

Ep #117: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Linda Shanti McCabe



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Krista St-Germain

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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 117: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Linda Shanti McCabe.

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

Hey there. Welcome to another episode of the podcast. Summer is coming to a close. I don't know if you're excited about it. I have kind of mixed feelings. I'm excited to be in this new house, I'm excited that fall is coming because I love fall. But man, it feels like the summer went by in a flash this year. That's how it felt for me.

It was nice to get out and do some traveling though, and kind of get back to a little bit of somewhat normalcy after being trapped in the house for so long with COVID. So today, I have an interview for you with my client who is also an author, a psychologist.

She is an expert on eating disorders, she is an expressive arts expert. These are all my words. I don't know how she would introduce herself but I call her an expert in all of those things. And she's just a gem of a human being.

She's one of those people that you just - she's warm, she's loving, she's funny, she's honest, she tells it like it is, there is a little bit of swearing in this interview, so earmuffs for the kids if you've got kids listening to the podcast. Just a heads up. But that's one of the things I love about Linda. She calls it like she sees it.

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She doesn't add in a lot of unnecessary fluff. So I hope you enjoy this interview. I do these because I don't want you to compare and despair. I want you to find hope. I want you to find inspiration. I want you to hear from other women who while they have not walked the exact walk that you are walking, they know what it's like.

That you can hear yourself in them, and I think you'll be able to hear yourself in at least aspects of Linda's story. So with that, we will jump in. I will let Linda introduce herself and I hope you love this episode, and then I hope you go buy her book and we'll link to that in the show notes. Alright everybody, enjoy.

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Krista: So Linda, welcome to the podcast. Super excited to have you here. I love the face that you made right when the camera started.

Linda: I'm excited to be here.

Krista: So it's been a long time coming in my mind. I don't know how it feels for you, but I, in my mind, have been thinking I want Linda on the podcast. Okay, so people don't know you. I could probably talk a lot but I'd rather you talk. So let's just start with kind of how you became a widow, how did you even get into this orbit of widowed mom life experience?

Linda: Right, so there's the obvious answer. My husband died.

Krista: No.

Linda: Yeah. I love talking to widows about that because we can just do that gallows humor with each other and it's fine. There's no tiptoeing

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around eggshells. So my husband had pancreatic cancer and that's a tough cancer, so that's how I became a widow.

Krista: And that was 2018?

Linda: 2019. Well, 2019 is when he died.

Krista: And then we met in 2020. You just started coaching in summer of 2020, in the middle of a pandemic. Also good times. Okay, so tell us a little bit about what your life was like when you decided to reach out.

Linda: You know, I have a colleague that I was talking with who's not a widow and I was just poking arounds for support. And she actually found you and she sent you to me. And she's like, I found this coach, she's a widowed mom coach. And I was like, no way, there's a widowed mom coach? How perfect is that, I didn't even know that was a niche.

So as soon as I got your information, I called you right away. But what my life was like was - I think the biggest obstacle was loneliness and a kind of a sense of unrealness and lack of belonging. I moved my son and I after my husband died and so there was a pandemic.

So I felt dislocated in so many ways and just kind of lost, which actually, we could talk more about that because that's literal and a metaphor I think we have worked with.

Krista: Yes, we have worked with that one a little bit.

Linda: We should talk about lostness. That's come back to that. But I think the feeling of lack of belonging and I had been in a young widows group. We can talk about that too because there's this niche of middle aged

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widows, it's like no man's land. There's young widows and then there's when you're supposed to become a widow, which is like 65 and older like the rest of the widows groups. And there's nothing for middle aged people.

Krista: That was my experience exactly. I was 40 when Hugo died. How old were you?

Linda: I was 46. I was 46 because the young widows - I remember talking with a facilitator about this. The cutoff for the young widows group was 45. I was like, can I even belong to this group?

Krista: What you're saying is you think I'm old.

Linda: But not old enough for the regular widows group.

Krista: Right, so where do you fit in then?

Linda: Yeah.

Krista: And you not only moved, it wasn't a little move. It was move across the country.

Linda: Yeah. We lived in San Francisco for 20 years, my husband and I, and he was a Brit and he wanted to go home and be with his family. And that was a kind of massive undertaking as he got more and more and more sick. And we did it. We got to England. He died two weeks later.

And then before we had gone to England, we had decided we're probably not coming back to San Francisco because of many reasons. One of the main ones being the cost of living.

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So I was thinking about okay, where can I be a single mom? And where can I connect? So I came back to where I grew up, which is in upstate New York, and we live seven minutes from my sister.

Krista: Seven minutes from your sister, that's nice. So I find it interesting too that some people are turtles and some are rabbits when it comes to decision making and especially, I notice when they reach out to me. And so sometimes people listened and listened and listened to the podcast and they know podcast episodes sometimes better than I swear I even know them before they actually reach out to me. And then there's you, who's like, I heard of you, I'm in.

Linda: Yeah. Well, there are a lot of ways in my life I am like slow to warm up, turtle, risk averse, but when I know, I know. And this was definitely I know. I'm in.

Krista: So thinking about - and people listen to this podcast and they're at all different stages in their experience. So some of them just lost their partner, some of them are years out, but just thinking back because I think it's always useful, thinking back to the early days after your husband had passed, knowing what you know now, if you could go back and you could give yourself some good wisdom during those early, acute days of grief, what do you think you might tell yourself?

Linda: That's a good question. I think actually that is the book. I think that is why I wrote this book. It is literally letters to myself in that place. The book is a collection of paintings that I did the first year after my husband died. And I think I just fell back on art because especially in grief, art was this place that could hold and express the uncomfortable and the not so pretty parts.

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We don't really live in a grief culture so people - it's like that episode of Dead to Me where the neighbor comes to the door with a casserole and she's like, "How are you feeling?" And she goes, "Like my husband was just killed in a hit and run driving accident."

Krista: So relatable.

Linda: That's how I'm feeling. I am feeling shattered, mad, afraid, I want to punch you in the face, I don't want your fucking casserole.

Krista: Thank you very much.

Linda: Yeah. So art was a place for me to - I had written all these letters in my journal, all these angry letters. So I ripped them up and I turned them into a compost heap and then I made a painting out of that. It's called grief is a compost heap.

So this book is a collection of art pieces that I made. There's a compost heap, there's the grief wave, driving into the grief wave, there's the hummingbird, signs that are visiting, there's the non-linear aspect of butterflies and caterpillars and chrysalis and there's the unknown and the questions and who am I without my person.

Krista: I'm imagining some people listening have probably no experience expressing their grief through art, so can you kind of just tell us a little bit about how you got into expressive arts in general?

Linda: Well, I think art for me was always kind of a go-to place. You gravitate places as a kid, and that was the thing for me. I would draw. But then life kicked in and the art sort of disappeared for a while. And then I

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had an eating disorder in my 20s and I got into recovery. And I found art to be amazingly healing.

I was like, what? And then I saw an art therapist and I was like, this is the coolest thing ever. So I went back to school and got degrees in psychology and art and started doing that. And my husband was also an artist, so after he died - it's like a toolbox but you open it and it has his paints inside.

And so I had that and there's the question with your person, what do you do with this stuff? What do you do with all this stuff? So that one, I mean, there's still a lot of things where I don't know, I don't know what I'm going to do with that stuff. I'm still sorting. That's one of the affirmations in the book too. Like what do you do with the stuff? Do you keep it? Do you let it go? Do you gift it? Do you save it?

But with this particular one, it was very clear. Like well, clearly, I'm supposed to paint with these paints. And so I painted - I literally painted the paint box. I painted a picture of the paint box.

And so then I thought, oh my god, that would be such a great kid's book. And my son and I called it Papa's Paint Box because it's papa's paint box. So I started, I was like, I'm going to write a kids book about grief. And so that's how the book started. But then as it evolved, it became clear like okay, all this compost heap stuff is more for grownups.

Krista: Yeah. Does the book have a title yet or is it just still a working title?

Linda: The book's title is After Your Person Dies: Affirmations for Grief, Making Meaning, and Going On.

Krista: Love it. And do we have a date yet for when it comes out?

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Linda: Presale August 18th.

Krista: Okay, so we'll figure out something to link in the show notes so people can find it. Okay, love it. So that makes a lot of sense because for me, I used a lot of journaling in the early days, but art was definitely not my go-to ever.

In fact, if I would do anything artistic, I would just judge the poop out of myself of whatever I created and I never really had any examples of anyone who was artistic in my circle. So never any examples of really how to go about that in an expressive and non-judgmental way without it being a product and thinking about the process.

Linda: You know, I should actually speak to that because I think that's true for a lot of people. And so I know people can't see this but I'm just going to hold them up for you. So there's this process called soul collage, which is these - they're five by seven cards and you collage them and collage is good because there's - not always, but often there's less of a critic for people when they're collaging versus drawing or painting. You can't really mess up a collage. Cutting things up.

Krista: Pick out some stuff and...

Linda: Glue it down. So what? It's a mess. It's supposed to be.

Krista: What you're showing me doesn't look messy.

Linda: But my critic is still commenting, my critic is still saying my collage wouldn't look like that. Okay, but you haven't made one yet so that's the big response for the critic because the critic's whole job is to paralyze you, is to keep you from doing it. So thank you for sharing, but these collage cards

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are great because you can do a whole deck of them for all the different aspects of yourself.

So if you're working with grief, you can do the sad part, the afraid part, the part that feels broken and incompetent, the part that is like a butterfly emerging into her new amazing life, the part that is considering dating, the part that can't ever consider dating again, the part - all of those. All of those are a part of you.

And then you can - it's kind of like tarot but it's your own personal tarot deck. And you can ask a question like I need guidance regarding whether or not to date right now, and then you pick your card and you do a reading, looking at the image. Like oh, I'm looking at a pregnant image right now, so it's like something is getting ready to be born and her head is in a big brain. And so the brain might say you're thinking too much, you need to do some tapping.

Krista: I love that. I need to have you teach a class on this. That's happening.

Linda: We're talking about that. Maybe at the retreat. We'll talk about it.

Krista: So okay, back to - because we took a little detour there and I'm glad we did, but back to the words of wisdom that you would offer to yourself back in the early days.

Linda: Yes, words of wisdom. I think this sounds so cliché but it's true. You're right where you need to be. That's what I would say. And it doesn't have to look like you think it should look.

Krista: How did you think it should look?

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Linda: I thought - and this is with a doctorate in psychology. I still thought it was like, the stages and they're linear and rainbows and unicorns appear at one year and then you're done and then you move on. I hate that phrase.

Krista: People are shaking their heads right now because that's what they think too.

Linda: Yeah. So I mean, I was numb for a good chunk of time for the first year. I was alternatingly numb and angry in the beginning. Numb, angry, numb, angry, numb, angry. And then I was like, numb, sad, numb, sad. And then I was like, I kind of feel okay.

I can at least feel my body again. That was another thing that was helpful for me was body stuff like dancing, tapping, things to get back into my body because it was just so traumatic. So anyway, I feel like I'm detouring again. You wanted to know what I would say, I would say you're right where you're supposed to be and there's no timeline. There's no timeline.

If you're at a year and you're in this place, that's where you're supposed to be. If you're at two years and you're in this place, that's where you're supposed to be. If you're at two months and you're in this place, that's where you're supposed to be. I'm approaching two years coming up soon and I just totally had a huge grief wave.

And I mean, I was kind of expecting it but you would think you would expect it because I've been through one round, but no. And it's like the body remembers because I literally - I was in this huge grief wave and I was like, what is going on? I looked back at my WhatsApp messages when I was talking with friends when we were in England. That's when we had gone to England and it was that final two-week stretch where he was dying. It was like, of course my body remembers.

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Krista: There is something so fascinating about how it really does. I've heard that so many times and had the exact same experience where it's almost like I use the Mirena now so I don't really have periods but going back to a time when I did where all of a sudden, you're like, oh, that's why I'm so grumpy right now, that's what's happening, it's my period.

It's like the same thing happens with grief where you don't know what's going on and all of a sudden it clicks and you're like, oh, my body totally knew. I was near some landmark that had a special memory, it was a particular time of the year coming up on a deathiversary, or an anniversary, or something. It really remembers. And you're coming up on the second year at the end of July. So we're recording this about a week out, a little bit more.

So what do you think though? Because it's easy to say from here you're right where you're supposed to be. Why do you think though that that's so hard to hear, to absorb? People don't seem to want to accept that where they are is where they're supposed to be.

Linda: Yeah. I mean, I think part of it - the first thing that came to mind was because I don't want to feel it. For me, if I'm right where I'm supposed to be, this totally sucks. I don't want to feel this. So there's that. And I think that this is where the thought work that you do is so helpful where there's - in therapy land it's called DBT where you have the balance of acceptance and change at the same time.

So it's like, I think it's easier to tolerate accepting I'm right where I need to be if I also have hope. It's hard for me, when I'm in the grief wave, you know what though, when I really think about it, it's not the grief wave that's hard. It's resisting the grief wave.

Krista: Yes, I totally agree.

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Linda: Because when I'm resisting the grief wave, I'm pissy and angry and I don't want to be here. But when I surrender to it and I kind of - it comes, it passes, I surrender to it. Not holding on to it, not oh, a grief wave, let me dive in and eat a bunch of crap and watch a bunch of sad TV and drink and feel sorry for myself and not communicate with anyone. Those are all options.

Krista: Not that we've ever done any of that before. Totally theoretical.

Linda: But just let it be there, right? Just let it be there and be in it and whatever you need to do to be in it, tapping or making art, or journaling.

Krista: I think that you're right. I think that is why it's so hard to accept those because most of us when we say you are right where you're supposed to be and where we are feels terrible, it's because we've typically not had an experience of what it's like to be in that space without judgment, to be in that space without resistance.

And so we really have never had this kind of clean - what I call clean as opposed to dirty experience of being with ourselves and our feelings. So it's like, it's particularly unappealing. But it's a skill that can be developed and there are lots of different ways to do it, as you said. Tapping is my favorite at the moment.

Linda: And also the work you do and also - the work you do around your future self. I think about it like my wise self talking to me, or just being a good mom to yourself, like you'd be a good mom to your kiddo that was weeping. You wouldn't be like, stop it, you're not supposed to be there, it's been a year, get over it, move on, we've already done sad, we're done with that.

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Krista: You only got one chance. First year. It's over. We would never speak to ourselves like that. Is it easier for you now and I'm assuming the answer is yes because I've kind of watched you do it, to kind of switch into that wise self or future self voice in your self-talk?

Linda: Yeah. I think that - so I'll give you a recent example. So I told you about this one. So I actually just went on a date. So I was driving, this was a first date. I was very excited about this date. I was driving to the date. He lives an hour and a half away so we found a place to meet midway.

I suck at directions. So far, I'm working on developing that skill, everything is figureoutable, you know, growth mindset. But generally, I'm not - I have a track record. My dad used to draw me maps before there was GPS. My husband - listen to this. My husband bought me a GPS and I lost it.

Krista: The irony.

Linda: So anyway, I'm driving to this place and I have a GPS. I have a GPS. But I pull over to get gas and somehow, I just totally got turned around and I get back on the highway and was going the wrong direction and did not realize it.

So I look down at my GPS and it's like, your destination is 45 minutes away. And I'm like, but I've been driving for 45 minutes. Oh no, this is not good. This is not good. So my mean voice starts kicking in, like the panic, the how old are you? Like all the things. Seriously, you can't even explain this to this guy because first of all, it's a first date, he doesn't know that you really suck at directions. And if he did know, he would just recoil in horror and not want to go on this date. I mean, he already has kids, he doesn't need another one. Mean, mean, mean, mean, mean.

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So then I was like, in the mean spiral, shame spiral, and then solution part of the self kicked in and was like, you know, well, here's your options. You could do this, you could do this, you could do this, which is great, everything is figureoutable, but it was still coming from a place of like, panic.

And I just - my wise voice was able to in that moment just come in and say you know what, I love you. That was it. I love you. I love you. I love you. We're going to get through this.

Krista: The same thing happened to me sort of. So the irony of all ironies. I'm Audible-ing Tara Brach's Radical Acceptance. Such an amazing book, I love Tara Brach. And so I'm listening to Radical Acceptance on this trip to Colorado to a YMCA camp in Estes Park.

And I end up at a YMCA camp not in Estes Park. Same thing happened. Downtown Denver, somehow hit something on the GPS, I don't know. An amazing mountain pass. And then we arrive at the YMCA and it is the wrong YMCA. And it was so beautiful because I had just been listening to this, the exact same thing of how do you notice the critic but then accept yourself for all of your imperfections and flaws and speak lovingly to yourself? Such a big transformation to make when we can do that.

Linda: That's the thing, that's the thing.

Krista: Yeah, I wanted to ask you too because you have I think a unique perspective in that you understand the therapy world as a professional, someone who's a psychologist and you understand the coaching world, and people ask me questions about it all the time, like what's the difference.

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And I always hesitate to answer that because I can only speak from my experience and I think it's just so different for everyone and it's different based on the person that you're working with, but I would love to hear you talk about from your perspective, what are the similarities and the differences.

Linda: Yeah, great question. What are the similarities and differences? Well, I'll say caveat, within therapy land, there are all kinds of orientations. So I think coaching is probably closest to CBT therapy. If you want to look for similar approaches, or DBT. It's got a lot of similarities with CBT and DBT.

Let's see, similarities I would say certain kinds of therapy and definitely coaching are solution-focused and post-traumatic growth oriented. And they work with your thoughts and the kind of belief system that your thoughts cause your feelings, cause your actions, cause your results kind of.

I mean, I think for me, doing this coaching has been profound in the sense of there's things that I've known for years personally and professionally that I feel like have just sort of clicked in a new way. In a more heart, oh, yeah, like how you talk to yourself.

It sounds so simple but it's so not simple and it's so profound and it's so the thing. The thing. It's not about the thing you think it is, whatever it is, like grief or your body image or food or addiction or depression. That's the thing. But the real thing is how are you talking to yourself?

It's like mindful self-compassion. I see a lot of crossover with coaching, and I don't know the different schools of coaching, but the coaching that you do and the coaching I've received from you has been helpful for me in a

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mindful self-compassion way. Like how am I talking to myself? How am I talking to myself?

Krista: I can always tell that in your coaching too because it's like when we coach - this is my perception of it. So tell me if you experience it differently. But my perception often of coaching you is that I just have to bring you back to what you already know. It's like I'll kind of see it in your face where it may not always feel comfortable and it may not always be what you wanted to hear, but it's like you kind of come home.

Linda: Yeah, I feel that. And that's what good therapy does too. That's what good therapy does too. I'm sitting with this one client I have and she literally says, "Why can't I fucking trust my intuition?" So finally I just wrote it on a sticky note and whenever we're having a session and she forgets, I just hold up the sticky note. Just hold it up. I just hold it up. She goes, oh yeah, thanks.

Krista: Thanks for reminding me of something I know but have forgotten.

Linda: I think that's the main kind of similarity. I think one of the differences is in therapy there's a lot - again, depends on the therapy, but there's a lot more family of origin work and kind of looking at how your past relationships are your template for your current relationships.

It's similar work in the sense of like, the place you're trying to get to is similar. You want to be looking at okay, this is how my relationships are right now, is this how I want them to be? And in therapy, we would go look at okay, what kind of internal working model do you have from your mom?

Oh, your mom was always enmeshed and anxious and over-involved and helicopter and you never got to set any boundaries, and oh, so interesting,

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that's coming up with all your girlfriends. And in coaching it would be like, well, what thought are you having about your girlfriend? She's being invasive. Okay, how do you feel when you have that thought? What do you do when you have that thought, and what thought would you like to have? But we're going to the same place.

Krista: Yeah. All roads lead to Rome. It just doesn't require the going back and sorting all through your past necessarily. I love it. I also wonder, did you ever have any - because I notice this happen sometimes with people who are already in helping professions like you are. Did you have any hesitancy or any judgment of yourself that might have ever prevented you from being in a program like this one? Did you ever should on yourself? Like I'm a licensed, I should, blah, blah, blah.

Linda: I'm laughing because not any more than usual. I should on myself all the time. I always think I should be further along so wherever further along is. But did it come up in any specific ways around this? You know, I think I had God, which is in 12-step programs, they call God is the gift of desperation.

I think that - it's also good orderly direction. So I think when I came into this program I was in so much isolation and I so appreciate - I think this is what I got from - because I have my previous experiences with when I got into recovery for my eating disorder and how healing it was to be in a community of other people healing from the same thing.

And then oh, that's so cool, I want to go and give back. And so I did. And so now I'm still in that community but I'm just in the giving back place. And that was so healing for me, especially with the shame and the feeling of isolation and the feeling of brokenness that I had a sober reference in the sense of like, oh, that was so helpful then. Maybe this could be helpful in a similar way.

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If I'm with other widowed moms, there won't be - I won't get the pity looks and I won't get the - just the stuff you have to navigate in the rest of your world. So I didn't have hesitation that way. I was excited about that. I think the only hesitation I might have had was is it going to be sort of a different school of thought than I'm used to and will that work.

And for me it totally has. It's influenced me as a therapist. All my clients now are like, what's this model you're doing? It's so cool, let me show you. And some of them love it and some of them are like nope, that's not for me. And that's fine. I can work in other ways so I don't force the model on them. But it's been great. It's been professional growth for me, but I wasn't sure. I wasn't sure because I hadn't really ever been in a coaching world before.

Krista: And so you did the initial six months, what we call Mom Goes On, which is kind of the standard program. And then you went on to do Masters. What was behind that decision?

Linda: Let's see.

Krista: I probably should say because people don't know - I don't even talk about this stuff often on the podcast. So Mom Goes On is the basic six-month program, and then people have the opportunity to graduate or continue on. So Mom Goes On Masters is the continuation program essentially. So you don't have to do it, it's just an option, but you did it.

Linda: That's right. I think it was just that I know - it's like this. I used to work in residential eating disorder treatment and when people would get ready to "graduate," there's no graduation because recovery is the rest of your life, but when people would get to that place and we'd be doing a goodbye ceremony, if they would be like, I'm so confident, I got this, I'm ready, I would be afraid for them.

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And I would give them that feedback. And if they'd be like, I'm terrified and I also know I have all these tools and I can use them and I can trust myself and I can come back to the part of me that knows because I found that place inside of me and I'm really scared, then I'd be like, you are right on track, you are so right where you need to be, I have full confidence in you.

So that's kind of how I felt at the end of round one, the first six months, I felt like I could continue. I could not continue, but I want to. And it's great and why not? I have this tendency to think I should be further along and done. And so why not not be done? Not be done yet and be okay with that. And have support.

Krista: That's a switch.

Linda: Yeah, and I wasn't done with my book yet and I kind of had it in my head that I wanted to finish the book. I wanted to have the support while I was finishing the book.

Krista: I'm so glad you brought that up because I would love for you to talk about just the whole process for you of deciding to write the book and then what that was like to write the book. Because we did a lot of coaching around thoughts and fears and challenging with writing that. Can you kind of walk us through what that's like for you and maybe what you've learned?

Linda: So I wrote another book, so people are like, well, you've done this before. But the other book was not a picture book. This is a picture book. So it was kind of like reinventing the wheel. Like I have no idea how to do this, I have no idea.

And so I think that was one of the first hurdles was like, I have no idea. And I think that's one of the things you coached me on was well, why are you

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supposed to have any idea? Why is that an obstacle? How could you find an idea? What's the next right step? Could you Google it? Everything is figureoutable.

Krista: We're not supposed to know how to do something we've never done before. But if we tell ourselves we need to know how and we don't, then it's going to stop us in our tracks. So yeah, how can we take the next little step as opposed to knowing the whole how.

Linda: Right, and I think that's where you helped me get back to - I had the where I was, and I had big picture where I wanted to go, and I couldn't see the middle. Or I could see maybe further along the path but what's the next right step? I had a sense and I think you helped me just live my way into the next step.

Because in the beginning I thought this is going to be a children's book, and then it became clear like, no, this has a little bit of adult content, this is not going to be a kid's book. So it's like, okay, it's going to be an adult book, okay, how do I do that? Okay, do you want to self-publish, do you want to get a publisher? Is it for widows? Is it for anyone that's lost their person?

Just keep figuring it out as you go. Do you need to get a nice pen? Do you need to - this is where I am now? How do you market this? How do you - but a lot of the time it just came back to like, get out the journal and write. That's what it came down to a lot of time, just get out a journal and write and keep painting.

Krista: Kind of random questions come to me, so just kind of - this is how my brain works. But thinking about you now, versus you - I don't know if we want to go all the way back to your husband's passing or even you a year ago, but how do you feel like you've changed?

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Linda: I used to think this post-traumatic growth thing was a woo-woo term and it's actually not. It's a thing. It's a thing. I mean, it's a research thing, which is really cool. I've been reading all the research, I'm like, so true. So I think I'm different in I'm a lot more grateful. I'm less risk averse in some ways. I'm more like, let's do this.

I took my son to the Aridondacks and it was like, oh my god, I don't know how to - directions. And you coached me through that like okay, you're going to get lost. Just put that in the plan. Plan to get lost. And so I took my son to the Aridondacks and went hiking in the snow.

Like who is that person? Who is that person? And we did it. And I did all the things like rent the Vrbo and drive into the mountains and hike in the snow, put little icepicks on your shoes so you can hike in the snow. Who the heck is that person?

Krista: So less risk averse, more grateful.

Linda: Yeah. And I'm more connected to what's meaningful. I appreciate birds a lot.

Krista: Me too. I was just thinking about that this morning. It's so interesting that you would say that. I've had - so I'm in my new house and I've got these four picture windows and I've had the most beautiful birds coming up to my office, perching on my window. And I was just thinking about that this morning.

There was a time in my life where I probably didn't - I'm sure I knew birds existed. There was a genuine interest, appreciation, gratitude, connection that I've never felt before until now.

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Linda: Yeah. I think birds are a thing for widows.

Krista: Yeah. But it's not something that was intentional. Was it intentional for you?

Linda: No. I didn't think after my husband dies, I'm going to become a bird lover.

Krista: I think this is the part where you go buy binoculars and bird watch. That's what you're supposed to do, right? No.

Linda: I mean, okay, so here's a story. So when my husband was sick, we had this garden outside the window and he would see a hummingbird in the garden. And he was very private and he didn't really want people visiting and so I felt kind of alone and everybody wanted to help and I didn't know what to tell them what to do.

So we had this thing where I invited everybody to do origami hummingbirds. And so they all made - our friends and family made origami hummingbirds and I hung them all over the house and now I have - I made them into a little mobile.

Krista: A little mobile, I wish people could see it but it's beautiful.

Linda: So now we're in New York and so a hummingbird just visited the other day. And so it's like our little sign. My husband was atheist, very when you die, you die. And I was like nope. And he was like, okay. I was like, you know you're going to come back as a hummingbird and he's like, "Alright honey."

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Krista: Alright honey, whatever you say. My husband was an atheist too. So we didn't talk about it yet but I have loved watching the butterfly garden. Can you talk about that? It's so much more than just a butterfly garden.

Linda: Yeah, so we planted for the first death anniversary, we planted a whole midway garden and raised monarchs to release on the one-year mark, which of course, butterflies do not cooperate with your timeline. So of course...

Krista: Nor does grief.

Linda: No. So they did not emerge on the one-year timeline but it was so amazing last year they - so my husband's name was Jonathan. So right before caterpillars change into a chrysalis, they turn into a jay. So on that day, they all became jays. It was unbelievable.

Krista: No way.

Linda: Yeah, they're all jays. At first, I was like, they're all still caterpillars. And then I was like, wait, what?

Krista: Holy cow.

Linda: They're all jays.

Krista: I was obsessed with your butterflies before I knew that. Wow.

Linda: Yeah, butterflies are amazing. I mean, there's the obvious transformation metaphor, but there's also - I love that as we're raising them now, we just went through our second round and this year, they all came out early so they're gone. So we have none to release on the second year.

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They're flying around. They're on their own timeline, as my husband was too.

He was rarely on time. It's really amazing to see the actuality of them. The really gritty life like, caterpillars poop a lot, they poop a lot. And then when they're changing into a chrysalis, at least monarchs, I assume this is for other butterflies too, but their skin splits open.

It's like, I literally - I videoed this and it was totally by chance. I was just checking on it and I was like, honey, come here - I'm talking to my son - like, the caterpillar is turning into a chrysalis right now, right now. It took four minutes. It took four minutes from the time that it started and it splits its inner skin out and then it becomes - it looks like it's becoming green from the bottom up. It's like, what?

It looks like it's trying to get itself into a stuff sack but it's actually skin, it's just really cool to watch. And then at the end it drops off the parts it doesn't need. So I think it might be the head, I'm not sure, but right at the end, I was watching because I was like okay, get in there, because it was this big hunk of black stuff at the top that wasn't in, and I was like, get your legs or whatever that is in there.

And then all of a sudden it just fell. Okay, guess you don't need that part. And I kind of feel like that's - there's so many metaphors for grief here. It's hard, it's work, sometimes you have to rest, sometimes you have to just let your whole head drop off.

Krista: Yes, sometimes it feels like your skin...

Linda: Is splitting from the inside out.

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Krista: Yeah, and you turn into a big pile of mush and gush before...

Linda: And then you come out in the transformation and it's not like ta-da. It's like when they come out, it's like a big fat body and very little crinkly wings. And they have to pump all the fluid from their body into the wings, and then rest for 48 hours. It's like, yeah, that's what it's like.

Krista: Yeah, and I love also just the timeline aspect of it. That it isn't what you think it's going to be. And it's not predictable. So good.

Linda: And then even after you become a butterfly, it's not like you're like, ta-da.

Krista: Right, all my problems are solved.

Linda: I'm the transformational goddess now. Let me help you.

Krista: I love it. So what did we miss? What did you hope to talk about that we missed? What would other people benefit from hearing that we haven't talked about?

Linda: I think we talked about it. How to talk to yourself. Here was the question that I wrote down that I'm like, carrying with me, which is how can I not be mean to myself when I feel broken and ashamed? I feel like that's my takeaway.

There's coaching work, there's been so many really cool things about the book and living my way into this amazing future that I'm creating and all that, but that's really it. How can I not be mean to myself when I feel broken and ashamed?

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Krista: Love that. And I don't think it's - I also want to normalize for people because this is something I think a misconception is we can do this work but there is no pot of gold as you said, graduation, yes, you can complete a program but it's not like you do this kind of work and then you become magically transformed in such a way that your humanness disappears and you never have negative emotion and all your problems melt away.

That question that you've asked is a question I'm imagining you're going to be asking yourself on the regular going forward. It's a practice. It's like yoga or meditation where we're always just kind of coming back and coming back and coming back.

Linda: That's right. And then the more you practice that, over time, over time, over time, it becomes not like this theoretical thing. It becomes this intuitive thing where all of a sudden, you're totally lost and that voice pops in and it's like, I love you.

Krista: Which is the place I feel like I'm in. It's so easy for me to speak kindly to myself now. It's almost I have to remind myself that it doesn't come easily to other people. Because I've done so much work on it, my inner narrative, I'll be on a Peloton ride and an inner narrative is like, you've got this, you go, I'm so proud of you. It's just my dialogue now, but it wasn't always that way and I have to remember it's work to get there. And it's not that it's never. There's still a critical voice, I'm just faster to notice it and respond to it.

Linda: Right, and not believe it and just go oh, that's so interesting, you're sharing a thing, okay.

Krista: You're sharing again, right, noted. And it's easier for me to go of course, of course this would be the part where my inner critic would flare up because I'm about to do something scary. I'm about to do something new

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that I've never done before, or take a risk, and of course that would happen. Well listen, thank you so much for coming on the podcast. I wish you the best with your book and we'll link to it in the show notes but...

Linda: Thank you. You're amazing.

Krista: Love you.

Linda: Right back at you.

Krista: Alright, take care.

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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.