

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Krista St-Germain

[The Widowed Mom Podcast](#)

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 164, Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley.

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. Late July, how did we get here? I feel like my summer is flying by. Finally got out to Colorado, if you remember, had COVID in May when I was supposed to go, family was supposed to go, everybody got it and so we didn't get to go out like we had hoped. But we did get out over the 4th of July, it was lovely. And my dad got Elon Musk's new internet out there, so I could actually do coaching calls from the balcony of the cabin with the Rockies all around. It was truly lovely. So, I'm excited to go back out there and be able to work from there.

And since my son does online school he could actually do school from there, so that's exciting too. So that's amazing. Let's see, want to make sure, the price is increasing for Mom Goes On. If you have been thinking about it, July is the last month to join at current pricing. I have not raised the price in a long time and it's time. So, if you join before August you will get the current pricing. If you join after that it's going up heftily, if that's a word. So, I just want to remind you of that.

And in this week's episode, I'm so excited to introduce you to Jenna. I know I always say this in Widows Like Us interviews. But I do remember how isolating it was to just not have any examples of other women who were going through what I was going through. And Jenna is just a brilliant example of someone who has – I mean just really done the work and got herself in a very healthy, happy place.

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

And she had reached out to me in our online community, I hadn't heard from her in a while but she just reached out to me and she sent me a video of her wedding and a very nice thank you note. And was telling me how much the program had helped her and how much better her life was after having participated and I wanted her to be able to share her story with you. So, I hope you really enjoy it and that you really relate to Jenna and even if your story is different, that you find the similarities and you choose to believe that if she can do it, you can do it.

And with that, let's jump into my interview with Jenna Kelley.

Krista: Alright, welcome to the podcast, Jenna.

Jenna: Thank you.

Krista: I'm excited that you're here.

Jenna: Me too.

Krista: So, the way that this came about was that you reached out a couple of weeks ago and sent me the sweetest message. Add not only was it just this kind message about your coaching experience but it had a video in it with your wedding. It was your wedding video. I can speak, really I can. And it was just like, wow, what a touching story and so I'm so glad to have you on the podcast so you can talk a little bit about who you are and what you've been through. And I know our listeners will resonate with that story.

So let me have you just start by introducing yourself. So, tell us a little bit about yourself, how you became a widow, that kind of thing.

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

Jenna: Well, my name's Jenna, and I became a widow in 2019. My husband was – he had wanted to race jetboats for as long as I could remember. He had a passion for it. And we always would go and watch the races and things like that and I'm like, "This is crazy. There's no way you would ever do this." And so, I didn't even think about it being a possibility.

And he kind of just got in with the community of jetboat racers and because he was interested in it and he became really good friends with someone that was just getting started in the racing series. He had done it for a couple of years. And so, in the race boats you have to have a driver and a navigator. And so, one of his friends asked him to be the navigator for his boat which was a huge honor to him. And I'm not the kind of wife that says, "No, you can't do it", all of that stuff. And we just had a really open relationship for everything that each other wanted to do.

And so, I was like, "Okay, if you really want to do this." And they were in the slowest class. And so, I was like, it's pretty safe, the fastest they go is 60 miles per hour I think or something like that. And so, I was like, "It's not bad, because some of these have plane engines in them and they run jet fuel and all this stuff." And so, I'm like, "Man, there's no way I would have let you do that but the slowest class I'm fine with." And so, he navigated one race and they did really well.

And then they were super excited and got their boat ready and they were doing a second race. And this was later on in the year so they started in June in the first race and the second race they did in August. And after seeing the first one I was pretty comfortable with it because I saw how fast they went. It wasn't super scary or anything like that. And the second race they did was on the Snake River. And they were racing the first leg of their race and the water had receded quite a bit from when they had practiced a few days before.

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

And when they were going along they hit a rock and just it was instant impact and he passed away at the scene. And I wasn't there. I didn't see anything that happened. And so, for me it was pretty traumatic, not only just losing him but not knowing what happened. It was just so unbelievable to me that he was healthy, he was young, and he just instantly was gone. And so, he had an aortic rupture on impact when the boat hit the rock. And so yeah, we lost him that day.

I was at work. I didn't think that it was going to be unsafe at all. After, like I said, after seeing what the first race was like I was like, "No, I'm just going to go to work." It kind of made me a little bit nervous but I'm like, "It's fine." So, I went to work and then people were just texting me updates on how they were doing. And I had gotten a video right before the accident and they were in first place and they were just, you know, I noticed he was just having the time of his life. And then that all happened and it was minutes later. And so, it was just a really, really traumatic thing for our whole entire family.

Krista: Yeah, totally. And how old were you and how old was he?

Jenna: I was 34. No, we were both 30. I was 34 and he was 35.

Krista: Okay. And you have one child.

Jenna: One child, yeah, Macy, and she was seven when the accident happened. She's 10 now.

Krista: Okay, yeah. And so, this was in 2019, you were both 34. Yeah, so he goes away to a race and then just doesn't come back.

Jenna: Yes, yeah.

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

Krista: Yeah. What was your life like before all of this happened?

Jenna: It was great. We own a business together and we worked together every single day and still loved being at home and hanging out with each other. And we traveled a lot and we were excited because Macy was finally at an age where she could go on some of our dealer meetings for our business together and things like that. And so, we just had a lot of things to look forward to in the future. And our families are super close. I'm really close with his family because his family purchased the business and then we started working in it and buying it together.

And I still work there and with his family and things like that. So, we're still really close as far as my in-laws.

Krista: That can add a whole another level of complexity when you were business partners or when they own a business. And then I see a lot of widows in a place where they're then trying to take over the business. Who took over his role in the business?

Jenna: So, at the beginning it was just basically me trying to do a lot of it. His mom didn't work in the business but his dad did. So, he has 50% ownership of the business and he works there. But he really struggled with alcoholism, especially after Steve passed away. And so, I went back to work the next week and just put my head down and started doing as much as I could. And honestly I don't know if I was really doing anything, just because I was in such a crazy headspace. But I felt like I had to hold it all together for everybody.

And it was really difficult. Our relationship was strained during that time. And luckily he ended up going into rehab and he's not been drinking for nearly two years now which was awesome. But yeah, it's a struggle. It's still a struggle sometimes because it's hard for them with me moving forward

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

with my life and seeing it happen basically front row. And also knowing that their son was supposed to be there. And so that's been really something we've had to really navigate and me trying to be as open as possible with them and still respectful of them and their son.

Krista: Yeah. I remember some coaching we did on that. And it never fails, the relationships that we're the closest to are usually the ones that we find the most challenging after loss. Not that there's any blanket rules or I don't want to overgeneralize but my goodness, in-law relationships can be challenging alone after a loss. And then throw in, and we own a business together and throw in some substance challenges and hello. Yeah, there's some opportunities.

So okay, fast forward for me from when Steve passed to when you found either the podcast or coaching, how did you come into the orbit of the podcast, and coaching, and what was life like when you decided that you wanted to reach out?

Jenna: So, I, honestly, I was just Google searching everything that I possibly could to make me better. I was just in this crazy head space to where I was just trying to keep myself busy. I was mowing a lawn, organizing, cleaning, working, just driving myself crazy trying to stay busy. Because the minute I sat down I would get so much anxiety and just start, you know, I just felt like I couldn't breathe if I was sitting in my own skin.

And so, I was Googling everything I could to try to figure out how do I help myself because I knew I wasn't being the best mom for my daughter because I was just avoiding everything basically. And something came up online that I really found interesting, it was about posttraumatic growth. And that really resonated with me because I was like, man, if I could just take all this anxiety, and pain, and just I had a lot of energy. I wasn't sleeping but I

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

felt like I had a lot of energy. If I could take this and turn it into something good then maybe good could come out of this.

And so, your name came up when I was looking at the posttraumatic growth. And so, I found you on the podcast. And it was probably a month after Steve's accident that I found you on the podcast.

Krista: Oh wow, super early.

Jenna: Yeah, it was, but it was so helpful because I was like, "She's real. She knows what it's like. She's gone through it." And you weren't sugarcoating anything. And so, I just was constantly listening to the podcast to get caught up on everything. And I would be cleaning and mowing the lawn and all that stuff. And I was just listening to all the podcasts and soaking in all the tools that I possibly could to make all this make sense. And it was just so helpful in me just being able to sit for 30 minutes and think and really be comfortable in my own skin.

And so that's, I don't know, it was just super helpful because I just couldn't be in my own skin. And so just really learning how to process a lot of what was going on was really helpful.

Krista: So out of curiosity, had you heard about posttraumatic growth before your Google search? Was that a new thing for you?

Jenna: No, not at all. I was doing some counselling about once every two weeks at the beginning and then once a month after that. And I was seeing a Christian counsellor, and I love him, I know him personally. And I just got to a point to where I was this is good but it's not bringing me into a new place. And so, he helped me process a lot of the trauma because my mind was just filling in blanks of what happened with the accident because I didn't know exactly what had happened.

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

And so, I just kept trying to fill in the blanks and I was waking up with these nightmares. And I would sleep and then I would just wake up just panicked. And so, the counsellor really helped me with a lot of that stuff. But just moving forward was what I really wanted. I wanted to not forget about what happened but get out of the place where I just felt suffocated.

Krista: Yeah. You're bringing up something I hope other people heard too because I have a feeling some people are out there and identified with what you just said. Which was about even though you weren't actually there at the accident that some people might be inclined to think that not having been there means it would be somehow less traumatic or that it wouldn't be traumatic necessarily. People have lots of opinions about what trauma is and isn't.

But I think it's really worth noting that it's entirely possible that you didn't see any of what happened and yet experience it as hugely traumatic. And that that doesn't mean there's anything wrong with you or that you've done anything wrong. But it just may be an aspect of trauma that you don't understand or didn't see coming.

Jenna: Yeah, exactly.

Krista: Yeah. So maybe you need to get support for that, exists and you might not think it does.

Jenna: For sure because you do, if you don't have answers you make up all these things in your head and all these terrible scenarios. And I didn't see him when he took his last breath and I don't know if he was able to talk and all that stuff. And so, it's just all these things that you're thinking about and you're filling in the blanks. And trying to figure it out and then it's just, you know, sometimes you do need help with that. And that was

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

tremendously helpful because I was actually able to relax and get some sleep. And I was able to process some of that stuff.

Krista: Yeah. So, when you'd said before that you just couldn't really sit down and be comfortable in your own skin, do you still have those moments now or how do you deal with moments like that when they happen, what's different?

Jenna: I do definitely still have some of those moments. And I feel like it's more of a fear than anything. If my current husband is out of town or I can't get a hold of him or things, I feel that same anxious feeling cropping up. And so, I do the same thing, I try to keep myself busy and all that. And I'm like, "Okay, I really need to figure out what's going on here." And so now I'm able to sit there and think, okay, it's normal for you to feel scared for what you've been through. And really process why I'm feeling this way instead of getting irritated and angry and all that stuff.

I'm actually able to sit here and be like, "Okay, I feel anxious right now. These are probably the reasons why I feel anxious." And I can really sit with being anxious and know that it's okay to be anxious.

Krista: That's so powerful.

Jenna: Well, it is because it just passes so much more quickly because if you don't acknowledge that you're having these feelings it just snowballs. And I had times where I felt like my heart was racing and it was a physical response and it wasn't healthy. And that scared me too. And then I would, you know, it was just like a snowball of things happening because I wasn't actually processing my feelings. And knowing that it's okay to just feel crappy. And sometimes you just feel crappy and that's okay. And so that's where that was just super helpful to me to understand that it's okay.

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

Because then if you don't then you think something's wrong with you. And that's where I was. I was just like, man, why can't I get past this or why am I feeling this way? And so, it's just normal.

Krista: And judge yourself for it, yeah.

Jenna: For sure.

Krista: Or sometimes I think people listen to the podcast and sometimes they think what I'm teaching is think positively. And that's not at all what I want to teach people. I mean nothing wrong with positive thinking but when it's kind of like thought swapping or rushing to get away from what is actually true for you, or being so uncomfortable with a feeling like anxiety that we have to kind of make it something we talk ourselves out of. It's okay, you're okay, it's fine, don't be anxious. As opposed to what you said which was, "No, it's okay to feel this way."

And you kind of befriend yourself as you are experiencing what you are experiencing. Instead of trying to shame yourself for having the experience, tell yourself you're wrong for having it or talk yourself out of it and find the silver lining.

Jenna: Yeah. Well, and that's, you know, I think we had talked about that in some of our coaching too is we just talk to ourselves so terribly when we don't feel happier, just all the good warm fuzzy feelings. And I think we do that in our lives no matter what a lot of the times, especially as women and moms, and things like that. If things aren't perfect, we feel crappy about ourselves.

Krista: Yeah, we blame ourselves for it.

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

Jenna: Yeah, exactly, what else can I do to make this better. And it doesn't have to be better, this is just life.

Krista: Yeah, right, exactly. And I think part of it is we've bought into that cultural messaging that says happiness is the goal. And if we're not happy, something's wrong, we've done something wrong, we should be doing something different which is just absolutely nonsense.

Jenna: Yeah. Well, it's not realistic at all.

Krista: It's not, it's not realistic.

Jenna: Nothing's ever going to be perfect all the time and if it was it would be boring and we wouldn't like it.

Krista: Exactly. So, knowing what you know now, if you could go back in time, I always like asking this question, if you could go back in time and you could give yourself some wisdom during those early really ugly days of grief, what do you think you would tell yourself?

Jenna: I would probably tell myself to calm down. Just take some time and you don't have to be everything to everyone. And that's kind of where, I rushed going back into work and I was trying to figure out all the best ways that I could be supportive of Macy. And just trying to help everybody else so I didn't really have to focus on myself. And that is so important is just to take the time to focus on yourself and be okay with not being okay. And that's the biggest thing is I just wanted to be better.

I just wanted to feel better. I just wanted to move forward so I didn't have all these anxious feelings all the time. And what I was doing was actually creating more anxious feelings. And so, I just think that even if it's super uncomfortable and sucks, you just have to sit there and deal with your

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

feelings and not just rush back into life because something so traumatic, I mean it has to be acknowledged. And that's where I was just like, "No, I'm okay, just moving forward", and all this stuff when there is a storm brewing inside me.

And I just felt so overwhelmed, and defensive, and angry all the time. And I was really short with my daughter. And I think we coached a lot on overwhelm because I just wouldn't allow myself to just relax, take a nap sometimes. If I'm feeling exhausted I don't need to just keep pushing myself and that was a really – it was so helpful for me to actually give myself permission to just relax, just if I have a day off you don't have to spend the whole entire day doing every single chore that ever needs done at that.

It's okay if there's dishes in the sink. You can do them later. And just listen to your body. And that's the biggest thing is just really, really acknowledging what's going on in your mind and your body and so yeah.

Krista: What did you notice, speaking of your body, what did you notice happened internally with your body in grief?

Jenna: Well, I just wasn't taking care of my body because I wasn't processing those feelings or eating was hard, sleeping was hard. I felt just a constant weight on my chest. I couldn't take a full breath for months. And that's anxiety for me but I dealt with breathing issues and things as I was a kid. And I think I almost manifested that, going back to that place where I just felt out of control.

And I just felt like when Steve was here I had so much control and I was two steps ahead of everything and all this stuff. And then he was gone and I just felt like I couldn't ever get back to feeling like that again. And so, it

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

was just everything, everything was sore, I was exhausted. It really physiologically it affects your body a lot more than you ever realize.

Krista: For sure. And I think even to your point earlier, even if you had total feelings mastery and you were marvelous from the get go about letting yourself feel whatever you felt. I still think the impacts on our bodies can be tremendous, even if we're 'doing it right'. Yeah, and different for every person. Did you have much widow fog?

Jenna: I did. I still feel like I do sometimes. I feel like I was so sharp, and I don't know if that's just me. I don't know. I felt like I was on top of things all the time. And I feel a lot better now but I still feel like there's some things where I'm just like, I don't know if I'm ever going to get that back. And so yeah, widow fog was definitely, I just even looking back now, I'm trying to remember how those first few months were. I just feel like I was just a zombie walking through life. And so, I mean widow fog was definitely, and going back to work was really difficult for me.

I remember missing due dates and certain things that have to be done on certain times and all this stuff. And I just felt like I just couldn't get caught up. And so that was really, really hard. And I mean I think it was good for me to keep my brain kind of active too because I kind of felt like I worked through some of that widow fog more quickly than I could have if I was sitting at home. So, I think you do have to kind of take a break from the grief every once in a while.

Krista: Yeah, and there's science that backs that up.

Jenna: Yeah. And I had a really and still do have a really good crew at work. They're like my family. And so, if I came in and had a day where I just wanted to talk about Steve and what I was going through, they sat there and talked with me. And it was really good to have that support because he

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

was like a brother to them too. And so, we just have a really, really great family that we work with. And so, it wasn't terrible because I had people there that understood and were going through some of the grief with me.

And so, it was kind of a blessing to be able to have that because I felt like I had to be at work to be able to have that release when I needed it. And if I just needed a hug, I would go out and one of them would just hold me for a minute until I felt that calm. And so, I don't know, I just feel really blessed that I had that support system at work because a lot of people don't. And it's so important to feel like you have a space where you can talk, even if you're a worker. Sitting in the car and you need to call somebody and things like that.

It's just making sure you're reaching out when you feel like you are at that point.

Krista: Did you feel like there was ever a downside to having worked with him? So, the reason I ask that question is because I relate so much to what you said about having such a great and supportive work environment. And also, because I worked with my husband there were opportunities and memories everywhere. How did you experience that?

Jenna: I struggled with that a lot because that was our future. We were growing that business together. We were super excited about it. And Steve especially, it's a motor sports business so I mean that's every guy's dream is to be able to have motorcycles and four-wheelers right at their fingertips. And so just seeing his excitement at work was just so fulfilling for me. It was because to see him so happy and then just to have that all disappear because in reality it was his dream to own that business and grow that business. And I was just supporting him.

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

And so going back there and just trying to figure out, I knew I loved my job, I loved working with everybody that I worked with but going back and trying to figure out how to do it without him it was kind of like I lost the north star. It's just I didn't know what direction to go in. And I was just trying to get through each day. And a couple of months after, I think it was in November because he passed away in August, my brother-in-law, so Steve's sister's husband reached out and just said they were planning on having a baby and all that stuff.

And he worked for a shipping company and his hours just were super crazy. He did really well there but he just wanted something more stable so that he could be there more for his family. And we got along really great and he's like, "Hey, I don't want to step on any toes or if you feel comfortable with this conversation, just let me know but I would really like to help and not take Steve's job." But kind of fill that role where we felt like there is more of a general manager there, somebody that was an employee advocate for everybody.

And just I don't know, when he sent me that, he said he spent a couple of nights forming this text because he didn't want to make me feel like he was just trying to take over or anything like that. And so, when he sent that to me I just started bawling because it was a blessing. But also, it was an end of Steve and I's dream. You know what I mean? It wasn't going to be us anymore and it was going to be him helping with all of this stuff.

And I love him to death, I don't have any bad words to say about him but it was really hard for me to grasp that reality that okay, I have to let go of some of this and I wanted him to work. There was no question in my mind that I wanted Adam to be there but it was just really hard for me to wrap my mind around the idea of what was supposed to be changing into something else. And so, I was really defensive about the business, changing anything or anything like that. I just want everything to stay the same.

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

But now that I've processed some of that, it's definitely helped. There's still some things I'm like, "Man, Steve would absolutely love this." Or just some of the changes that we've made and I'm really proud of the direction that we've taken the business. Since Adam's been there he's really been helpful at supporting me and us growing ideas and just making it into such a stronger business. I think Steve would be really excited about it and so now I'm happy. Before it was just super scary and hard. It's hard to go there and know that he's not sitting in that office. And I don't know, it's just so hard.

Krista: Yeah, totally makes sense. It's so interesting how it unfolds too, the things that you don't think will kind of knock you over sometimes.

Jenna: Yeah, exactly. I remember someone had mentioned that we should update our logo. And I'm like, "No, everything's going to stay the same. We're not changing anything." I was just mad, and then I'm like okay, this is a really old logo. So, it took me a day to process it and so like, okay, it's just me holding onto what was before. And so, it's just, you know, your brain just takes you in funny places sometimes.

Krista: Yeah. So where were you and what made you decide then to start coaching? So, you said you discovered the podcast pretty soon, you were looking for resources pretty soon, then what made you decide to take the leap?

Jenna: So, I was, like I said earlier I was just feeling a lot of overwhelm. I didn't have control over what was going on. And at that point, Cory and I had been together for – so my new husband, we had been together for quite a while. And it was wonderful. Our relationship has been so wonderful from the beginning. But I was so scared that I was going into this relationship because of grief, because I was lonely, because I was just trying to fill a void.

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

So, between feeling all the overwhelm that I was feeling at home and at work. And just trying to make sure – Macy goes to a private school so there's a lot of volunteer things that go on there. And Steve did a lot of that stuff and so for me to fill all of those roles was just so much for me. And I just didn't feel like I was in control at all. And then dating Cory and all that stuff, I just wanted to make sure I was in the best mental space that I could be in to be able to move forward in a relationship, and at work, and at home.

Because I wasn't trusting myself, honestly, I wasn't trusting my thoughts and my feelings and all of that. And so just to get those resources to help me work through all of the overwhelm that I was feeling and making sure that I was in the right space to really nurture this amazing relationship that had formed. And I just wanted it to be right and I wanted to make sure I was healthy mentally for all of that.

Krista: Would you have described it as a self-trust issue before kind of?

Jenna: No, not at all. Not at all. So now it's like, okay, these are actual feelings and these are actual thoughts that I'm having. And I have control over that. But I was just thinking, I'm just crazy for wanting to move into a relationship so fast and wanting to do all these things at work. And feeling overwhelmed because of living everyday life. I just thought I was going crazy, honestly. And now it's like, these are normal feelings.

Krista: I love that your sense of self-trust grew because of coaching. And I see that happen so much but what's interesting to me about it is that even though I know that's a huge part of what we're working on, it's not usually something I think most of us are aware of that we need to work on. We just think there's something wrong with us or all sorts of things that we say but a lot of it does boil down to how much do we trust ourselves.

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

Jenna: Yes, for sure and it's huge. I mean to know that okay, I am fully capable of forming my own thoughts and feelings and controlling what's happening in my life. Obviously outside things I can't control but I can control how I'm dealing with everything that's thrown my way. And just taking some time for yourself and knowing that if you're not feeling – it's hard to say. It's hard to explain but some days you just aren't 100%, you aren't yourself, you aren't, and there's something going on.

And so, taking that time to just really sit and understand why you're feeling these ways and I don't know. Just like I said, trusting that you can process this and you can deal with it and you can move forward. And you are having legitimate feelings. You're not just crazy, and so it's just, yeah.

Krista: Yeah. And it sounds like for you too, you can trust yourself to make decisions, dating again and what to do with your business and what to do. Since I can't do all the volunteer things, can I trust myself to decide what I can handle? And can I trust myself to be kind to myself through all of that? Yeah. Well, what was it like in your brain dating again? Was your brain mean to you? Did you have a lot of thoughts about shouldn't be dating, those kinds of things? People always want to talk most about dating.

Jenna: I was really more scared of what everybody else thought. And that was because it was really soon, it was about six months after Steve passed away that we officially started dating. Cory had been there for me basically since Steve had passed away and he, you know, I think he just really wanted to be supportive for me and for Macy. He was in a relationship when Steven had passed away. And I think after that he just kind of realized that life is short and that relationship wasn't the direction that he wanted to take his life.

And so that relationship eventually ended up ending and since the day Steve passed away he was here trying to help with stuff. And I wouldn't

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

really let anybody help me with anything. So, then he was like, “Okay, you’re not going to let me help. I’m going to go to Macy’s soccer games.” And he helped her build her toys that she got for Christmas and things like that. And he was just really supportive because he knew what a terrible place we were in.

And he was just a really good friend to us. And then me seeing the bond that Macy grew with him made me fall for him more than anything just because she would just wait by the window and she nicknamed him Corn Dog. Well, my sister-in-law nicknamed him Corn Dog. So, she would always say she was waiting for Corn to come over. And so yeah, they just fell in love with each other and then oh my gosh, I have feelings for this guy and I don’t know what to do with all of this.

And I thought it was just me feeling lonely or trying to feel better, not feel so awful and all this stuff. And so, it was really hard. And then I’m like, “Oh my gosh.” Because I literally live down the street from my in-laws.

Krista: It’s a pretty small town.

Jenna: Yeah, community, for sure. And then I work with them and so they’re going to know exactly what’s going on in my life. I can’t just hide, that I’m moving forward with my life. And so, I knew that I had to tell them right away what was going on. And my sister-in-law, Steve’s sister and her husband, they were another one of my just number one supporters from day one. And so, I brought them over and my mother-in-law over and we had pizza and I told them what was going on. And I hadn’t told Macy yet but I just wanted them to know.

I didn’t want them to think I was hiding anything from them. And so, for the most part it was a really good talk and interaction and all that because they loved Cory too. And so, I don’t know, it was good but nerve wracking. I’ve

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

never been so nervous in my whole entire life than to tell them that I was dating somebody again. I was sick to my stomach and nervous sweating. Oh gosh, that was probably one of the harder conversations I've ever had to have just because I just didn't want to hurt them because they have always been so supportive of me.

And I wouldn't be in the place I am in my life without all the support that they've given me since. I met Steve when I was 17 years old. And so, I felt like they were my family. And so, it was definitely really hard. And then just navigating boundaries with them and all that too, just to know that this is my life now and establish that this is the direction that we're going. And I know it was hard for them because like I said earlier, that was their son and this was his home and his life and all that. And so, to see somebody new in that position he was supposed to be in was super difficult for them.

Krista: Yeah. And I think it also just goes to show that we really can't control other people's response. I mean somebody else might be listening and their family might have a completely different response. They might be very upset, they might be very hurt. And it's not about you or your relationship with Cory. But other people will have their opinions, so it sounds like it was a lot easier for you because they were supportive. But it also wouldn't have been a commentary on you if they hadn't been.

Jenna: Yeah. And that was one thing that – well, coaching helped me with because I was just so worried about everybody else's thoughts. And I felt like I was in a fishbowl. I felt like everybody was judging me and looking at what I was going to do with my life and this new relationship, and all of this stuff. And I didn't even think that it was possible that those thoughts don't matter. I mean they matter to them but they don't affect how I can live my life. And so that's where coaching really helped me is I understand that they have these thoughts, I can't control them, I can't change them.

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

And yeah, sometimes it does affect me. I don't want them to feel that way about me but I can't change it.

Krista: There's so much more freedom when we can just, okay, what if I could be myself, be authentic, be honest to the degree that I value? And then let other people think what they may and support myself through it as opposed to trying to make myself who I think they want to be just in case they might not approve.

Jenna: Yeah. I mean even before Steve passed away I had those tendencies. I just wanted to be perfect for everybody, you know what I mean? I just wanted to help with everything and make sure everybody was okay.

Krista: Yeah. Well, we're kind of taught that. As women we're kind of taught that we're supposed to do that. We're supposed to make people feel good. And it's put into our brain at such a young age that what we say creates other people's feelings. When you say this, I feel that. And so, I think we're kind of set up to become people pleasers.

Jenna: Yes, for sure, definitely.

Krista: Yeah. What about, I'm curious, I don't remember knowing this during coaching but in watching your video, your wedding video which literally, I think was seven minutes long, I'm pretty sure.

Jenna: It's really long.

Krista: Genuinely cried the whole time it was just that touching. So, your first husband was into speedboats. Your second husband is into motocross?

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

Jenna: Yeah. So, he races snow bikes. So, it's basically a dirt bike with a snowmobile track on it. And my husband also, they were really good friends. And so, he also loved snow biking and things like that, not to the level that Cory does. And that's kind of how Steve got into it is because Cory was doing it. And so anyways, and that's kind of like when Cory and I first started dating. I'm like, okay, my husband died because he was racing this boat and now I'm falling in love with this person that loves racing things.

And I'm like, am I crazy, what is going on, how do I? And so that's when I started putting walls up. I'm just like, I have too much anxiety. I can't do this to myself. Something's going to happen to him. I'm going to put myself through this again, all these thoughts that were just ruminating because I just knew he was going to die. And I'm like, everybody's going to die eventually. But it's how do I put myself into that position and know that there's a great possibility that something could happen to Cory too.

And so that, I really had struggled with that a lot. And every time Cory would go and ride in the back country or any of that stuff. It would just give me so much anxiety and I'm like, "I can't do this. I can't do this to myself." All this and then just I think I just really needed to process that we all have our time that we're going to be here on this Earth. And Steve was having fun. And he went out in the first place doing exactly what he loved and so I don't know. And that's kind of where I'm at now with Cory and myself. We just don't know. I can't control when our time is to go.

And so just working through some of that. I still get anxious when he goes and does stuff. And he loves riding dirt bikes and all that. He doesn't really race anymore just because I kind of drew a line with some of that stuff. I was just like, okay, snow bikes, I understand that you've done this, this is your passion, I'm not going to take that away from you. And it's snow, so if you're on a circle track and you wreck in the snow, it's not as bad as

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

something else. But I do try to justify a lot of that in my brain too so that it makes me feel better.

But he does most stuff for fun now but he does have a passion for purchasing and fixing up dirt bikes. And so, we have all kinds of stuff.

Krista: Well, kudos to you, kudos to you. I mean I'm just thinking about how many women I have seen not want to be in relationships again because they're afraid of the pain of the loss. So, kudos to you for not only being willing to put yourself out there to experience loss in a relationship again knowing that that's always a possibility. But also, to be brave enough to navigate something so similar to the potential of something similar to the way that you lost your first husband.

I really do think if we all just decided the worst thing that could happen is a feeling and yes, I could be sad if I lost it but also I'd probably be sad if I didn't go all in on something I want. And then we just kind of chose, we didn't make decisions to avoid loss and the potential of loss. We really made decisions that are what we want, knowing that negative emotion is probably going to be a part of it at some point because you're right, we're all going to die. We don't know when.

And it might have nothing to do, it could be just totally unforeseen and have nothing to do with a hobby or something you knew about in advance. We have no idea.

Jenna: Exactly. And that's where, like you said, just don't stop yourself from doing something you love just because of this fear. And that's where I had so many fears when Cory and I first started dating about what other people were thinking. And about his racing snow bikes and about what if something happens to him, what's going to happen to Macy? How can she

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

handle something like that again? And that was one of my biggest fears is I don't want her to fall in love with him and then get her heart broken again.

And that was soul crushing for me to know that she could possibly have to go through something like that again. But also, I have this wonderful man in front of me that treats me better than I could have ever imagined. And he loves Macy and he's very goal oriented. And we have so many similar thoughts about how we want our life to be. And I was willing to throw that away because of fear.

Krista: Yeah. And Macy would miss out on that too.

Jenna: Yes, exactly. And she still gets to be crazy and ride her dirt bikes and four-wheelers and all the stuff that she loves to do and she loved to do with her dad too. She actually races snowmobiles now. And so, she did a whole circuit this last year and she got first place in her circuit [crosstalk].

Krista: And she's 10?

Jenna: She's 10 and she's the shyest little girl on Earth. You would never imagine that she would do something like that but she absolutely loves it. And so yeah, it's just I have all these adrenalin junkies in my life, so yeah, she's doing awesome.

Krista: Well, Jenna, what did we miss? I honestly can't believe the time with you has gone by as fast as it came but what do we miss? Was there something you hoped to cover or talk about, tell people, that we missed?

Jenna: I don't think so. I think just like we talked about, just trusting yourself and trusting your feelings, and really just sitting with what is natural in your body. And that's kind of the biggest thing for me is just being able to sit still and understand when my body needs rest and when to navigate all this

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

stuff that I need to navigate. And you don't have to be sad all the time. There is times to be sad and you can choose those times. You know what I mean?

[Inaudible] feeling like really overwhelmed with everything and you just keep going, and keep going, and keep going. It eventually just runs your body down. And so, making space for that. When there's death-versary coming up or Father's Day is coming up or anything like that, just taking the time and the space and a day just to be in your own skin. And really process some of the stuff that's going on because I feel like leading up to those days I always get kind of on edge. And I'm just irritated with everything and memorial day, that day I was just, I felt so irritated all day long.

Because I just wanted to go to the cemetery and sit with Steve and just process some of that. And I was avoiding it all day long. And I just noticed myself getting cranky all day. And so, you don't even realize sometimes that you're avoiding and pushing that stuff off but you really have to just sit there and process.

Krista: And sometimes it clicks and you go, I see what I'm doing.

Jenna: Yeah, exactly, that's what we were, it was later in the day, I'm like, "I really wanted to go to the cemetery today and we haven't been yet." And that's probably why I've been so crabby with everybody.

Krista: Yeah. And I think sometimes too our body just remembers, I was reading on Facebook, a good friend of mine in high school, her boyfriend at the time and you could just tell, they were just so good for one another. He died pretty young in life and she had posted on Facebook about how she was just feeling really upset and it didn't make any sense to her at all. And then she realized that it was his 45th birthday and it was just like, oh, yeah,

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

okay, connecting the dots. We don't always know what's going on. There's usually a good reason for it.

Well, thank you so much for being willing to come and share your story.

Jenna: Yeah. Thank you. Thanks for having me on.

Krista: Yeah. I'm really proud of you. I'm really happy for you. And honestly, just so thrilled that you sent me that video and let me be part of that because I sometimes have no idea what happens to people after they do the coaching program. I don't know where life takes them or what they do. And so even though I wasn't there at your wedding I felt like I was a part of it. And to know that I had played some role in helping you trust yourself more and be happier with life is just so rewarding for me so thank you.

Jenna: Yeah. No, I appreciate you so much. Thank you for everything.

Krista: You're so welcome. If people want to get in touch with you what is the best way to do that, if they have a question for you or want to connect with you?

Jenna: Probably just on Facebook, yeah, Facebook, Jenna Kelley, it's K-E-L-L-E-Y. I have messenger on there so if anybody has any questions.

Krista: Okay, not a common name or anything.

Jenna: No, I know.

Krista: It was also fun to see your new name on the Zoom, I'm used to seeing your old name so it was fun to see your new name. Alright, well, thank you so much for coming. I really appreciate it.

Ep #164: Widows Like Us: An Interview with Jenna Kelley

Jenna: Thanks, Krista.

Krista: Yeah, I love you.

Jenna: Love you too.

Krista: Okay, take care, bye.

If you like what you've been hearing on this podcast and want to create a future you can truly get excited about 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 that you can move forward with confidence.

Please don't settle for a new normal that's less than you deserve. Go to coachingwithkrista.com and click work with me for details and the next steps. I can't wait to meet you.