this up, if this closes out then what am I left with? And do I lose the connection?” I felt a little bit of that for myself. For a while, I felt kind of obligated to pursue it, even though none of it felt like it would be at all enjoyable or pleasant. But I felt obligated. Then, at a certain point, I kind of judged myself for letting it go. And that's what had me holding onto it probably a little longer than would have ultimately been beneficial to me.

Meredith: I mean, lawsuits for better or worse, on the civil side – so, in the law, there's the criminal side and there's the civil side. And so, sometimes you can have both in a wrongful death situation. For example, the most common one that we see is drunk driving situations. Somebody will be prosecuted on the criminal side as a drunk driver. But also, there will be a civil case based on the car insurance.

Civil side, we only deal with money. Criminal side, you deal with people's freedom and whether they go on probation or go to prison. And on the civil side, literally all we're allowed to deal with is money. We only ask a jury, how much money should one person pay another? And so, it ends up being a math decision is the best decision about whether you continue to pursue a case. If the math of the money makes the most sense to pursue it, that's a good decision to make. If the math doesn't make sense, especially in terms of your time that you're going to have to commit to the lawsuit or

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any expenses that you're going to have related to the lawsuit, if the math doesn't make sense, I think that's the best reason to decide not to pursue it.

But if the math makes sense, then I think the rest of it is drama that you can resolve, that is the internal process that you just need tools to resolve. A lot of people feel like because it's just money, like they're being paid off for their loved one's death and there's no amount of money that would make it worth it, there's just no amount of money that is worth going through that experience.

Krista: I did an episode of the podcast called Wealth Purgatory and a good portion of that is, sometimes, all the thoughts that we have about the way we get money really hold us in a pretty terrible emotional place, even if we're financially okay or better off than we were. So yeah, I can see why that marriage for you of the law experience and the coaching is so beneficial because it sounds like you can help someone do the math and you can help them through the drama.

Meredith: Right, that's what we do the whole time. And what we find is somebody who – we don't do wrongful death cases in my practice. We just do the employee-side work. But my experience is that trauma brain and grief brain are not super-different. And a lot of our folks have gone through some physical trauma that's interfering with their ability to tell their story clearly.

And partly because of this guilt, because of the drama around obligation to bring a lawsuit, all of these things that interfere with a person's ability to just tell a clear story. And so, what we find – or to make a clear decision about whether to continue or not, like you're saying.” And so, what we find is, if

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somebody can use coaching tools to clear up the drama, they can tell their story in integrity and honestly and more clearly than if they aren't.

Most people think that lying is – that's kind of an extreme word, but in the law, we are like, "Who's telling the truth? Who's lying?" quite often. And most people think that lying is saying something that's not correct to get something good for yourself. But what we see more commonly is people lie against themselves. And we see this a lot in coaching too, right? Like blaming themselves for the death of their loved one, for example. If it's not your fault, it's a lie, right?

And so, we don't call those lies though. We call them self-criticism or we have all these nice names for them. But really, they're lies. And so, what we see with our clients is they're much more likely to lie about taking – so, for example, when I'm working with women in sexual harassment cases, which is the bulk of what we do, they'll say, "Well, I did wear a nice dress that day, so I guess that's what made him do that..."

And the association that if you wear a nice dress then you're in danger is a lie, right? So, don't lie. Don't blame yourself. But I think, when we work with people, I think the same can be true of grief brain, when people haven't processed, don't have these tools to make these decisions or talk about the experience in a way that's just not clear and then sometimes is not even in integrity because it blames you for something.

Krista: So, the answer to that is get someone to help you see, number one, what is the math of the situation that you're dealing with so you can make a decision from that point. But then shine the flashlight in your brain so you can see how you might be telling yourself some accidental lies that keep you from getting the result that you want and add suffering where there doesn't need to be as much.

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Meredith: Yeah, and then I also think, to plug working with you, if anybody's in a lawsuit or has to testify, I think that lawyers often think in the thought model, like we think according to what is the objective circumstance, and separate out everything else into different categories. And so, if somebody can work with a coach ahead of time and know what the lawyer's asking, it just gets you ahead.

Krista: Yeah, that makes complete sense. Thank you for that. Just reflecting back on conversations I've had with clients about these kind of issues, I have really seen just a lot of suffering and at almost all comes from what I think you've clearly articulated is lies without knowing that they're lies, "If I drop this case it will mean that I didn't do right by him. It will mean I've disrespected his honor, that I didn't love him enough, that I wasn't a good enough wife, that I wasn't dedicated enough or I didn't care enough," you know, "It's up to me." Just all of the stuff.

Meredith: Or on the other side, if I pursue this case, I'm taking time away from my kids. I'm not strong enough to pursue this case. "The attorneys don't like me," is a big one that we see.

Krista: That's a new one.

Meredith: It's interesting because attorneys are a whole breed of people...

Krista: What? They're not just singularly represented by one...

Meredith: They're a whole situation. And we aren't really taught how to talk to the humans very well. But I think, when you're in a trauma place, you really want to be surrounded by comfort. And attorneys tend to not be comfortable for people to talk about. So, you can have the resilience to be

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able to talk to somebody and not worry about if they like you, but know that they're representing you...

Krista: Yes, be able to advocate for yourself instead of being filled with self-doubt and people-pleasing.

Meredith: Yeah, and then just choosing what your reason is, the reason that you like to not pursue a lawsuit or to pursue a lawsuit, but choosing from a clear place.

Krista: Yeah, because I think it just goes right along with there really is no right answer; pursue, not pursue. It doesn't objectively exist anywhere outside of our brain. We get to decide if it's the right decision to pursue or the right decision not to.

Meredith: Right, and then you make the math decision also. Like, ultimately, I think if you can make a math decision about it, you're going to make a more clear decision about it.

Krista: Yeah, ultimately for me, because I did have the criminal side as well because it was a DUI and other things, so there was that thing happening. But then, there was the possibility of the malpractice side. And so, ultimately, it was easier to make that decision once we had done the math and the probability of all of it. And then, in a way, I personally got to a place where I felt a little bit of relief because I realized I wasn't going to have to go through all that stuff I really didn't want to go through and just rehash it all and I could just kind of move forward. But the math helped with that.

Meredith: I think that's such a good point too, is like it's easy to lose touch with our instincts about what the right decision is for us and then look to the

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advisors to make the decision for us. And sometimes, you just know in your body, this is not the right thing for me.

Krista: Yeah, I don't think I knew that at the time. But reflecting back, I think I did know that it wasn't what I wanted, but I was pursuing it because I felt obligated to do that. And the math let me off the hook. The attorney saying, "I don't think this is what we want to do." And then I felt a little bit of guilt, but then mostly relief.

Meredith: And I mean, with malpractice cases, attorneys can really do that math pretty clearly. They're expensive cases and you have to have really solid medical...

Krista: But I also didn't have a coach to help me through that either, which is interesting because I actually did have a coach at the time, but it never occurred to me to bring that part of my life into coaching.

Meredith: That's so interesting.

Krista: Right, I never thought of it. It's further evidence of what we kind of started with, which is how often we try to go it alone when support is available. And look at me, like, I clearly knew about coaching and it did not occur to me to talk to a coach about it.

Meredith: So interesting. Were you focused on career coaching or was it just a different topic that you were doing or something?

Krista: No, it wasn't even really career coaching. I mean, I was thinking about how do I figure out how to redefine myself and love my life again. You know, clearly Hugo had died and I was trying to figure out, "Okay, well

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now what do I do?” because life is way shorter than I thought and I want to do something more meaningful. But it wasn’t actively career coaching. It was more like, conceptually, post traumatic growth and where do I go from here, how do I build the next chapter?

So, the medical issue and the legal stuff just felt like, I don’t know, leftover baggage ends that needed to be dealt with. But for some reason, I just didn’t connect the dots that support could have been available to me in that regard.

Meredith: And maybe you just knew the answer. I think, if you know the answer, it doesn’t have to – but I do think if you don’t know the answer, if it feels confusing, if it feels foggy, if the lawyers come back and they say, “This is a case. You’re going to be the key witness,” then I think having a coach, but also coordinating the coaching with the law work is really important, so that you can potentially keep the coaching under the umbrella of attorney-client work product related to the case and have some confidentiality around it, I think is good too, important to have that coordination. But I think coaching has always been the right answer to me.

Krista: Right, if we can get our brain in the right space and tell ourselves stories that help us instead of hold us back. Was there anything else? I feel like there’s all of this stuff in your brain that I probably have no concept of what’s in there and I’m missing out on it. And I want to know what else I’m missing that I don’t know.

Meredith: I realize I didn’t really tell my story of my experience. I do have my own grief experiences. I’m not a widow. But the reason that I got into coaching was that I got my dream job at a civil rights law firm and I was representing women in sexual harassment lawsuits and I was being sexually harassed at the same time. And I was in a spot of I would walk to

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work and I would listen to podcasts and I could hear the sound of my heart beating over the sound of the podcast because I was so afraid to go to work every day.

But it also was my dream job, and the work was amazing. I just would stay late and the guy who was giving me backrubs would stay late and I was worried that – and he was sort of the main boss in the firm and so I didn't feel that I could tell him to stop. And it was the first time that I had run into an experience where there was harassment or an issue like that, that I couldn't just say, "Stop it now. That is unacceptable." I felt like my job was on the line if I did that.

And I went to lawyers and I asked them how to resolve it. Like, I said, "I know how we file lawsuits after somebody gets fired. But how do we help them just not get touched every day?" And they were like, "We don't know how to do that. So, you could quit, I guess, but things are really sexist and you've just got to deal with it."

And I reported to other people a couple of times and nothing changed. And then I found coaching and that was really what turned it around. And I was able to think about things from such a different angle and stop all of the self-blame that I was talking about before. And that could clear up my mind to figure out how to actually resolve the issue. And it ended up that he apologized and stopped touching me and then we worked together for years after safely.

So, that's sort of my experience of that trauma brain, brain fog where I didn't take the mental health days, where I didn't know that toughing things out and outsmarting things wasn't going to work, that getting support was the thing that needed to happen for me to be healthy. But then, once I found it, I mean, it really just changed my whole experience.

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And I also, I didn't end up suing them and I didn't really want to sue them. But to me, navigating the experience in a positive way was better than – and keeping the job and having the job was more important than having a lawsuit. And I also think that when we can make that impact ahead of time, when we can be healthy ahead of time, just everybody benefits more than if we're retroactively trying to compensate people.

Krista: How wonderful that you've gone forward. It's so interesting. This is what I love about coaching. Every coach I've ever met seems to have the most fascinating personal journey and then has taken that journey and kind of paid it forward and figured out a way to help other people through the journey. And it sounds like exactly what you've done.

Now, since this is a question I have no idea the answer to, do people have to work – have to live in the same state to work with you? Like, if somebody were to hire you, they have to live where you live?

Meredith: No. It depends on the state that they live in. They can always reach out. If somebody's still working, they do not have to live in the same state as us. If somebody's been fired because they reported a problem at work or for a discriminatory reason, they can still reach out to us, but we might refer them to an attorney in their state. It would just depend.

Sometimes, we can get involved and then just work with an attorney in their state. But sometimes, we know an attorney in their state who we trust, who we could refer them to instead.

Krista: So good. Thank you so much.

Meredith: Yeah, thank you for having me. I really appreciate it.

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Krista: If people want to connect with you, what's the best way to do that?

Meredith: Yeah, so they can email me at meredith@erisresolution.com or just check out our website. If anybody is – a lot of times, what we see people say at work, in especially situations where they have a mental health experience, they say, “Well things aren’t bad enough yet to do something about it. Things aren’t bad enough. I’ll just wait.” And then what ends up happening is we are anticipating things getting worse and worse and worse and so they do, before we get help.

And so, if they go to erisresolution.com, we have a toxic workplace quiz, like a how toxic is your work environment quiz. So, if anybody is sort of feeling like, “Are things bad enough? Should I take a mental health day?” That can kind of help you evaluate whether now is the time to do something.”

Krista: Awesome. And let's not wait too late. Why do we do this to ourselves?

Meredith: It doesn't work. It's like, if you've got a broken leg, you can't be like, “Maybe I'll walk on my broken leg for a little while before I go to the ER.” It doesn't work.

Krista: Right. And we don't make the broken leg mean that we're weak.

Meredith: Right, because it doesn't.

Krista: Yeah, why do we judge ourselves for our mental health or the things that are happening in our work environment or our husband's death or any of it?

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Meredith: I really think it's just lack of knowledge. When I learned coaching tools, I thought, why was I not taught this in junior high? Why did I never learn this? Like, I'm a lawyer. I've gone through high-level education. I also thought, to be fair, I was like, "I think this is what my counsellor has been trying to teach me for a while." I just didn't get it because it wasn't a system. But I didn't get it and I didn't learn it as a system, as tools, as things that I could rely on every day to come back to. And that just was what worked for me.

So, I think it's just lack of knowledge. I think people don't know – I talk to employers who are really anxious about reports of discrimination in their workplaces and they really want to do the right thing, but they literally don't know how to do the right thing because they haven't been taught. I think that we just haven't been taught.

Krista: Well, thank you so much for just even bringing to my attention that there were maybe some things we might want to talk about because it just never occurred to me and I'm so grateful.

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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.

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