

Ep #127: Becoming a Young Widow at Christmas: A Widows Unfiltered Interview with Christina Sgambato



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Krista St-Germain

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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 127, Widows Unfiltered: An Interview with Christina Sgambato.

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. I've got another Widowed Mom client to introduce you to today that I think you're going to find so inspiring and so relatable.

And I'll let her introduce herself of course, but I just love her so much because not that this is a requirement, so I don't love you any less if you're not doing what Christina's doing, but I just love Christina's journey because she has gone from trying to figure out how to help herself and her very young son to helping herself so much and applying all the tools that she's learned and then getting herself to the place where she's actually ready to help other widows.

And it's just a beautiful story filled with, to me, bravery, so much bravery, a lot of strong decisions, and I'm just really proud of her and can't wait to introduce you. So without further ado, let's jump into my interview with Christina.

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

Christina: Glad to be here.

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Krista: So I'll have you introduce yourself just a little bit, but I'm really excited to have you because it's been really fun to watch your journey. And I'm sure there were elements of your journey I didn't even get to see, but it's been really fun from where I sit to watch your growth, to watch you pursue your dreams, to watch you do all the things that you've done in the last year, so I can't wait for people to hear about it. So why don't you start? Just tell people a little bit about who you are, how you became a widow, give us your story.

Christina: The whole deal. So my name is Christina, I am a director of marketing for a healthcare group in Baltimore, Maryland. I am a mom of a very crazy little two-year-old boy and I am a young widow. So my backstory was that Christmas Eve 2019 is when I got that awesome title of young widow.

My husband Matt was diagnosed with stage four cholangiocarcinoma in January of 2019. A week after the birth of our son. And then we spent most of 2019 being new parents and battling cancer and kind of working through all of the intricacies that go along with both sides of that spectrum and really dealing with the diagnosis, dealing with everything that comes along with cancer care, all while dealing with being these young adults that just had a child too and trying to get our arms around that. So 2019 was a crazy year for both of us, and then on Christmas Eve Matt passed away. And that really began my journey into widowhood.

Krista: I'm just thinking back to what it was like just a week after my daughter was born, my first child, how overwhelmed and how emotionally unbalanced and just what a hot mess I was just with the birth of my child. So I literally cannot imagine what adding on a cancer diagnosis and a really bad one at that must have been like.

Christina: I kind of feel like I went through that year and my brain was just like, muddled. I don't even know how I focused on work or how I got other

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things done, but it's like, you kind of experience this high of highs when you have your child, and then a week later it's the lowest of lows, and trying to find space in between.

I think I really - kind of looking back on that, I'm sure that a lot of cancer widows or other people who have dealt with terminal illnesses or long-term illnesses kind of feel like you're grieving twice in that process. And that early grief for me after Matt's diagnosis was very much like, the numbness and the confusion.

Because like you said, I mean, I'm already dealing with hormones of post-pregnancy stuff, but I was so in it and so into getting him better. And really, those first two months after his diagnosis were the time we were finding it out and we were getting his care set up and you're just going, going, going. I'm pumping in a hospital room, it's just all this stuff.

And then you go home and it's like, wow, this is our reality now. And everything is different. Everything is not what we planned. All the should bes and should haves. And we kind of focused that year on really Matt being that 1%, the person that's going to survive this, and figuring out what we could do.

And I think 2019, I spent a lot of that - and maybe that's how I dealt with some of the grief I had. Just keep pushing forward, keep figuring things out. Something stops working, what are we doing next? Really looking towards that because I kind of felt that personal responsibility to be that beacon of hope for Matt. And at times when things felt just really, really hard and really uncertain and all of that.

And when he passed away, all of that kind of came to the front too of everything that I'd been grieving from that year on top of grieving the fact that Matt's actually gone. And that was just a lot all at once.

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Krista: Yeah, I can only imagine. And I'm just imagining too, it's like, really not even much time for grieving any of it while it's happening. It's compartmentalize, survive, go, go, go.

Christina: Yeah, 100%. And it's like, even though it was a long-term illness, it was 11 months. So we didn't have - I'm not saying - I haven't gone through an illness where it's been four years and you're dealing with that or whatnot. But really, I don't think it ever sunk in that we were even dealing with this, and all of a sudden, everything...

Krista: Yeah, and your nervous system was probably completely fried.

Christina: Oh yeah.

Krista: Okay, fast forward to then we met. How did that happen? What made you reach out? What was that all about?

Christina: So there's kind of a few serendipitous things that happened. So I should say I'm not a stranger to thought work. I've been following thought work for a really long time, I follow Kara Loewentheil's podcast, Life Coach School podcast.

So I knew the concept behind thought work and I was kind of in this place of that doesn't apply to me now though. This situation is outside that realm and it is not going to be useful for someone that's dealing with something so heavy and so traumatic. So even though I could utilize some of those concepts in other areas of my life, I felt like when I was dealing with everything in front of me now at that point, it felt really hard for me to apply it.

And then one time, I was listening to another podcast and a coach on there had mentioned your name and I was like, oh, there's a widow that does this? And I was like, I'm interested. So I started listening to your podcast

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and of course, Facebook knows, so I started getting all of the Facebook ads for that. I work in marketing so...

Krista: The pixel.

Christina: And so I was just like, I'm going to watch this, and you had said one thing in one of the videos that was basically like, I thought my best days are behind me. And that was really kind of the trigger point for me to be like, wow, this woman gets me and understands.

Because that was really kind of how I was feeling at that point. And I really got peace at that point of okay, I need to talk to her. And it kind of worked at the same time where I had been working on this big event in Matt's honor all year long prior to reaching out to you.

So right after Matt died, I had been so used to doing things so much, I was like, okay, now what? Now what am I doing? We're going to keep moving forward. So I reached out to a few of our family and friends and we decided to organize this big event in 2020 to raise money for cholangiocarcinoma, to bring attention to rare cancers, and obviously in Matt's honor.

Then the pandemic hit and we had to alter the event. So really, on top of being a new mom and my actual paying job, I was planning this big event, and then I had to change everything. So the whole year was spent doing all of this and really focusing.

And as we got closer and closer to the event, I realized that I was just feeling this anxiousness inside of me about the event ending. And I couldn't quite put my finger on it. I'm like, I'm going to have more time, why is that a bad thing? And then I realized that I was just having a lot of trouble really sitting with the feelings of loss.

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And a lot of the things that I had pushed down by doing things, it started to come up for me. And that was really kind of the combination of those two things. And I had been in therapy, so I had done that, but this was something that I felt like I needed in order to move my life forward.

Because I loved the event, it's a huge event, it's a big part of me now. But I didn't want it to be the only thing and the only thing that I was holding on to in order to feel connected to Matt.

Krista: Yeah, I remember that from our first conversation and you just kind of knowing that. Because sometimes we do that. We try to solve our feelings with action, or distraction. And not to say it's not sometimes action we're really proud of or something we create that we're really proud of.

But we have this kind of knowing that after this is over, when I don't have this to fall back on, or when I don't have something to keep me busy, there's something waiting for me. And that dread of ugh.

Christina: Exactly. And I was like, this dependency that I felt like I had on that event, and I'm like, that's not healthy for me and for me dealing with all of this. And I'm probably getting a little ahead of myself, but as we kind of dug into it, I'm like, I think what I'm doing is I'm just afraid of feeling all of that grief.

I'm afraid of sitting with it. And I did that even after Matt got diagnosed. I just kept doing things and trying to buffer with even positive thoughts, or things that could kind of push that down because it just felt so - I just didn't like that feeling in my body.

And I think that that really kind of - I didn't want that event to be that for me. I wanted it to be something that for years to come does wonderful things for the community, that is an honor for Matt, that connects me to him in a

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healthy way but isn't my lifeline and isn't my way of suppressing a lot of that feeling.

Krista: So what did you learn that helped you deal with it differently? And how did you support yourself through all of that?

Christina: I mean, I think some of it was just learning - so we did the now feeling process. I think that that was really helpful. And honestly, that was the first lesson we got. And as well, this is super helpful right now. But I think that that was just noticing it, allowing for feelings to happen, and telling myself that it's okay.

And that I think was a big part of my work throughout the year and continues to be a big part of my work in coaching. But knowing that some of those hard feelings are okay to have. It's okay to experience that. Even if it doesn't always come - something great comes from it, sometimes you just need to sit with it in order to process it because the more I would stuff things down, the harder they would come up for me.

And it wouldn't feel - it just didn't feel helpful for me. It just ended up making things much harder for me in the long run. So I think that that really helped for me. And I think that that was a huge help. And I also find a lot of help with movement too. I've noticed for myself that when I'm processing feelings a lot, movement with it, not videotaping that.

You can use your imagination, it's really fun. But I found that a really good way for me to process a lot of feelings when I'm just feeling something's getting at me, because for me too I've noticed that a lot of times when I'm feeling something and I'm buffering or I'm pushing it down, the actions that are coming out of that aren't things that I want to be doing.

It's usually something - I get snippy with people, I act differently, I'm not my normal self. And I don't like that part of it. So it's because I'm so resistant to

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feeling it that I'm doing all these other things that are not helpful for me. So just being able to do that, and it's really helped me process things and then move forward.

Also not bash myself if I have feelings like that. I think we can all attest to the fact that grief isn't linear, it doesn't go away, the hard still happens. But now I'm more comfortable allowing it to be there instead of feeling like I have to do something to buffer it out.

Krista: When you were talking about giving yourself permission, what was it that was holding you back to giving yourself that before? Was it a fear of something? Do you remember?

Christina: I think it's depending on the circumstance, there were different things. So I think part of it was just a fear of feeling certain feelings. And I think that as a culture, it's really hard for us to confront grief and confront death and to talk about those types of things.

And we're kind of always told to look on the bright side, or to find ways to help people out of the rut, and all these different things. But no one ever says maybe sometimes you just need to be sad. Or maybe sometimes you just need to sit with this. It's always you should be - okay, you can be sad for a little bit but what are you doing to get out of that sadness? Or what are you doing?

And sometimes it's just - if you don't process it and you're not really working on that, you never get to a point where you can deal with that emotionally. And so I think that it was the fear of getting stuck was part of it, or being in this icky place that I just didn't want to be in.

And I think there were other fears that I've kind of worked through too in regards to my connection to Matt. That was another thing that I was afraid of losing.

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Krista: If you felt better?

Christina: Yeah, if I felt better. That would be a sign that I'm over it, or that's a sign - or people will think I'm over it, or all of these other things. I think I still even work through some of that today with when I'm posting things that seem like I'm moving forward with my life and things that I'm really excited about doing.

And I know we recently coached on this too but the other shoe dropping type of a thing. So all of those, the fears as you move forward, there's so many things - it just makes you stop for a minute. How are other people going to react to this? Something bad's going to happen. All of those things.

Krista: Yeah. I wonder too, did you ever have a - sometimes when we're parenting, especially little ones, and in that solo parent role sometimes there's a fear that if we allow ourselves to feel how we're feeling, we won't be able to be effective as parents, we won't be able to - we'll fall into some pit of despair and never come out.

Christina: 100%. And I think, I remember one time I actually went over to my brother and sister-in-law's and I cried in front of their five-year-old daughter and I was like, I am so sorry. I was apologizing for crying and they were just like no, it's okay, we all feel that way. It's okay to cry.

And I just felt like I shouldn't, I want to be the one they think is strong, and I want to be the one that's getting through this. My son was so young at the time but for him too, there's the fear of that if he sees me struggling, if he sees me sad, that it's going to impact him even more than he's already been impacted at such a young age. So I definitely - yeah, I think as parents you kind of hold yourself to a standard too, and thinking you need to be in a certain place.

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Krista: Yeah, I think it's an interesting reframe too that I've noticed come up a lot in coaching, which is what we think is strong is sometimes not what's actually strong. We put this pressure on ourselves that it means handling it by ourselves is somehow a sign of strength when really, being willing to be vulnerable and let other people in and get support from other people and express how we're truly feeling is actually strength.

Christina: That's definitely I think another thing that has really come to light over this year and just not being afraid to ask for help in certain situations, whether it's help by coaching, or whether it's help just with things. Helping with Bryson or picking something up for me, helping me with the seven moves I've done in two years.

I think that this whole situation, I've never been someone that easily asks for help. And I think that's something that this is almost forced me to be in that position, but also not feel bad in that position, not feel bad asking people for help. Because people genuinely do want to help and if they didn't, they would say no and that's okay. It's just being able to reach out to people and I do think there's strength in that, to being able to do that.

Krista: Yeah, sometimes it's so hard to be able to receive the help, to ask for it, and then to receive it for sure. One of the things I've really loved too that I think is kind of unique, some people do, some people don't, but you've really been pretty public in terms of the blog that you have, and just bringing people along on your journey. Can you talk about how that came to be and what's made you decide to share what you share? What's that like?

Christina: Yeah so, I think for me, I was an English major in college, I've always loved writing. And I actually started a blog years ago. I'd been toying with it a little bit and then finally Matt was like, just do it, you've been talking about it forever, just do it.

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And so I started the blog and it really picked up steam when I got pregnant with Bryson and I did this whole pregnancy series that was really popular and people enjoyed it. And I had all these plans for doing a postpartum thing, and then everything happened with Matt.

And at that point, we didn't really talk about Matt's illness. It wasn't my story to tell. So I stopped blogging, and my blog has always been something from the get-go I thought about as an outlet for me, it's a place for me to be really raw and authentic. And hopefully it helps other people that might relate to me on whatever part of life's journey they're on.

So because Matt's diagnosis and our whole year dealing with that was such a big part of my life and I didn't feel like it was my place to be blogging about that, I just stopped blogging. But right after Matt passed away, I'm like, I need some sort of outlet right now and something to just get this off of my chest and to talk and not feel like everything's bottled up.

As a 33-year-old widow, it felt very lonely. I am lucky in a sense that I have a great support system. I have family on both sides, my in-laws are fantastic, my immediate family is great, I have a huge group of friends, they're super supportive, but it's still a very lonely journey when you feel like you're in this place at 33 years old with a one-year-old child.

And I needed some sort of an outlet to talk about it. And my blog ended up being that. And it's interesting now because I can look back at these blogs and really kind of see how I've grown or evolved or changed over time, but also really kind of see where I was and know that that was okay.

When I think about that, I think sometimes I would write the blog and I would publish it and I was like, oh God, I can't believe I just put that out there, what are people going to say? But it was such a real part of my experience at that point and even though that might have only been a year and a half, almost two years ago now, just how I look at certain situations

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has changed. But I still think it's so important to acknowledge how I was feeling in that particular place in my life.

And now I've had so many people reach out to me, not just people that are widowed, but other grievers, people that have lost parents, people that have lost children, people who have dealt with miscarriages and other losses. And just finding little nuggets of relatability, hope, just empathy, whatever it is, and finding that in words I think just does so much.

And for me, I found that in different podcasts too. Your podcast was great, the Widow We Do Now podcast with those ladies. It's not a very large young widow community so when you can find people that are really speaking to you in whatever form that is, it's just helpful. And that's kind of what I wanted to be and I continue to want to be with that.

Krista: I love it. What's your belief progression been like? You mentioned that one of the things you heard me say that caught your attention was my fear about my best days being behind me. So what's that progression been like in terms of losing Matt and your thoughts about your future and what's possible for you and how that's kind of shifted into wherever it is you are now?

Christina: That's been such a huge part of - it's still a big part, an evolving part I would say of my journey. But when I first found you and you said that, it resonated because I was literally thinking those things. I would sit in my office at work, I went to work a week and a half after Matt died. It was a little crazy.

And I would sit in my office sometimes when I had a minute and I would cry or things would come on the radio and I would just start bawling. And then I'd have these thoughts like, this is it. I mean, Matt was the love of my life. He connected to me on so many levels. We were together 10 years.

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And it just felt like okay, this is it. No one's going to connect with you like that again. And I am my own person, but a big part of me had been Matt. We evolved together over these years. And what we had laid out as our plan, it felt like everything just got blown up. And now it was just me trying to put pieces back together and refigure this life.

And now I'm a solo parent, the financial obligations of being the only provider for our family, all of these things just felt like a lot. And I'm like, it sucks. And then I looked back at the 10 years before when I was in my late 20s, early 30s, and we were just having a blast in life and things were going really well. And it just felt like, okay, that was it.

And it felt so demotivating and so blah and I just - so from that point, I'm like, this isn't how I want to live. This isn't how Matt would want me to live. And it sure as heck isn't the example I want to set for my son.

And so really, a lot of belief work on the fact that things can get better. And we talked a little bit about using thought ladders, so it was really a lot of thought ladder work where it was like okay, there's potential that I could have a life that is sort of as good.

And it's little stiff, like okay, maybe there's a 7% chance this could happen. And that's really - I started working on that and finding different ways of how life could be better than it was before, or just as good as it was before, or however I want to frame it.

And I think that that's really - in theory, I was like okay, it's possible. As a human, you're always evolving, the hope is that you continue to grow throughout life no matter what. But when you're in it, it feels like that's just not possible. That's not where we're at anymore.

And so I think just looking at my life and saying okay, where am I now and where do I want to go, and what do I need to think in order to become that

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person. So a lot of belief work there, and I feel like I've come really far in a lot of aspects of it.

Of course I still have tendencies to miss my life then and miss Matt and wish he was evolving with me on this journey. But I think that I've been able to really come to a better place with that. And again, it's continuous work to really get there.

Because really, you're becoming another version of yourself. When your life gets blown up, you're like, alright, who am I? What's going on now? And that's really kind of putting that together and figuring out what your values are and what are the things that you really want to do because time is finite here.

Krista: Yeah, I think even just the process of figuring out how to contemplate what you might want in the future can be really hard. Because when everything you imagined was you and Matt and your son and a family, probably more than just your son, you have all these visions.

And then to have to go back, it's like, at least for me, I was pissed that I had to even be thinking about wanting something else because I don't want anything else. And then figuring out how do you even want again?

Christina: It's definitely - I was definitely mad. I was mad that other people got to continue with their lives and their family plans. And I felt like everything got taken away from me. And it felt a little wrong too. I would say I think that some of my belief work, really, there was some underlying guilt of I get this chance to do this and Matt doesn't. And that just felt wrong.

And I think that really working on that belief has been a part of this too, and trying to get that out of me in a way that I didn't feel that guilt. Because I also know that that's not something that Matt would ever not want for me. He would never want me to stay status quo. He'd always want me to grow.

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But I would think that thought and I'd be like, yeah, but he's not the one that has to be here trying to figure all this out and I have to figure it out. So working through a lot of that.

Krista: Our last Masters call, I think you were on in the beginning and then maybe you had to jump off so I think you had hopped off by the time we were having this conversation, but that's one of the things that - I think it's entirely possible if we want to, and we have to want to, and it's not a requirement that we want to, to believe that our future is better than our past, is going to be better than our past.

But then when we go to contemplate that, I think it's natural that the resistance pops up of wait, if that's true, then what does that mean about him? What does that mean about my relationship? What does that mean about my love? Is that disloyal? Am I abandoning him? Do I even want to believe that it's possible for me to love my future even more than I love my past? And if we want that, we got to move through it. But it would seem like a belief that everyone would want, but yet maybe not sometimes.

Christina: I think it's super complex. I think that it's still even almost two years into this journey and one year after working with you Krista and really digging in a lot, that's still a belief that I have trouble completely feeling like I want to have. And we have all the logical side that says of course you want to believe that, of course you want to keep moving forward, of course you want something to look forward to. But there's always that kind of but what does that mean about what we had together?

Krista: That emotional side. And I think even kind of the fear of believing that it could be amazing. Even that can be scary. Okay, so by the time this airs, you will be a certified life coach.

Christina: I will.

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Krista: So talk to us about that progression. What made you want to do that? What made you decide to do it at the time that you did? Because I watched the progression but I want people to hear about it from you.

Christina: Yeah. So I was a health coach a year - I am a health coach technically speaking. I didn't really practice for a few years. I did have a couple clients that I kept on but dealing with all of the Matt stuff and then widowhood, I just kind of stopped with that.

But I've always had this desire to want to help people in some capacity. And I've been following The Life Coach School forever. I think when you're doing that, you're always like, could I do this? And I was always like, I don't know, I'm not sure I'm made for that, is this really a thing? Are people really successful with this? It's for other people, not for me.

A lot of that kind of talk. And we were working together and I really started to think about it, people were reading my blog and I was getting a lot of DMs and messages from people, there is a space for people that are grieving and for young widows, and for people that are dealing with these things where coaching can really be helpful.

And there aren't many of us doing that. And I think that I felt kind of called - I hate using that, but I felt called to really get involved in that and want to be part of that. And knowing how much and how valuable it was for me to have that, to feel like despite the situation, despite the circumstance of Matt's death, that there was still so much space for me to love life again and to figure out a way to do that, and whatever that means for someone.

So I really - of course then I was having a lot of jibber-jabber about okay Christina, but remember what your old brain is telling you about you not being able to succeed in this, you're investing money into education piece of it, you're investing time into it, I mean, it is no joke certification. I mean, it's lots of coaching, it's lots of putting yourself out there and being in front

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of people coaching and doing things that were a little out of my comfort zone.

And I had throughout the year had a lot of brain jabber about how - I still have brain jabber about how maybe this was a bad idea, maybe this isn't for someone like me who's dealing with a toddler and sickness and trying to coordinate when I'm coaching and all of this stuff.

It's interesting because I had - I was getting peer coached once and this was really - I should shoutout to her sometime but she was - I was going through all this jabber about maybe I'm not supposed to be here, maybe this is not for me. And she was like, maybe this is exactly why you're supposed to be here because you're learning how to do all of this while dealing with all of this.

I had to miss some of my classes because Bryson got sick, so I had to get creative on how I would figure out the material, practice the material, or learn it. And it really - I mean, getting through that and learning all of that, it kind of - that was a boom moment for me like, yes, this is why.

And from there, I just felt like yeah, this is exactly where I'm supposed to be. So yeah, I'm really excited to get out there and start coaching and feel like I can help. And this is probably a testament to you Krista, I feel like I'm always going to have a coach because I need someone to be able to look at my brain and help me because even going through this coaching certification, even getting coached by you for a year, even listening to The Life Coach School podcast and these things for years before that, I still need that support of being able to look at my brain and calm that jibber-jabber down because it always wants to tell me why I shouldn't be doing things or why I should play it safe, or where I'm doing things wrong.

Krista: Obviously I'm the same way. I will never not have a coach. And it's really - I don't even consider it a need so much as a want. I want someone

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to show me what's happening in my brain because I know that if I can get some leverage over whatever drama's in there, then I can do even more of what I want with my life. So yeah, I'm totally with you.

And also, I just want to shoutout for a second, having gone through obviously certification myself and been an instructor for The Life Coach School for years, I know how hard that is. And I did it without a toddler. So to do it with a toddler, working full-time, and you moved in the middle of it, and Matt's event, that's just no joke.

So I hope that you kind of leverage that for yourself. And the next time your brain's telling you you don't have what it takes, you can pivot back to wait, remember what we just did with certification? And all of this.

Christina: 100%. It kind of reminds me - sorry, I'm going on another tangent but you said about reminding your brain and one thing you say and I think that's really resonated with me is always that you can do hard things. And that has kind of put me in a place that even in certification where there were times I'm like, this is hard, that's what would ring in my ear. I hear Krista saying that.

You can do hard things. I have done some of the hardest things a human is ever going to have to do. And I'm still here to talk about it and I'm still moving forward with it. So yeah, hard things, bad things are going to happen but I can do that. That really resonated with me.

Krista: Amazing. So what's your vision? I'm sure it will change, but what's your vision for what you want to do with coaching?

Christina: I could change, who knows, but I really want to help young widows, young grieverers in general. I've toyed with what area, what do I consider young, what do I consider old, but I don't really care. Whoever really wants help in that area, to figure out their path forward.

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And one thing I've always said that really resonated with me is kind of integrating your loss into your journey forward too and being able to honor that loss and still carry it with you in a way. Because for me, that was a lot of work too. Not feeling like I'm leaving Matt behind if I want to move forward.

How do I move forward with him and kind of keep that relationship with him, even if it might be different now? How do I maintain that? So people really looking to do that and figuring out what does life look like now for me.

Krista: I think that's beautiful. And I think that's the ultimate goal. Because we can never go back to who we were before. Why would we even want to? But what we can do is take that experience, take that relationship, take those lessons, take all the sadness, take all of it and weave it into the fabric of who we are and use it as a way to decide, okay, what do I value?

That's what it was for me leaving my old job and becoming a coach is intense clarity on not that I don't love these people that I'm working with, not that these planes aren't beautiful because they are, but more than ever before, I could so clearly see how precious life was.

And using that opportunity to then decide, okay, what do you value? What do you want the rest of your life to be about? And then giving yourself permission to go after that. And use the loss in a way to create more of what you want in life instead of using it as a way to limit what's possible for you and what you do with your life.

Christina: Exactly. And I think I've always felt like a pretty empathetic person and I would say this after anyone passed away or something, life is too short, life is too precious, and then things just kind of happen and you do your thing. And I think when you're really struck with a personal grief situation like the loss of your spouse or a loss of a parent or whatever that might be, it really shows that finite time we have here and how precious it is

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to do something valuable with it, and helping people to find that for themselves and what that means.

Krista: Yeah. And I'm thinking about people who are listening to this and they're maybe pretty close to their loss, I just want everybody to know, if you want to tell us to jump off a cliff right now, talking about loving life again and moving forward, that's okay too. And I would have wanted to do the same thing in the very beginning.

And so it's a progression that we get to make over time if we choose to, but by no means do we want to diminish what it is that you're going through. If you could kind of look back and knowing what you know now and having the skills that you have and the experiences that you have, if you could talk to younger Christina, maybe after Matt got diagnosed or maybe right after he passed, at a certain earlier day in your grief experience, what kind of wisdom would you offer to yourself so our listeners can benefit?

Christina: So I have a few things I've thought about a little bit. I think definitely you're right where you need to be is an important thing. Looking back, I'm like, I should feel this way, I should feel this way, I should be acting this way, I should be doing this way, and this is a huge disturbance in your existence.

It's okay to be wherever you are, whatever that means to you. And sometimes that's being in a complete fog, and sometimes that's being numb, and sometimes that's feeling like you want to cry but not being able to conjure up the tears to do it. Whatever that is, it's okay because there's no use adding suffering for something that you shouldn't be suffering over.

And then definitely feelings are not something to be afraid of. I think that that's huge. We talked a lot about that, but just not being afraid to feel the tough feelings. And what I really have noted over time is that feelings are

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just part of the human experience, and if you were only to feel one way, then you're not getting the whole human experience.

It's just part of who we are and it's okay. A feeling isn't going to hurt you. And that's something that I've really, really had to do a lot of work on and I think that I wish I would be able to tell myself that a couple years ago. And then you're not powerless. And that I think was huge for me.

I don't know if a lot of other people when they're in early grief, whether it's a diagnosis of a terminal illness or someone or your partner just passed away or whatever it might be, it can feel really powerless and like everything's happening to you.

And things are happening that are really sad and bad around you, and it's okay to acknowledge that, but know that you're not powerless in any situation. And it can feel that way, whatever you take from that.

Krista: That's a really mind-bending one too to wrap your head around because it's like, we can find the balance between releasing our desire to control the things that we genuinely don't have power over, but then also clearly distinguishing, yes, I can't control that diagnosis, I can't control that my person died, I can't control that my son is screaming and won't sleep right now, all that.

But even then, I do get to choose how I want to respond to that. I do get to choose who I want to be in that. It's this really hard to find balance that creates so much freedom and so much less suffering.

Christina: That's exactly it. Sometimes that means showing up and being super sad or whatever that is. There's no one way to show up. It's just knowing that you get to choose how you want to show up in that situation and whatever that way that is, that's perfect, and that's supposed to be how you're showing up.

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Krista: Yeah, absolutely. If anything, what was there that you wanted to talk about that we missed, or things you want people to know that we didn't get to yet?

Christina: I think a big thing for me too is - we touched a little bit on it, but your brain is always going to show you all the things that you're not doing right all the time and it takes a lot of practice to figure out what you are doing right. And that's had a huge impact on me and allowed me to really move forward.

We did some work on this mid-coaching year for me. We were all doing it. And the three things that you accomplished today, three things you want to accomplish tomorrow, and all of that stuff, and that felt so reassuring to program your brain to look at those things.

Because I think in widowhood at any stage, whether you're a new widow, whether you've been a widow for 10, 12 years, whatever, your brain is always going to be like, oh, I didn't do this right, I didn't do this right, I don't know how to do this, I'm not doing this. You're always going to look at all those things instead of just acknowledging all the stuff that you are doing and all the things, whether that's just getting out of bed or whether that's getting your life coach certification, or going for a walk, or playing with your kids, or whatever that is.

I mean, all of those things are successes and it's important to acknowledge that to kind of get your brain to start looking at those pieces. So I think that overall, I would just say it might feel like you're stuck, it might feel like you're not moving forward, it might feel like it's one step forward, four steps back, but just know that you're doing everything you can and that's part of your journey. And I think that that's important.

Krista: Yeah, it's like almost don't trust what your brain is trying to tell you about your lack of progress. Your brain is a liar. And we have to retrain it to

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actually show us what is equally true, which is all the areas of progress that we're making. I love that you mentioned that. Love it.

Okay, so where can people connect with you? I would love for them to read your blog, but what's the best way for them to connect with you?

Christina: So they can connect with me on Instagram, so my Instagram handle is @christinasgambato. No one ever spells or says that right. I'm pretty sure I'm the only Christina Sgambato alive on this planet.

Krista: Love it. Okay, so they will find you.

Christina: They will find me. And they can also find my blog and my website at www.christinasgambato.com and those are probably the best ways to reach out to me.

Krista: Amazing. Well thank you so much for coming and being brave enough to share your story with my listeners.

Christina: Thanks for having me Krista and for coaching me. And dealing with my crazy brain too.

Krista: That part is truly my pleasure. Okay, we will link to your website and your Instagram in the show notes too so if you didn't write that down and you want to connect with Christina then go to the show notes and you'll find it there. Alright, thanks so much.

Christina: Thanks Krista.

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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.