Ep #83: A Different Perspective on Widowhood: A Widows Unfiltered Interview with Suzanne Gibbs

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Krista St-Germain

The Widowed Mom Podcast

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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 83, Widows Unfiltered: An Interview with Suzanne Gibbs.

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 everyone. Welcome to another episode of the podcast. I just looked at the number of times this podcast has been downloaded, and we're at over 113,000, which is really fun.

So you know what I would love for a late holiday present? I would love it if you would share this with someone who you think could use it. Maybe they're a widowed mom. Maybe they're just someone who would benefit from some grief resources, but I really, really want to reach at least a million widows. At least. That's a great start. I would just be so honored and grateful if you would share this podcast with someone who you think could benefit. So thank you in advance for doing that.

I also just want to take a moment because I noticed as I was planning to do this intro and seeing the date that it was going to be airing for you. Because I always record it beforehand right? It's airing on December 28th, which is my late husband's birthday. So happy birthday Hugo wherever you are. I love you.

Before we get into the interview, I also haven't done a listener shoutout, a little listener love in a while. So I was looking through some of the reviews as of late. I noticed this one, which I hadn't yet mentioned on the podcast. It's so fun for me because I see this woman and she's now in my program. She wrote this review before she joined, and it's already been so much fun to watch her change in the last couple of months since she joined.

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So she wrote, “It will be five years this month since I lost my sweetheart. We have six children. He was my first kiss and my best friend. I've listened to almost every one of Krista’s podcasts in the past two weeks, and some of them I've listened to four or five times. I think it’s saved my life. Every year that passes seems to get worse. I've tried to do the things people tell you to do. Be grateful, stay busy, stay strong for your kids. I've tripled my income, earned a masters, run a farm with 50 head of sheep, remodeled my house, put three kids through college, and so on.

“I found myself in my closet crying last week because I'm more lonely than ever before. I found the podcast and listened to How to Feel Better Now. For the first time, I decided I can find happiness again. I may not know how quite yet, but I know I can figure this out. I've got this. I can't thank Krista enough for taking the time to help me.”

It makes me so happy when people who haven’t even coached with me, just listened to the podcast. Never underestimate the benefit of what you can learn just by listening and applying what you learn. Tevya, it is such an honor to work with you. It’s so much fun for me to watch you take your life and your mindset and your mental and emotional wellbeing seriously. That’s why you're changing your life, right? It’s never me. It’s always I just give the tools and you do the work. You're doing the work, and it’s really been fun to watch you. So thank you for your review. I love you too.

Okay. Let me introduce you to my client, and I consider friend now, Suzanne Gibbs. Suzanne and I have known each other for about a year and a half or so. I wanted to bring you Suzanne’s story because it’s not the usual widow story that I get. I know some of you have some pretty specific ideas of who I work with and probably some limiting thoughts on that, right. Like I only work with women who their husbands died recently, and they're sad. That’s not it at all.

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I work with all kinds of widows who are moms. All kinds. Husband died years ago. Husband just died. In a happy marriage. In a challenging marriage. Husband died of some long-term illness or an accident, but also sometimes by suicide. All over the place, right. Little kids, grown kids, grandkids, you name it. Sometimes, as in Suzanne's case, people who were married, lost their spouse, and remarried, and then that didn't go as planned. That's at the point when Suzanne and I met.

I just have so much love and respect for her as a woman and also as a widow. You'll hear all about it in the interview. I don't want to spoil it all, but she and her husband adopted a son. While he was battling brain cancer, adopted their son's sibling. Then she was left to parent both boys. She's just a rock star.

I think you're going to really benefit about hearing from some of the challenges that we can face even after we've gotten through the loss, and then some of the challenges that can come about later. Like what happens when you get into a marriage afterwards and it's not working? How do you rebuild from that? How do you process the grief from that? Then how do you deal with kind of that cumulative effect of grief?

Suzanne is just a shining example of figuring out how to be your own hero, again, right? And figuring out how to be your own champion. She does that so brilliantly. It's because she's put in a lot of hard work since we started working together. She's just a really great person. So with that, let's just get into it. Here is my interview with the lovely and beautiful Suzanne Gibbs.

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Krista: Welcome Suzanne. I'm excited to have you on the podcast. I've been looking forward to this.

Suzanne: Same here.

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Krista: Feels like we've been through a lot. It's been a while since I've known you and we've coached. So I'm excited to have you on the podcast. So why don't we start. Just tell the listeners who you are, anything you want them to know about you. Your background, your late husband, all that stuff.

Suzanne: Sure. I am a mom of two boys outside of San Francisco in California. I'm not a native west coastian. I am from the east coast actually. We moved out here for my late husband's job, and it quickly became home. So I'm glad we're here, and that this is where we're building our life because I've really enjoyed the community and living here.

Krista: Yeah, I always see the most beautiful pictures of where you are.

Suzanne: It is amazing. We're really lucky. Especially with COVID. We've been really taking advantage of getting outside and seeing what's here and exploring what's here. Because being relatively new, there's a lot to see. It's all new to us. So we're enjoying it. It is beautiful.

Krista: Love it.

Suzanne: Yeah. So I'll tell you a little bit about Brian. We met later in life. We were both 32 when we met. I had been happily single doing my own thing for a long time. I had sailed around the world. I had bought my own house. I had traveled a lot and had a great career. But I was hoping I would meet somebody like him. Then we met when we were 32. He was just coming out of a divorce, and so he was very gun shy. I don't think he was thinking that he was ready for another relationship yet.

The funny thing is when I met him, I was very intimidated by him because he was incredibly professional and smart. He had achieved a lot. At the same time, I was really smitten. So we started seeing each other but took it really slow. Like I said, he was gun shy. So I used to joke with him that it

took him over a year to say I love you, but he showed me every day how much he loved me.

So I didn't feel like that was important or had to be rushed because he was showing me with his actions that he loved me. So I was able to give him the time and space to get to the point where he was comfortable saying that again and not being afraid.

One example of that is that he used to write me letters every special day. So my birthday or Christmas, Valentine's day, and then later Mother's Day. He would write me a letter. They were just beautiful. It wasn't like him. It wasn't his style to do that very often. So they were very special.

When we were living on the east coast, we had separate walk-in closets. He came into my closest one day to get something. As he turned to walk out, he saw all of his letters. I had made photocopies of them, and I had put them all around the door of my closet. I put the originals in the safe because I didn't want to ever lose them.

All of the copies were around my closet door. He said, "What's this?" I said well it's all the letters you've ever written me. He said, "Why do you have them here?" I said, "Brian Gibbs. Do you have any idea what it's like to come in here and get dressed and start my day every morning surrounded by this kind of love? It's amazing." So he was really…

Krista: Thank you for sharing those details. I always like to hear the stories that I haven't heard before.

Suzanne: I still have them in my safe. Sometimes I pull them out. So. Another funny thing about us is that we actually got married twice.

Krista: What? You got married twice?

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Suzanne: We had a wedding planned for May, but we were already living together. We had moved. He had been transferred. So we had moved. We were living together, and we had bought a house together. So in December prior to our wedding, he was an accountant. He said, “Let’s run the numbers and see what the…”

Krista: Let’s run the numbers.

Suzanne: We ran the numbers, and it turned out we would save a lot of money if we were married before the end of the year. So we ran off to a justice of the peace and we secretly got married. Then we had our wedding in May. So I always told him I loved him so much I married him twice.

Krista: How long were you married before he passed?

Suzanne: We were married for 10 years.

Krista: 10 years. Okay.

Suzanne: So we were together for like 13.

Krista: Yeah.

Suzanne: So yeah. So we moved. He got transferred to California. He was surprised that I was willing to move across country and away from our family and everything. I told him, I said wherever you are is home. I’ll go wherever you go because that’s home. We had been married for a few years. We had tried to get pregnant. Because we’re older, we didn’t really want to do a whole lot of the medical gymnastics. So I had always had my heart set on adopting at some point anyways. He supported that dream. So we adopted our first son, and then three weeks later moved to California.

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Krista: Holy… That's a lot.

Suzanne: Yeah. That first year in California was really rough. We were new parents to a one-year-old who was in a major transition because he was grieving his foster family. We were in a new house in a new community. Brian had a new team. He was with the same company, but he had a new team and a new client. So it was a hard year.

As things got easier after that first year, I said to him one day. We had a really tough spot there. We weren't always so gentle with each other, but I always knew that we would come out on the other side together. He said, "You know, I feel the same way. I always knew that we would get through all these transitions and all these challenges and do it together." I think that symbolized our marriage. We were a team, and we were a really good team. We tackled things together. That's probably what I miss the most is having my teammate.

Krista: Yeah. So then how did the whole cancer diagnosis and everything unfold?

Suzanne: Yeah. So we were actually in the process of adopting again. We had wanted to adopt again. We were in the process. Then we found out that our older son's birth mother had had another baby, and she had asked the adoption agency to find us to see if we would raise the boys together. Of course, we were thrilled. We were excited about a second child anyways. To find out they were biological brothers was just amazing.

So while we were waiting for our second son to come home. It was a long process. Brian came home from the park one morning and put our older son down for a nap. Then said he wasn't feeling great and he wanted to go lay down. He ended up having a seizure, a really huge seizure. Then we got him to the hospital, and he had a series of more seizures. Then they found out that he had a brain tumor that probably had been growing for

maybe 10 years. Then it had just finally gotten big enough that it was causing him to have seizures.

So it took about two months before they were able to remove as much as they could. They found out that it was cancer. It was pretty aggressive. He had chemo and radiation. He did go back to work that fall and was feeling good. We had a few moments where we thought maybe a chance that he had beat it or held it at bay, and then it came back with a vengeance. It was really aggressive after that. So he fought cancer for 17 months. Passed away right after we both turned 45 and we had our 10-year anniversary. The boys were five and two and a half. So it was a pretty intense time.

Krista: So you're dealing with cancer, and then you get your second son.

Suzanne: Yeah. So we talked long and hard about whether or not to go through with our second son's adoption because we didn't know what Brian's prognosis would be and what would happen. He really hesitated on completing the adoption because he was worried that I would be raising two boys by myself. I was worried that best case scenario is Brian beats the cancer, but then we've lost our son and our older son's brother. Then I also felt like if we didn't adopt him, I would have lost my husband and my second child.

So we just hoped for the best. We hoped that he would beat it. And that he would be one of the ones that could actually get through the 20-year mark that some people do with brain cancer. We felt like the boys were brothers. We didn't want to ever have to tell our older son that we'd had a chance to bring him and his brother together and we hadn't done it. So we brought him home.

He's just amazing. To have the boys together. I mean yes, it's a ton more work to be a solo parent with two kids. But to see those boys have the

relationship and be the brothers they are, it's wonderful. They're great kids. They have a pretty special bond.

Krista: Yeah. I love keeping up with their adventures vicariously through you. I feel like I know them. They're handfuls. So okay. So often then what happens is that then the husband dies and then that's when I seem to meet people, but that's not exactly your story. So carry on with.

Suzanne: Yeah.

Krista: Between Brian's passing and then when we met.

Suzanne: Well I'd say for the first 18 months, I just seriously powered through as a widow. I mean it was just people say sometimes, "I don't know how you did it." And honestly looking back on it, sometimes I don't know how I did it. It was like I put my head down and kept going. I felt like that's the only choice. That was, I felt like, the only choice I had was to really just keep moving and keep getting up every day and showing up for these boys and pushing forward with life. I look back now, and I realize how much it was just sheer grit and determination to get through those 18 months.

So I was part of a widows' group, and I had a therapist. I was doing all of the things to take care of me. That was really helpful. Then in the widows' group, I met someone who was also a widow. His wife had died I think six months after Brian. So he was about a year out. I decided to leave the widows' group. I had been in it for a while. I felt like it had served me well, but I wanted to move on from it.

He and I stayed in touch, and we actually went on a few dates. I think on those dates I realized what I was missing. I realized that I missed the companionship. I missed having that partner. It just sort of laid bare what the last 18 months had been like. As strong as I had been and as much as I had powered through, there was a lot missing. So having those dates just

really highlighted that and identified it. We clicked. We got along really well. I felt a spark of something.

Then he dumped me. I went into this huge pit of grief. The funny thing is that everybody would say, “Well you know what the grief is about, right?” I'm like I know, I know. I'm grieving Brian, and I'm grieving what I was hoping this relationship would be. And I'm grieving the year and a half that I'm realizing what I was missing. It was really a tough, tough spell.

Krista: Yeah.

Suzanne: So I went to this grief workshop. They talked about how grief is like a wound in your center. That you build a life around it, and you cover it up sometimes. You keep kind of building on it, but it’s not a stable foundation. You have to peel away life sometimes. You have to attend to the wound. You have to go back, and you have to look at it and take care of it. Then you can keep building a life on it.

They said, “You're just needing to uncover the wound. You’ve been just powering through with these kids and life for a year and a half, and you haven’t attended to it. So it’s time that you really sit and be with it.” They were right.

So I did that and then dated a little bit more. I met someone who was really lovely. I knew he wasn’t the one, but he was just a great guy and we had a lot of fun. Then six months later the guy who had dumped me came back into the picture and said, “Can we try again?”

Krista: He saw the light.

Suzanne: He did. So we talked about it for a while. I wanted to make sure that he was ready this time. I think the time before it was too close to his wife’s death, and he wasn’t quite ready. So we took a chance. Like I said,

there were sparks and a connection. I did have some red flags about the relationship, but there was also a lot of love there. It was just so wonderful to feel that again and to have that in my life again.

So as things progressed, we got to know each other more. We got engaged. Then, again, there were more red flags. When I wanted to slow things down, he had just kind of this well you're in or you're out mentality. Like there wasn't a slow down. It was either we're going to keep going with moving in together and getting married and having a life together, or he was going to move on.

At that point, I realized that I didn't feel like I was in a place where I could feel that pain again that I had felt earlier, a year earlier. That pit of grief. I just didn't want to go back into it. So I felt like well, we love each other. We'll make this work. We'll figure it out. We're both widows. We've been through a lot. We can do this. So we got married. We were together for three years, but then he left. The grief was just postponed. It wasn't avoided.

Krista: Yeah. Do you think you consciously knew that? Like I really don't want to feel this grief. "So I'm just going to muscle through and try and make this relationship work." Did you know that at the time? Or did that only come clear to you later?

Suzanne: I think there was some of it there, but I don't want to brush over the fact that there was a lot of love there. We laughed so much together. We both loved to travel. We had very similar views on a lot of things. There was a lot of love. So yes, I saw that. I think I was somewhat conscious of that, but I also felt like okay. I still love this person. It wasn't like I moved forward saying eh, he's okay but I'll marry him. So I just felt like well we'll grow into this. We'll figure this out.

Then we couldn't. So when he left, I changed my Facebook status to widowed. Because I didn't want to change it to single. I didn't feel like… Single didn't feel right. Divorced didn't really feel right because I felt like what had led me to the place, I was now wasn't just the divorce. It was also the death of my first husband. So I changed it to widowed. That's when you popped up. So the algorithms.

Krista: Then the algorithms. I used to feel kind of bad about that. Like eh, people change their Facebook status to widowed and that's when I find them. But I don't anymore because that's when I can help them. So yeah.

Suzanne: Well there were a lot of strange men who popped up too asking me... You were a breath of fresh air.

Krista: Right? All the creepy ones come out.

Suzanne: You're the only one I clicked through. Not the other creeps.

Krista: I'm the only one you clicked through? I love it. What made you decide that you wanted to try coaching?

Suzanne: You know, I was remembering the 18 months that I had powered through. I wanted more than just powering through. I wanted more than that. Therapy had been helpful. I just wanted to grow and be stronger. I guess I really was questioning. I thought I was strong before. Then in making the decision I made in the relationship, I realized I was strong, but I was also really, really vulnerable. I wanted to have a sense of where that was in me and have the tools that I could use so that going forward I would recognize that.

So I wanted to be in a position of making decisions from a position of strength and not from a position of trying to avoid a feeling. I felt like that vulnerability is a great thing, but I also didn't want it to be what was driving

decision making for me. So I looked at your information. I watched your video. I felt like the whole post-traumatic growth really resonated with me. I felt like I had survived my husband's death, and I had survived it really well. I'm really proud of the 18 months that I had with the boys and what our life was during that 18 months. I also feel like I was surviving and not thriving. I was ready for the next step. I was ready to thrive.

Krista: So what's shifted for you? What's changed for you since we started coaching?

Suzanne: Well, I'm definitely more confident and more reliant on myself for my feelings and not external circumstances or situations.

Krista: Which is one of the things I remember from our very first conversation. Which is you saying, "I want to be able to trust my gut. I want to be able to trust myself." Yeah.

Suzanne: Because I had heard my gut in the second marriage, and I had chosen not to listen to it. I wanted to make sure that I understood that, and I would know going forward what that was about. I feel like I understand that now a lot better. I think I give others more grace, but I think I'm learning to give myself more grace. That's always a work in progress. I think curiosity has really been something that you've taught me. It's served me to understand things better.

So rather than be reactionary, I tend to get more curious about things. And move forward from more of an understanding and more of a curiosity rather than just a strong feeling or emotion.

Krista: Yeah. It's so powerful when you can notice a pattern of being reactive, and then stop and take a different approach and be curious about, "Okay, maybe what are my options here? How do I want to think here? How do I want to feel here?"

Suzanne: Yep. One of the things you've taught us is that your brain is like a toddler. Sometimes I feel like… I was texting one of the other Mom Goes On members. She said, "You've got a whole preschool in there today, don't you?" To look at your brain like a toddler and look at your inner critic and all the other little thought realizations that help you understand what decisions you're making and what reactions you're having based on your thoughts. That's been great.

So sometimes I'll look at my brain or I'll look at a thought and I'll say, "Thank you. I understand what you're trying to protect me from. I appreciate that. Now I'm moving on from it."

Krista: Yes.

Suzanne: Tell the toddler to go relax and sit down.

Krista: Yeah. I know you want to throw this little tantrum today. I hear you. It's okay. We're going to go over here. Yeah. So why do you think – I'm sure there's a lot of things you have learned since Brian died, but what are some of the things that you've learned since he died that you wish he would have known sooner that maybe other women can benefit from?

Suzanne: Well, one big thing is that grief isn't linear. I was a little shocked a year and a half out to go into that what I jokingly refer to as the pit of despair. That kind of that big second wave of grief. I didn't see that coming. I didn't expect that. To go to that workshop and understand that whole the wound is still there, and you need to attend to it. That was really helpful, and really made me not feel like I had to be at a certain place in grief at a certain time. That sometimes it's two steps forward and one step back. That's okay. We all have our own paths. We're all in different places at different times with our grief. There's no right or wrong. That was a really good realization.

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You've used the beach ball analogy of trying to hold a beach ball underwater. That I've definitely learned. That trying to avoid a certain emotion is like trying to hold a beach ball under the water. You can try to avoid that feeling, and that beach ball is just going to pop up. The more you try to hold it down, the stronger it's going to pop up. So really not avoiding feelings but understanding them and feeling them and processing them.

Krista: Are there any particular feelings for you that have been harder to not shove under the water?

Suzanne: I don't know. I've been a lot better about not shoving them under the water. I think what I've had to learn to do that's served me really well is learning to carry two feelings that are seemingly opposing feelings at the same time and being able to hold space for two completely different feelings.

Krista: Yeah.

Suzanne: So like last week, the boys and I were playing football. We were just cracking each other up and giggling and having so much fun. I had to pause for a second because I really felt like Brian was missing from that. That stopped me in my tracks a little bit. Then I really consciously said, yes. I miss him and we're happy. Yes, I wish he was here and we're having a great time. To hold those two opposing feelings at the same time was really good.

Krista: Yeah. It's so interesting. It's like where we do we even get this idea? I see it all the time. I'm sure you do too in our group. That we really do kind of, without meaning to hurt ourselves, are kind of harsh on ourselves especially when we feel happy. Right?

Suzanne: Like we're not supposed to be.

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Krista: Like we're not supposed to feel happy. Or if we feel happy then that means we can't feel sad. Or if we feel sad, that means we can't feel happy. We just make it very either/or instead of no. We can have lots of feelings at one time, and it doesn't have to mean anything.

Suzanne: Exactly. Yeah. When you get to be able to hold them both in you at the same time, it's just really freeing.

Krista: Yeah. So thinking about listeners with listeners in mind. What kind of advice, knowing that some of them are widows and moms because that's what the podcast is called. Some of them aren't. What kind of advice would you give them if you could?

Suzanne: What I wished someone had helped me understand early on was how to act from a position of strength and not from a position of fear or avoidance of a feeling. Clearly in dating that's what was going on with me, but also in parenting. That sometimes I want to help the boys avoid a feeling of sadness or being upset or frustration. If I act from a position of trying to avoid that feeling or help them avoid that feeling, then I'm not acting as authentically as I want as a mom. It's more important to be able to be comfortable feeling the feelings or having the boys feel those feelings and acting from that position of strength.

Krista: Totally. I was thinking of what I know from your boys. Just thinking about even the past year, right, with the pandemic and everything that's happened. They seem to be very intelligent, inquisitive, high energy. I just imagine as the parent of a fairly mild-mannered girl and a pretty calm boy, right, that you've probably got your hands full.

So if you are parenting from that place of not wanting them to feel disappointed or sad. And they've already been through this really big loss. So you're trying to then not pile onto that. Then that could have you avoiding the decisions that you know are the ones you want to make

because you don't want to feel the feelings, or you don't want them to feel the feelings.

Suzanne: Absolutely. It's funny because one of my friends said to me one time, she's like, "You guys do hard things really well." Because I was always open with them about discussing Brian after he passed and what happened. We just talk about things that I think other families haven't always either had to or wanted to talk about. So when the pandemic hit, we were in a different place of being able to talk about our feelings and how we were doing and what was going on.

They've had their ups and downs. They've been in different places at different times. So while it's been challenging, at least I feel like – we joke once in a while. We're like well, it's not cancer. So we can handle it. They've been great through it.

Krista: Yeah. It puts everything in perspective, doesn't it?

Suzanne: It does.

Krista: For sure. So what do you think, if you look back at recent times or times since Brian died or going through what you went through with Chris. What's been like your biggest challenges?

Suzanne: I think having my own back and giving myself some grace when things are not going the way I want them to go has been something I've really worked on a lot. We've talked a lot about self-love and being our own champion. That's something I worked on a lot. I think in the last few years it was I'm naturally an empath. So when somebody says to me, "Oh, you make me feel this way." Even if I know that I didn't cause their feelings because that's one of the things that we learned in coaching is that you don't cause somebody else's feelings. I would always still try to fix it and make it right.

So when my second husband would say, “Well you know when you and the boys are talking together, it makes me feel left out,” I would feel like I had to fix it. So I was always kind of walking on eggshells trying to make sure I wasn’t causing him to feel left out or feel angry or feel upset. So it was constant management of somebody else’s situation. That just doesn’t work.

I can't control somebody else’s C-line, as we talk about in the model. That’s his circumstance. He chose to think things about the circumstance that I couldn’t manage. So it made it really hard to try to manage that for a few years. Now looking back on it, I feel like I'm in a position where going forward I won't try to solve somebody else’s thoughts or feelings. I’ll show up who I am and go from there.

Krista: Yeah. Who you are is a very loving, kind person. Right? It’s not like – sometimes I think people when they hear, “Well we can't make a person feel a certain way,” that that means that then we’re going to become cavalier or we’re going to act in ways that are inconsiderate. That’s not it at all. Like who you are is amazing and wonderful. You would never intentionally.

Suzanne: Well and you and I went around and around about that in some coaching of, “Well, how can I be empathetic and to be trying to change somebody else’s thoughts and feelings about the circumstance?” I had to really see the separation there that I could still be empathetic, but it doesn’t mean I have to show up as a different person than who I am.

Krista: Yes. You do not have to be a doormat.

Suzanne: Exactly.

Krista: Yes ma’am. Yes, yeah. Well, it takes a little while for all of us, right? Sometimes we can get ourselves to a place of feeling love and empathy and compassion for another person and we can still hold really firm

boundaries. Just because we're feeling love and empathy and compassion on the inside doesn't mean that we roll over and don't live life the way that it's important to us. We can still make choices and feel loving and compassionate even if the answer is sometimes like thanks but no. So I was trying to go back and think about this. So you were like one of my OGs.

Suzanne: Because I was here for all of it.

Krista: Original gangsters I think is the phrase. I'm from Kansas. So that doesn't really suit me, right? So we coached one on one. Then you were one of my original members of the group. When I switched to groups, you joined the group. Now you're on your second round of masters, right?

Suzanne: I feel like a slow learner.

Krista: I can never get enough. Well you know it's been so fun though. It's not that you're – there's nothing slow about it. You've grown and evolved at every level. I am curious. Like what keeps you coming back?

Suzanne: Well you know it's funny. We were talking just last week when we had a private coaching session in that I feel like I'm at the point where so much is clicking and falling into place. I had really planned on not coming on for this third round. Then I just thought you know what? I just want to get solid with these tools and these skills.

Like I said to you last week, I've recently had the feeling of I'm back. The core of me is finally back after a whole lot of being lost in the last few years. I'm trying to make something right in everyone else's world, and now I get to really take care of myself. I feel like my spark just came back at the end of round two. I feel like round three we're going to have an inferno. I'm so excited.

Krista: I love it.

Suzanne: I wanted to have that. I wanted to keep that going and really let it catch fire.

Krista: I love it. It was last round, I think, when you got a Peloton.

Suzanne: Yes.

Krista: Yeah. So I remember – and I'm probably going to screw up the details about it. I remember you posted something in our group, and you said you were doing a ride. It was Cody Rigsby that asked you like, “Who’s your hero? Picture your hero.”

Suzanne: Yeah. They said, “Tell us who your hero is.” I started thinking about who’s my hero? Then I said I am my own hero. I'm my own hero. I was pedaling faster and harder. I was like yes. I am my own hero. To have my back like that, to have that spark back really feels good. So. I haven’t told you this, but since I had that little – like I told you I had that voice in my head that said I'm back and I'm good enough and I'm here. It was about five weeks ago. I have gotten so much done, and I've lost 13 pounds since then.

Krista: What?

Suzanne: It was almost like… I know, really. I know. Something has clicked. I am taking care of myself. I am doing great. If things are messy and not perfect, I'm okay with it. It just feels like that spark is really…

Krista: Yes. Things are messy and imperfect, and I'm okay with it. I am back. I love it. Can you talk just a little bit about some of the challenges that you have faced as a mom? So like what’s been hard for you? What have

you had to learn? What have you had to do to support yourself? Let other people benefit from your wisdom there.

Suzanne: Yeah. I think the challenges are exactly what you'd expect of being a solo mom of two little kids. Just the relentlessness of it. I think what's really helped me most recently is how you've taught us to question our thoughts. So saying I can't do this, or I never get a break or I'm not a good enough mom. To really pick those apart and say what is the truth of that? That sometimes we tell ourselves these things and we make them true. But we can pull them apart and really look at what is and what isn't true and if they're serving us. So I've done a lot of work on what my thoughts are around that.

What's helped is being real and just being honest with people. It's allowed my community to just walk this journey with me. Then this genuineness has allowed my life to be really full and rich. So I think one time I remember, I was on a walk and I saw a friend of mine. She was having coffee in a little coffee shop. I sat down and she said, "How are you?" I was just at a really rough point and I started crying. I said I'm not good.

She just reached across, and she took my hands. She just waited for me to talk. I said all I want is to love and be loved, and it really hurts that that's not where I am right now. She just sat and she said, "I know. I get it. I get it." It was just beautiful to be able to be genuine and not have somebody say, "How are you?" And say fine. I'm great. I'm getting along. So I think being genuine has really helped.

Krista: You seem to have an ability to receive and give. Like I've noticed that about you. Right? You're a very generous giver, and you also receive.

Suzanne: Receiving was harder. Someone during Brian's illness told me that if I was willing to take help, I was giving other people a gift. I've tried to

remember that. That people really want to help. That if you can accept that help then you're giving them that gift as well.

Krista: Yeah. To take it even a step further. I'm so glad you said that. To not accept the gift, to not accept the help is to deprive them of the opportunity. Right? Sometimes when people feel so powerless because they see us suffering so much, they so desperately want to help and contribute in some way. So I'm so glad you said that because yes. If we can just say yes even when it's hard to receive and try to let that in, it's such a gift that we give to other people. I love that.

Suzanne: The other thing that you really helped me understand was the difference between pain and suffering. We had just really taken a little bit of a deeper dive into that right before the pandemic hit. So when everything happened with, you know we had pretty big lockdowns in California and the schools being closed and everything. It really helped me get to a place where I stopped fighting it because that was causing suffering, and just said you know what? This is the way it's supposed to be. Then I could feel the challenge and the associated pain but not have the suffering. That really has made this year, I think, different than what it would have been if I hadn't had that.

Krista: Yeah. When we drop into that place of acceptance, we stop arguing with reality. It's not that it's any less painful, the acceptance, but then we don't heap on the suffering.

Suzanne: Exactly. Yeah.

Krista: Yeah. It's so much cleaner. It's so much easier and lighter. Still hard. Still painful.

Suzanne: Yeah. You've got that extra layer of gripiness in trying to fix it all.

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Krista: So thinking back to some of our conversations, and I don't think we've had very many of these relationship coaching conversations lately. But I know that you have had some relationships in life that have been a little challenging to work through. So talk to me a little bit about what's shifted for you in some of those relationships?

Suzanne: Yeah. We've done a lot of work I think in the group and with the smaller master's group on really looking at the other person's experience. And understanding that they're doing the best they can, and then seeing them through a lens of love. That has helped a lot. So if someone is reacting in a way that I didn't anticipate or not feeling comfortable with, I try to flip it around. If I can do it in the moment, I try to do it in the moment of okay. What's their experience? What are they coming from? Just try to have that acceptance that they're doing the best they can.

So I think it really hit home recently when a friend of mine texted that she wanted to talk to me about something. It was a little bit of a contentious issue. I started to react. Then I put the brakes on. I said wait a minute. Where may she be coming from? I thought well she's probably uncomfortable about this and she's probably feeling hurt. I kind of went through some of the scenarios of what I thought she might be feeling. I thought I love her. She's my friend. I'm going to try to show up in a way that's not defensive. I'm just going to hear here.

So I did that. I just listened. It was a fabulous conversation. We resolved the issue. We talked about other things going on in life. At the end, she said something about, "You're a great mom. I love watching you with your boys, and I love you so much." You know it totally changed the whole interaction. Looking at it from looking at her perspective and the lens of seeing her through love instead of through my own defensiveness. So that's been huge.

Krista: I love that. I love that. So using the model—I've talked a little bit about it on the podcast but using the model as a way to…Not that we ever really know. Because we never really know exactly what's going on in someone else's mind and heart. But to just kind of use it as a way to develop some empathy and some compassion or at least some perspective of what might be going on for someone else and where they're coming from. As opposed to falling into our old patterns of they're coming at me, and I have to have my hackles up and all of that.

Suzanne: Right.

Krista: I wonder what we didn't get to. Was there anything that you wanted to talk about that we didn't get to?

Suzanne: You know we talked earlier about earlier this summer my 16-year-old niece died by suicide.

Krista: Yes. Yes.

Suzanne: It was awful to be on the west coast and hear my sister through the phone on the east coast. So the boys and I packed up and moved to the east coast for a couple of weeks. Took all their school supplies and they had school from the hotel. I sat with my sister and brother-in-law and others in my family for two weeks and felt so different in how I was there with them. I really attribute it to a lot of the thought work we've done and the place I've been able to get to with my own emotions where I didn't try to solve anything. I didn't try to fix anything. I didn't try to change any emotions or any experiences. I just held space for them.

I just felt like it was such a gift to have done all this work for the last year so that I could show up that way and be there for them. I have my own grief with it, but I felt like I could really be who I wanted to be in that moment for

them. I really appreciate that you got me to that place so I can do that for them.

Krista: I didn't get you to that place. I gave you the tools. I give everybody the same tools. You got yourself to that place because you took advantage of the tools, yeah.

Suzanne: Yeah. Yeah.

Krista: Yeah. What I love about it is the ripple effect of not only watching you change but watching then how you show up for your family differently. How that's going to impact your boys. That's pretty awesome.

Suzanne: Yeah.

Krista: You know my favorite moment with you?

Suzanne: I don't know if I want to know.

Krista: Do you know what it is? It happened over email. I'll tell you. So Hugo died coming back from a trip. Somewhere you connected the dots. It was like an email that I had sent out to my list. I had talked about the trip. It was a program called Heather's Camp which is a camp for kids who are blind or visually impaired. It's in memory of my sorority sister.

I don't know how you connected the dots, but you connected the dots. You replied to an email. I don't even remember. What did you say? Something like I knew there was a reason I liked you.

Suzanne: Yeah. I knew there was a connection.

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Krista: “I knew there was a connection.” Then you signed it with something which told me we were in the same sorority and I had no idea. Signed in a way that let me know that we had that connection. It was kind of like a little secret kind of way. I had balled like a baby reading that email. It was the most ridiculous thing. That's my favorite Suzanne memory. Like oh of course she’s a DG. Of course she is.

Suzanne: It was funny because when I was looking up Heather’s Camp and I saw that she was a DG, I was like oh course Krista’s a DG. That's why we get along so well.

Krista: That's why we’re doing good. That’s the motto. Well thank you so much for coming on the podcast. I know it’s not always easy to talk about painful things we’ve been through and challenges in life, but I really do think that it’s helpful. It’s helpful to people to hear real stories of real widows who have been through it. And not just the original death, which is bad enough, but then other road bumps and other experiences and still have figured out how to come out on top and get back to being the strong person that they are. So thank you.

Suzanne: Yeah. Thank you. I mean it’s definitely not the path that I thought I would be on in my life, but it’s my path. It’s pretty amazing. Like I said, let’s light it up. I'm ready.

Krista: Let’s light it up. All right. I love you. Thanks again. Suzanne.

Suzanne: No problem. Thanks Krista.

Krista: Bye.

Suzanne: Bye.

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If you like what you've been hearing on this podcast and want to create a future you can truly get excited about, even after the loss of your spouse, I invite you to join my Mom Goes On coaching program. It's small group coaching just for widowed moms like you where I'll help you figure out what's holding you back and give you the tools and support you need so you can move forward with confidence. Please don't settle for a new normal that's less than what you deserve. Go to coachingwithkrista.com and click Work With Me for details and next steps. I can't wait to meet you.