

Ep #99: Creating a Life You Love After Loss: A Widows Unfiltered Interview with Leann Patrick



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Krista St-Germain

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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 99, Widows Unfiltered: An Interview with Leann Patrick.

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. Excited to bring you another interview today. So, I have a special guest, Leann Patrick. Leann is a widow and a mom and a former client of mine.

I always love it when clients keep in touch with me and tell me what's going on in their lives. And Leann has been sending me updates. We worked together in 2019. So, it's been a while since we worked together. But she's been sending me updates.

And in December, she sent me an update, and I knew how hard she'd been working toward this goal. And so, it was so exciting for me to see it finally come to fruition. Which was her getting her house ready to sell and selling it.

I want her to tell you all about that journey, but listen when I say it was no joke. Her husband was, we'll say, a collector. She would probably have another phrase for that. But so much stuff around her house, such a large property, a son that really wasn't all that supportive of her wanting to part with any of that stuff, a daughter with her own challenges.

Leann was a full-time teacher, so lots of challenging pieces of this puzzle. And I know how hard she worked when we coached together, so to see her really make this happen for herself just made my heart happy and I wanted you to hear from her.

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Because my goal with interviews like this is I hope that you will see part of yourself in another woman. I hope that you will see some aspect of her struggle and you will tell yourself, "If she can do it, I can do it." Right, "If she can do it, I can do it."

Because maybe you're struggling with something similar. Maybe not everything is similar. Maybe there's just a little piece of her life that is similar to a struggle that you're having and her story will lift you up and inspire you and fill you with hope. And that's what I want. So, without further ado, let's get into my interview with Leann.

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

Leann: Thanks. I'm excited-nervous, but I'm excited.

Krista: Of course, you know, before we started recording and you were talking about how you were feeling about it, I was just remembering, going back to when I was on my coach's podcast. And her podcast was what brought me to her in the podcast and it had been so helpful to me. So, then to go full-circle and go through her program and then be on her podcast was crazy full-circle and very nerve-wracking for me. So, I know what you feel like.

Leann: Yes, for sure.

Krista: Okay, so I was looking back through our notes before we started coaching, and you came to me in the summer of 2019, yes?

Leann: Yes.

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Krista: Okay, so kind of walk us through just a little bit about your story up until that summer. Like, where were you? What happened? Just tell us what you want us to know.

Leann: So, let's see. In June of 2017, my husband of almost 25 years – actually, it was 25 years because we had gone to Hawaii for our 25th anniversary in August of '16. And then, in '17, he was diagnosed in the emergency room with congestive heart failure. And that started our journey. We didn't know exactly how long it was going to last.

But in August of 2017 we were in the hospital for 47 days and they actually put him on a list for a heart transplant. And the hospital that we were at were doing something called an LVAD, which just takes over part of your heart. And he had that surgery in March of 2018. And he actually had a substantial stroke during the surgery.

And during that surgery when the stroke happened and the doctor came to tell us, you know, he had a stroke, they made it pretty light. It wasn't doom and gloom, so we didn't really know what we were in for. But for 12 days, he was on a respirator on full life support.

We watched him. The family came and prayed for him, you know, different things. And then, on the 14th day, I had remembered what he had said to me the day before his surgery. We had filled out that little book of his wishes and he said, "Leann, if you have any doubt or if the doctors give you any doubt that I won't be able to have my full life, I don't want to be on a machine. If I can't go up to the mountains and go fishing with my kids, if I can't putter in my shop, if I can't do those things, please let me go."

And we had to sign those papers. I wasn't going to let that be my decision. And so, on that 14th day. I had to make the decision. Although he had made it already, I still felt like I had to make the decision. His brothers were with

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me and we decided that he needed to go to God. And he didn't need to suffer anymore. It was the hardest 14 days of our lives.

But yeah, so that's how I became a widow. Then, right after that, my son, who was 16, he assumed the man of the house, even though I didn't really give that to him. I wasn't giving anybody anything. I was just walking through the motions and dealing with things as they hit me.

And he assumed the man of the house. And by probably – so that was in March, and by probably June of 2018, kind of came to a head, like, "You're 16. I am your mother. We need to figure out how we're going to survive together without your dad." He had taken all the keys to all the buildings. I mean, all of this stuff was his...

Krista: He was in charge. And you had a large property full of a lot of your husband's stuff.

Leann: Yes, my husband was always a collector, always a farmer at heart. He never really did farming in our marriage. But we had tons of stuff. I was in charge of our little three-bedroom house. But he had the 40 by 90 shop, the two acres, the six outbuildings, and all of it was full of just stuff. And that was always a contentious point for me in our marriage. But I didn't say anything very often because it always ended up in, "Well that's going to be my retirement someday." Well, it turned out to be stuff I ended up having to deal with.

Krista: Yeah. I remember when you came to talk about coaching, that was one of your major frustrations was that there was so much stuff. You had said you felt like you were drowning in it. And then there was the challenge of it being overwhelming just by the sheer volume of it, but then also the emotional issue that your son was having at the idea of you letting any of that stuff go. But you knowing that this property is so big and there's all this stuff and it's just too much and it's not really what you wanted.

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Leann: Yes, I had never – we lived out there for 19 years and I had never driven a tractor to mow the lawns. I had never done any of the stuff that my husband had done. And here it is laying on my shoulders, or the shoulders of a 16-year-old. But he was not going to take any of that responsibility. He was just wanting the stuff because to him the stuff equaled his dad. Being able to stand in that shop and use his tools, which I got. But it got to be such a problem.

I literally was drowning, like you said. And I would say things to my son about, “Well, we need to get rid of some stuff.” I even bought, when we were coaching, I bought a huge one of those train car kind of storage units and sat it next to the shop. And I told my son to put stuff in this because in the summer of 2020, I am going to start cleaning up.

And he didn’t believe me. And so, it sat there and I paid \$900 before I was just like, “I’m done. I’m not going to keep paying to buy this, the monthly payment or whatever if you’re not going to do anything.” So, I had the company come and get it and I was like, “I don’t know where your stuff is going to go because I am leaving this property eventually.”

Krista: You know, that’s in fact honestly, when you sent me the pictures, because you were keeping me posted every once in a while, you’d send me a message and tell me how you were doing, which I love, and you sent me pictures of your property before and after. And I think you had just listed your house. I don’t know if you had sold it yet, but when we started coaching, that was one of the major things you wanted to do, to have like an exit strategy for that property.

And the pictures, they were like ariel – I don’t even know how you got those pictures. But oh my gosh. The difference...

Leann: Google Maps...

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Krista: I was – because I don't think I had ever seen those photos or really understood what you were up against when we were coaching. It wasn't until afterwards and I saw those pictures and I just had such a deeper appreciation for all the work it took you to get that house on the market. And then knowing that you didn't have the support of the other family member living with you.

Leann: Right, and actually what happened – and it was a complete godsend. I will go to my grave saying that – my son said to me in like the week before Mother's Day in 2020, during COVID, during all of this stuff, he said, "Mom, I'm going to sell one of dad's tractors." And I said okay. It took him like a day because all you had to do – people wanted all of my husband's stuff. It was good stuff, you know.

But he sold it, and then he came out to the living room. And he said, "And with that money, I'm going to go to Tennessee and meet my online girlfriend." And he's 19. So, I can't do anything about it. I'm like, "Well, okay."

So, the minute he left on the day after Mother's Day in 2020, that Monday, I called a realtor, I had her come out to the house. She was very much not a country – she had no idea what was going on with all of the stuff. I had her walking around. She was in heels. And I was like, "This is not a good fit."

But my friend and I were driving around looking at properties because I had finally decided, I am leaving. I'm getting this done. I don't know how. It's going to be me and God and my friends. It's not going to be my kids. I have a daughter and she had moved on and done some other things. She was up in Nebraska at the time. I didn't know how exactly she was going to be involved in it.

Krista: It's so interesting, the timing of that too. Because I remember – I always try to get people to pick an area of focus that they really want to

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point the coaching towards. And it's not to say that we'll only accomplish that one area. But I very specifically remember you settling on, "I know I want to get out of this house. I know I want to deal with all of this stuff." And May of 2020 was your target of I just want to get Hunter through school, I want to do as much as I can until then. And it sounds like that timing is almost exactly what you ended up creating.

Leann: Yeah, and you know what, it didn't happen the way I wanted it to. I've been teaching for 22 years. And my son didn't graduate from high school. He dropped out. And it broke my teacher heart. It broke my mom heart. But also, and, "You're not going to sit on that side of the house..."

I think I told you, I never thought he was going to get up and do anything. And he did. He just decided he was leaving one day. And I wasn't sure and I thought maybe he might end up in a cult or something. He'd never met this person. Turns out he's been there for a year and he's happy. I've seen him a couple times. He's happy. And I'm happy because I was able to start my journey officially to get rid of that house.

And from May, I listed it at the end of September. So, from May to September, my brother-in-law, my husband's brother had helped me in the summer. He wasn't working and so he was able to help me. It was all like all the pieces got put together. Everything I sold paid for more labor to get more done. I'd have my realtor, who I did end up finding one who came with tennis shoes on and climbed up on top of stuff and said, "Oh, this is a good tank." You wouldn't believe all of the pictures. I mean, you know. And I had six outbuildings that looked just like that.

Krista: Yeah, totally mind-blowing. What I hope everyone hears when they listen to interviews, I hope that they hear, even though it might not be the exact same circumstance that they're going through, I hope they hear, you know, "If this woman can do it, I can do it."

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Because it wasn't, I mean, really, this is my thought, I'm a little in the pool – so those of you who know much about coaching, don't give me a hard time. But you did have a challenging situation with your son. You had a lot of challenges with your daughter. Plus this huge property with all of this stuff and a full-time job as a teacher. And then we'll just throw in COVID for fun.

Leann: Yeah, it was insanity. And at the time, my daughter was dating a guy who happened to be at the halfway house. And those guys just happened to want to earn some money and I just happened to need big guys. It was just – and she's not dating him anymore and that's not who I wanted her to be with. But it worked out for that summer. They came and worked with me for three weekends and busted out that 40 by 90 shop. You literally could not walk through the shop. That's how it was.

And especially after Hunter had gone through the things and found what he wanted and did what he wanted, he didn't take care of the things. Benji had a system. My husband had a system, you know what I mean? Where he would put things this way over here. He might have literally 19 boxes of shop rags in the corner of the shop, but he knew that they were there. Hunter didn't know where anything was, so he was going through everything and leaving it.

So, by the time I got in there, I'd not gone in there once since my husband died. And not very often before then because it wasn't my world and it drove me crazy. But yeah, we had a huge mess. And just all of the pieces fit together. And now I'm waiting to move into my new house. And I'm actually building a house and it will be done in June. So, full-circle. That's exactly what I want.

Krista: Full-circle, so good. And size-wise, is this kind of just for Leann size, or what are we building?

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Leann: So, it's a three-bedroom, but one bedroom, I took part of it out to put in a walk-in pantry for my kitchen. And so, it's very little and it's going to have just room for my office. And then the other room is going to have a twin-size bed. Not enough for anybody really to stay with me too long.

Krista: Which is exactly what you want. If you could see her face, she's like, "Damn it, so awful..."

Leann: I love my kids, but they need to move on and I really feel like my daughter has. My son has moved on. He's in Tennessee, but he's living with his girlfriend's family and stuff. I just want him to jump. My daughter's doing awesome after some struggles that she's had for the last nine years.

Krista: Can you speak to that just a little bit. And not so much your children. I mean, share what you're comfortable with. But really what I saw in you was a pretty big transformation in terms of how you related to your children, your role as a mother.

You know, so often we take blame and responsibility for our children and their choices. And we kind of back ourselves into a corner where we don't get to believe we're good moms, we're good parents. And we think that our kids need to change or follow that instruction manual that we have for them. And I really saw you transform in that way. Can you speak a little bit about that?

Leann: I spent my entire motherhood, I guess is what you'd call it, helping my kids to be good people. I had things in my family on my side that were hard to deal with as a child. I didn't want my kids to have to see that, be around it, do those kinds of things. So, I was the mom that did everything I could possibly do to support them and work a full-time job. I'd take off time to go be with them.

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I worked in a town 30 miles away from my daughter's school and I would still say, "I've got to go," and go give my daughter whatever she needed. When she graduated and started hooking up with some people, made some choices of her own that I didn't like, didn't know how to understand because that was what my family had done, that's not what I had raised my kids to do. I turned into I'm going to fix it mom. I'm going to make this right. I'm going to give you everything.

As a matter of fact, I can't even tell you how many times I set up her household for her, like financially. My husband had no idea because I was working full-time. We were paying bills. As long as I was paying the bills, we didn't share all of that.

And so, I set up her house just for her to turn around and continue what she was doing and lose most of what she had and had to start over. And it wasn't until our coaching and things that I realized I was enabling, even though I didn't mean to.

I was trying to help her be successful. She had kids. I was trying to keep a roof over her head. But she kept doing what she was doing. So, it was not until – was it fall that we were together? It was the fall of 2019 where I just said, "I am done. I cannot anymore. I can't." And I did not – that was in September 2019. And I didn't hear her voice again.

She texted me a couple of times, asked me for money, asked me for a place to stay, things like that. I didn't see her again until May of 2020. And then she spent her entire summer helping me get out of my house.

Krista: Wow, what a change.

Leann: Yeah, I mean, and she told me that summer that I helped her by not helping her, you know. She just was basically thrown to the wolves and it broke my heart every day. I had a friend call me and tell me that she had

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overdosed one day. It was Halloween of 2019 and I said, "I'll pray for her. I love her. But she's not going to live with me anymore. I deserve to be at peace. I deserve to let my daughter live her life. I tried to raise her the way I wanted to, or the way she needed to be raised, and she took that in a different direction. But the praise report is that she has been sober for two years now, as of May. So, praise God, it's been awesome.

Krista: Yeah, you know, I think one of the things I see come up so much with people, which is kind of what you had to go through, which is just this process of realizing how we treat our children, especially the grown ones who are making choices that we don't really support, how we treat our children isn't necessarily a sign of how we feel about them or how much we love them. And so, just because we love them, doesn't mean that we have to always say yes when they ask, right? And just because we say no, doesn't mean we don't love them either.

Leann: And just because you don't answer your phone or you look at your phone and you say, "It's my son, it's my daughter... my peace doesn't get this. I don't want to do this right now," and put your phone down.

Krista: Well, there were times when we were coaching that I remember you getting texts or calls and being in the middle of a school day and trying to do your job.

Leann: And I was going through some of the things we did too before this interview. And one of the things was she blew up my phone all day long. She blew up my phone because that was the day that I told her, "No. I cannot help you. I love you. But I love you enough to let you go. And I'm learning to love me enough to let you go."

Krista: Say that again.

Leann: I'm learning to love me enough to let you go.

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Krista: I think we should pause for that.

Leann: Yeah, it was huge. Nobody should be 50 years old and have to figure that out. You shouldn't. And I didn't know that because I fixed everybody first.

Krista: Yeah, we can't make anyone else do anything. Even if it's in their best interests, we just can't make them. And we spend so much of our energy trying to get people to do what we think they need to do, especially when they're our children. It's a hard thing to work through. It's no joke.

Leann: Yeah, until you've gone through Krista's coaching and then you're like, "You know what? I love you buy I love me. I get to love me. And what you say to me is what you said to me and I don't have to react to it." And I used to take every single bit of it and just mull it around and make it a reality in my head and it doesn't need to be. That was a huge thing I learned.

Krista: How did you come into that realization that your kids could say something and you didn't have to react in a particular way?

Leann: That my thoughts don't have to – I can be in control of my thoughts. I can be in control of my – I might be sad, but it's because I chose to be sad. Does that make sense? Yeah, that is what I have learned, is that yeah, lots of junky things happen in life, I mean anywhere. And any minute of the day, you could choose to be sad. Or you could choose to say, "I know that I'm going to get through this and it's going to suck for you, I love you, but it's going to suck for you."

And I'm not saying I don't help my kids a little. You know, my daughter is working a full-time job and has a little girl that's he's raising all by herself, and I do pay her electric bill. But it's not because she is not doing her job.

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And it will stop the minute she isn't doing her job, you know what I mean? It doesn't have to be that mommy's saving it anymore.

Krista: Yeah, totally. So, kind of backing up just a little bit, what was it that made you decide to do coaching in the first place?

Leann: I was, like you said earlier, I was in a corner that I did not ever see me getting out of. I couldn't figure out if it was my grief from being a widow. I was in Hawaii on my 25th, in the hospital ICU celebrating my 26th, and a widow on my 27th. And I just, after right around what would have been my 28th anniversary, I was just like, I have got to do something. I don't know what it is, but I looked on Facebook for widows' groups and your podcast popped up. And then I went into the podcast thing and listened to some of them from the beginning and I just thought, "I need to meet this lady. This lady is awesome." I needed to do it for me. I was sitting in a Cabela's parking lot talking to you on that first day.

Krista: Was it? I didn't remember that. It was a Cabela's parking lot.

Leann: I don't know that I told you. When I first had the little, will we fit together...

Krista: Yeah, the consult call.

Leann: Yeah, my son was in Cabela's. He was actually trying to get in at one point and I'm like, "No, no, I'll be done in a minute." Anyway...

Krista: Alright, something else I kind of want to hear a little bit about. Usually what I see is not only people's relationships changing. And I mean relationships with other people. So, clearly your relationship with your daughter changed. Your relationship with your son changed. But also, I see the relationship with themselves change; the way that they think about themselves, perceive themselves, talk to themselves, those kinds of things.

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Can you talk a little bit about how your relationship with yourself has changed?

Leann: So, I have given myself permission to say no. And that is something I never did. I was at work until nine o'clock on a night at school just because I had so much to do and there's not any time or space at home. You know, this was years ago. And then I'd come home and I'd still watch a movie with the kids, or I'd still this or that because they asked me to.

And I have been able to give myself some no-time. I say no and I'm okay with it. I actually just said that to a friend the other day, "You can say no and that can be your whole answer."

Krista: Yes, you can say no and that can be your whole answer; no justification required. No, just because you want to say no.

Leann: Yep, it can be simply no because – and then in your head you're like, "I have nothing to do. I just don't want to deal with what you're giving me to deal with." I don't know if that came with age or what...

Krista: You don't need a reason. I don't know. It happens differently for different people. But just being able – I just did an episode of the podcast called Playing the Widow Card, which it's not out yet so you haven't heard it, but just this idea that we never really need an excuse to live the life that we want. We never really need an excuse to say no when we just want to say no.

Leann: Yes, and that was huge for me. Another thing was that I can be who I am and I don't have to apologize for it. Like, I can say or I can be silly, like when you asked me if I would do this and I asked you if you could edit out the Leann-ness...which you would get at 6:30 in the morning when I was working with you in the corner of my classroom trying to hide from the custodians.

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So, I can be who I am and you can like me, or you don't have to like me, but I'm still going to be okay with me. Now, that's not to say that I like that I gained 50 pounds and I like, you know – but those are things I can change if I choose to. And I haven't chosen to yet.

Krista: Yeah, but the idea of giving yourself permission to like you for just being you and for having your preferences, that's a big deal.

Leann: Yeah, and I didn't do that. It was always about my kids, my husband. And honestly, if I were to be completely honest with myself, back in my marriage, I would have said more about where we lived and how we were living. It wasn't that we were filthy. It was just overwhelming. It was just insane.

And he loved it. He would get out there and climb on the tractors and things. And I'd be like, "I'd love to have a friend over for tea." But there was literally one person in the 20 years we lived there that I would let come out there and not feel like I would have to apologize for everything. And she loved me anyway. She still does. She's my best friend.

And this new house, I'm living in a new neighborhood. I'm going to be across the street from a park, two blocks from my principal. I mean, all these different – it's just exactly what I wanted.

Krista: Yes, talk a little bit about that shift too because one of the things I'm always trying to sell widows on, because it is so possible and I'm just passionate about it, but is this idea that you really can love your life again, that you do not have to get used to a crappy new normal that you didn't ask for. So, how has that shifted for you? What are your thoughts on going forward and your ability to create what you want in life?

Leann: So, I am super-super-excited about the house and getting in there and making it my house and putting things where I want them to be. I can

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be happy again. I'm happy now, you know. I'm living in a little tiny room of my friend's house right now and I'm happy because I don't have all of the chaos that was around me.

I called it hillbilly shenanigans. I've even told my kids and the cousins that there will not be any more hillbilly shenanigans at my house. Somebody else can take that torch.

So, they would take, I don't know, a car hood and put it on the back of a four-wheeler and fling each other around the property and we'd be in the emergency room. And I'm just over it. I might go and watch but I'm not going to be the one that hosts it.

Krista: Yeah.

Leann: Yeah, I just – I don't know, I can be happy. One of the things I am starting to miss – I didn't miss it at all to begin with but I guess that's part of being a widow, but I am starting to miss a companion. I guess that's probably because both of my kids, even though my son and I had so many issues, even though we fought a lot about, you know, "Did you shower?" you know, all of that stuff you do with a teenage boy, he was a companion. He was somebody in my house that I could speak to. So, that's something I'm kind of looking toward but I don't know how to deal with. You know what I mean?

Krista: So, maybe dating in your future?

Leann: Yeah, but I don't know how to do that. You hear of all the stories and I want to meet somebody that will sit next to me at church. You know what I mean? Not somebody that's just fishing for my money...

Krista: Yeah, and I firmly believe that those people are out there. That person is out there. It's just a matter of not believing that I don't know how

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story when it shows up in your mind and just deciding to go out and experiment.

Leann: Yeah, and I haven't done that yet. I think I'm focused on – but I do have the power to do it. I do know I can. And that's a huge shift for me.

Krista: Yeah. I can't imagine why you haven't had time. I mean...

Leann: Yeah, I actually am looking forward to this summer because I'll have more to do again. Because right now, being in my friend's house, everything I own is in storage other than my TV.

Krista: I'm curious, as a teacher, are you back in the classroom yet?

Leann: We are. We've been in the classroom every day except for the week before Thanksgiving. I teach first grade and they are just loving being with their friends. We're learning lots. We have lots to catch up on. I think we're getting there.

Krista: I can only imagine. Okay, so before we go, I want to give you the opportunity to just kind of speak to other widows. If you could speak to maybe Leann a couple of years ago, what kind of advice would you give? What would you want them, or former you, to know?

Leann: That you are worth it. You are important enough to be valued by you and by other people around you. And you don't have to have people in your life that don't do that for you. And that you don't have to do things for people in order for them to want you in their life. And yeah, don't let the thing between your ears, that brain of yours and your heart get involved as much, you know what I mean? Just do what you can do. Maybe the brain needs to be involved more than the heart.

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Krista: Yeah, but do what you can do. Which is to say you can show up in a loving way and do what feels loving to you, but we have to release this idea that we can get people to make different choices, or make the choices that we hope that they would make.

It doesn't matter how good of a parent you have been. Knowing the details of your story and what you grew up with and the way that you parented, it's just a really solid example of children have their own agency. They will make their own choices, no matter how amazing and loving their parent is. You can set the pristine example of what to do and what not to do and values and all of that. And your children will still go and make their own choices. And it really, as much as we love them, it's not up to us to be able to control them. But we can love ourselves. And I love seeing that shift for you.

Leann: It's been awesome. I actually just ordered a little – it's maybe five foot by eight inch tall little piece of wood, and it says, "The next chapter, 2021, Leann Patrick," or Patrick's house, or something like that. I'm super-excited to put that up in my house and my next chapter, if I do start dating someday, I'm going to say, before I even tell you my name, do you have a shop and how much stuff is in it? Because I'm not dealing with it again.

Krista: You just set that as a filter straight out the gate. I love it. Well, I hope you'll send me pictures when you're in your new house.

Leann: I will absolutely, Krista.

Krista: Thank you so much for coming on and sharing your story. I know it's not an easy thing to do.

Leann: You're welcome.

Krista: Alright, I really appreciate it. I'll talk to you soon.

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Leann: Thank you.

Krista: Okay, bye.

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.