

**Ep #206: From the Depths of Despair
to Finding Hope for the Future:
A Widows Unfiltered Interview with Cindy**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Krista St-Germain

[The Widowed Mom Podcast](#)

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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 206, Widows Unfiltered: An Interview with Cindy.

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 some exciting news, like hot off the press kind of news because here's the thing, since I am a widow myself I do know how difficult it can be to navigate life after losing a spouse, especially with all the misinformation that exists in our culture around grief. And I also know that not everyone is ready for something as involved as my premium *Mom Goes On* six month small group coaching program.

So that's why I'm inviting you to try a brand new opportunity called *Widows Like Us*, a monthly gathering and workshop for widowed moms. It's designed exclusively for widowed moms, offers practical tools, stuff you can actually use and topics that you're not going to find anywhere else, plus a community of women who understand. And the best part, this is my favorite part is that it takes only 90 minutes per month, 90 minutes. Now, if you're already a member of *Mom Goes On* or *Mom Goes On Master's*, you will get *The Widows Like Us* workshops included at no additional charge.

If you aren't a member of *Mom Goes On*, I highly recommend that you run, do not walk to coachingwithkrista.com/widowslikeus to get all the details. Plus the opportunity to try out your first month for less than the cost of a Starbucks latte. So you have to do that by Mother's Day to take advantage of this special offer. Again, coachingwithkrista.com/widowslikeus and I'll see you inside.

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And for today's podcast episode I am super excited, I always say this but I really always do mean it, to introduce you to former *Mom Goes On* member, Cindy. I've really been looking forward to this interview because I have a unique vantage point when I am coaching women through the program. I get to see the entire transformation. And that means in my eyes it's quite stark. I think when you're going through it yourself it feels a little slow and gradual and you don't fully appreciate what's happening and you don't fully appreciate how much you're changing.

But let me tell you the Cindy that you are about to hear from is a different Cindy than the one that came into *Mom Goes On* not so long ago. And I am just so proud of her and how she really did use the tools even when it was really hard for her and challenging for her, she did not give up. She also never swallowed anything that I taught. And people get the best transformation when they don't just go along to get along, when they aren't lemmings, when they actually do push back a little bit and challenge the tools, see if they can break them.

When it doesn't quite feel good to them they say something. And Cindy is one of those people, she doesn't just do what she's told in the best possible way. And she made the program work for her and I'll let her tell you all about it. But I will just say watching her in particular go from believing that it was virtually impossible to not be happy in a partnered relationship to truly seeing that it is, was a really inspiring thing to watch. And if Cindy can do it, you all can do it too. Alright, so with that let's get into my interview with Cindy. Enjoy.

Krista: Alright, welcome, Cindy, to the podcast.

Cindy: Thank you. I feel so happy to be here.

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Krista: I love that. You all can't see us but we're in matching, almost blue and white, it's like we coordinated our wardrobe today unintentionally, apparently. Well, listen, I would love for you to just kind of jump in and tell us a little bit about you and how you got here, whatever you want listeners to know.

Cindy: Sure. Thank you. Well, my husband, David and I met at summer camp when I was 18 years old and he was 20. And we fell in love fast and hard. And really then have been together for the next 40 years. We were married for just shy of 35. So we really grew up together, we supported each other going through school, developing our careers. We raised four children together up till young adulthood. And I really feel like we lived the dream that we set out to have.

And I had an experience recently where I found an old photo and it was a picture of the two of us, really technically on our very first day of married life. We had just come back from our honeymoon and we were moving to LA. I'm in Toronto, but we had to spend a year in LA. And so David had set up this camera. There were no selfies in those days. So he set up a camera on a little pedestal and turned on the timer and the two of us ran and it took this photo of the two of us.

And I saw it the other day and it was like two children but I immediately remembered where our minds were and the optimism we felt and what our hopes were for the future, what kind of life we wanted. And when I thought about it, I just thought, yeah, that was what we did. And then everything came crashing down in a blink of an eye. And so that was on April 1st, 2019. We were about to go on a trip to Sicily with some friends. And, David, developed a blood clot in his leg. And his doctor said, "Just take some blood thinners and go on the trip, don't worry about it."

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But he was a doctor and he was just uneasy about it. So the next day we went to his hospital and he just ordered himself a CAT scan. We took it over to the radiologist, he went in and a few minutes later he came out and like I'm sure many other women have experienced, this moment is seared in my mind as he told me that he had metastatic pancreatic cancer. So we both immediately know what that meant. We were told he had three to six months to live.

But we were kind of not buying that, so we searched the world for treatments. We tried everything. We were able to access all sorts of unexpected treatments and so on. And we ended up being blessed with two years and three months of life and the majority of it was really very good quality life. He showed strength and grace and optimism and courage. And we had beautiful experiences, my son's wedding, we danced our hearts out. And my second son's engagement, one daughter got into law school, the other one got into medical school.

And we traveled and we did tons of family stuff during COVID. And then when the end came, my kids, David's brother and I took care of David at home and he passed away in his sleep in bed with me and with all of us around. And I later learned that I had been having what was called anticipatory grief, something I had never heard about from the outset for those past two years. And even though he dealt with it with great strength and we were having all these happy moments, the truth was that it was a terribly, terribly dark time for me, the darkest time of my life.

And the only thing that comforted me was I kept having imaginations of David and I going out into a forest, lying down on a cozy blanket, cuddling up and going to sleep, the end. And of course I would never have acted upon that. And all he wanted for me was to live and to have happiness but it was a very dark time.

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Krista: You know, I think that's so common though. And I'm actually glad you're articulating it because I think a lot of women are afraid to say that they have thoughts like that or visions like that or kind of like a subtle wish because they worry that people will assume that they are having suicidal ideation, when it's really not that.

Cindy: Yeah, that's right. It's a different thing. And I learned through the *Mom Goes On* program to be able to feel comfortable to share my truth. And that was my truth at that time. So I quickly realized that I needed help. And so I was open to anything and everything and went during that time when he was still alive, went to different therapists with not really getting a lot of help. And then shout out to Facebook, something came through my feed one day and it was an advertisement for a life coach for women whose husbands have cancer.

And I said, "No way. How could something so niche exist?" And I hummed and hawed about it and then I just took the leap and I did it. And I worked with Marika who was a graduate from your program. And it was the first time that I started to say, "This makes sense to me. I see something that can help me here." And then once David passed away, I finished with Marika and she gave me your name but she said, "You're not ready, you need to wait." And so in that early period I kind of was throwing spaghetti at the wall, I guess.

I tried lots of different things and probably the first thing I did and if I was sort of talking with a new widow, what would I say? The first thing I did was I tried to grab on to one little piece of my former life that I felt could still be there. And in our family I had always done a weekly sabbath dinner for the entire family. And so the week after we had finished all of the funeral related things I took it up again and I just kept doing that every week. And it would bring the family, it would bring us all together and it gave me a little bit of purpose. I had to meal plan and I had to shop.

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And I had to prepare the food. And I had to set a table. And some of the time when the kids were there it was unbearable for me because I didn't even know how to be with my own kids without David. It didn't feel right. So some of the times I'd just end up going up to my room and crying and one or other of the kids would come up and kind of sit with me. But then with time and doing it every week it started to be a bit enjoyable. And then we started to invite people to join us.

And again with the help of your coaching, now I invite couple friends to come and it's fun.

Krista: Which by the way is a kind of a big deal because I know, I mean maybe you can talk about why that's a big deal but from our coaching conversations. To me that is huge victory.

Cindy: It was really big, we went through a lot together. But it all started with just kind of grasping at one thing. The other thing that I realized early on was that I really needed to process my early grief. And I found again thanks to Facebook, Megan Devine's program on Writing Your Grief. And I'm not a writer. I took sciences at school. I had no talent in that regard. But I on a leap of faith I just did it. And it was a 30 day program and each day you would write on a different topic that all contributed to kind of helping you process your grief.

And I would say for that month, honestly, I'd wake up every morning and the first thing I would do would be check, what's my prompt today? Did anybody comment on what I wrote? And the women that were in that group became my besties for the month. And I now have these 30 pieces of writing that capture what I felt. [crosstalk], I said, "Okay, I'm done, I want to start living." [inaudible] forward. And I tried different things and nothing was really working well for me.

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And I kind of hit a wall by about the six month period where I was back to work and I was going to yoga and going out with friends but I basically had hit a wall where I had what I considered to be beliefs, I now know I considered them to be truths. I [inaudible] to be well oiled thoughts. But I had a series of beliefs that were frankly just incompatible with being happy. And there was nothing I could do to think my way out of them. And I realized I was stuck. And that's when I went to you.

Krista: So good. There's so much in there. Okay, I have a few questions. As you were talking about the whole sabbath experience and inviting your family over for dinner, what was the timeline there where it was really hard for you to have them over and be in their presence without David? How long did it kind of take? Not that, listeners, I want you to think that what happened for Cindy is what will happen for you, but just out of curiosity, what was the adjustment period like for you?

Cindy: I would say many months.

Krista: Many months, okay.

Cindy: Many months. Of course it was incrementally easier, by let's say three or four months I wasn't running upstairs anymore but I still felt [inaudible]. By a year it was starting to just feel okay.

Krista: What did you use to keep going and keep reinviting people over every week when it was hard for you?

Cindy: I guess I saw what it did for my family. And I saw that it brought closeness for us and joy for us. And that even in the discomfort I was also laughing. And I was also feeling great about making a wonderful new recipe or feeling excited about trying a new recipe that I found on Instagram

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or talking to a friend about something. So it was giving me purpose and stability and bits of joy.

Krista: I love it. I love it. I also wanted to mention since some people might not know who Megan Devine is. She's the author of *It's Okay That You're Not Okay*. And she also has a podcast and yeah, just a beautiful group. So in case people are wondering what that is. And then it occurred to me and also I'm wondering, am I mispronouncing Marika's name? I've also said Marika and you said Merika and I thought, oh my gosh, have I been pronouncing her name wrong this whole time? So in my mind it's Marika but I don't know, Humphreys.

But what a flashback there and I realize, I should have her on the podcast too. She has such an amazing story. And I don't know if you knew this but I was a Life Coach School instructor at the training that she and her husband when he was battling cancer came to. And it was all anybody could talk about, to have him there knowing full well his days were very numbered. And watching him just be so open and her be so open. And him just really pursuing something because it was an experience he wanted to have, it was profound for all of us there.

And so then later after Marika had gone through that, then later and she was a certified coach and then she came through the program, my *Mom Goes On* program, but what an incredible story. So it's such a neat connection, I'm really glad to hear that you had her support specifically.

Cindy: I'm probably mispronouncing it, [crosstalk].

Krista: Well, honestly, sometimes we hesitate to correct people when they say our names wrong, so it's quite possible it's me, but anyway, I'll find out. I'll reach out to her, make sure we get it right. But that is all just really full circle moments. And so good that you kind of realized as you said, you had

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some well oiled thoughts that at the time felt like facts to you and they weren't budging. So at that point you had my name and then what happened?

Cindy: It was so scary. I guess I emailed or whatever, signed up and then I had a couple of phone calls with Jamie. And I was so worried about it and so frightened and it felt like such a big investment. And in terms of time, emotion, financially, it just felt like a really big decision. And Jamie really, really gave me the time. She had several calls with me, [inaudible]. But she was just really gentle with me and took the time and answered my questions. And I just said, "I'm going to do it." And so I took the leap. And there were tears and anxiety.

And a side story is that when I did it, I did it on my Visa card and I got called by Visa because they saw it as an unusual payment or whatever. And then I had to call my Visa company and then they pointed out to me that my Visa card was a joint card with my husband and they canceled it there and then. So it was just really traumatic, but anyway.

Krista: Thanks, Visa.

Cindy: Yeah, I powered my way through that one, put it on my Amex and never looked back.

Krista: Oh my goodness. How was the experience compared to what you had imagined it might be in your mind?

Cindy: So much better, yeah. I guess my biggest concern was that it seemed like not getting one-on-one, getting only 15 minutes at a time would just kind of be a bit insufficient for someone who had problems as big as me, but it just wasn't like that.

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Krista: What was it like?

Cindy: Well, I think I was just temperamentally really, really well suited to the program. I found the structure of it just to be really, really helpful for me. The workbooks were so insightful and helpful. And I mean I'm a keener, I'm one of those types. I was never behind. I was never even a week behind. So I did every workbook, every worksheet. And I made sure that I had my individual coaching. I went into Slack when I had problems. I used Slack extensively to support myself. I took notes after every time I was coached. So for me it actually was very immersive and quite life changing really.

Krista: Music to my ears. It's so strange when you create a program that you've not actually been through. I created the program I wish I could have found but I hadn't been through it at the time when I needed it. So hearing the good stories and that it was a good fit in all the ways is really rewarding for me to hear. But to your credit, you showed up intensely the whole time. I mean you were always asking for coaching whether it was written coaching or coming onto the calls and asking for coaching. And it wasn't about light, fluffy easy things.

Cindy: No. I mean looking back, when I look back at some of the stuff I brought you guys. I mean I realized how belligerent I was at the beginning. I'm maybe a little more of a difficult person.

Krista: What do you think you were being difficult about?

Cindy: Well, I just really, really believed certain things. I believed that I was not cut out to be alone. I believed that my life was A plus before and C minus now. I believed that loneliness causes illness equivalent to a pack of cigarettes a day. These were, to use an *MGO* reference, I had a bingo card full of beliefs. And right from the start, you and Jamie, the feedback you would give me, you'd keep saying, "What if that's not really true? How

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could the opposite be different? Where can you poke some holes there? And what other thoughts could you believe that might actually be true too?"

And I feel like I may have sort of been almost argumentative at the beginning because I was kind of pushing my point. And then slowly with lots of work and lots of written work and doing the models and doing the ladders and poking holes, slowly it just shifted a little bit. And then I think the other really, really powerful thing that happened early on for me was being introduced to the concept of gap versus gain. And I guess maybe I'd heard about it on one of the podcasts.

Krista: Yeah, there's a podcast where I talked about it.

Cindy: But then maybe in my third month in, you did a challenge, you called it the wins challenge. And the goal was that every day we had to write three wins [crosstalk]. And I remember being so appreciative that you didn't say, "Three things we're grateful for." Because around then I was not feeling gratitude. But wins, yeah, I could think about that. And I don't mean to brag but I won that month. There's always a winner each month and I won that month and it was because it really was transformative for me.

And what I kind of took from it is that you have only so much thinking real estate in there. And choosing to spend more of it on the games just felt better for me. So, I still regularly, it's not every day but once a week I do my list of gains and it's not three, it's often 9, 10, 11. Or if I'm feeling a little bit down I will automatically go to making my list of gains. So I found those two types of thought work really, really shifted me in a very big way.

Krista: I love it. And to switch that slightly a little reframe, you did that. You changed that for yourself because you did the work. And I personally love it when someone comes into *Mom Goes On* and doesn't just swallow what I teach but actually does push back. That's when I know it's going to be

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more powerful. When you put the tools to the test and you challenge it and you don't just act like a lemming, that's when you see the kind of change that you've created for yourself.

Cindy: Yeah. I felt like a legal prosecutor at times, [crosstalk].

Krista: Yeah, I like it. And I also love that you were willing to be coached on the same issue multiple times because sometimes I think people assume that, well, if we've already gone over it once. Then they tell themselves, well, I should have figured this out by now. I should know better by now. But that is not the case. Sometimes we have to go at the same issue from multiple angles and different places in your life experience and that's just coaching. So your willingness to just come back with the same issue or a similar flavor of that issue and let's go at it again. That was amazing.

Cindy: And I think the two other big pieces that I profited from, well, the second big thing was that when I met you I was still experiencing quite a lot of despair and fear and anxiety. I had days at a time, really was quite difficult emotions and really felt quite the victim of them and helpless before them. And I also very seriously put my efforts into learning the NOW process that you [crosstalk] and the tapping. And I can remember going on Slack and saying, "Well, I tried doing NOW but I ran into this problem or that problem." And you would give me feedback.

And I remember one day I did it and it worked. And holy cow, this can work and I kind of discovered the power and that was just really, really big for me.

Krista: How long do you think that took, how much trying did it take for you to get to that place?

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Cindy: For me it took a couple of months. Yeah, it really did. So it wasn't immediate for me. And I think I may have done it wrong or I was impatient. And yeah, so I really needed to practice it but once I got it, it's just part of who I am now. I do it with my kids. I do it when their friends are over. If they're having problems, I'll teach them how to do it. So that really is helpful. Not to say that I don't have hard feelings still, I definitely do. But I also embraced some of the kind of themes that are a part of *MGO* like the worst thing that can happen to you is a feeling.

And you've done hard feelings before, you know how to do it. And that just sort of, those words helped me. And I found through *MGO*, there's a lot of words that I would learn. And for me anyway, those words stick with me and help me.

Krista: I love hearing that. You mentioned when you were kind of early on in your experience, you were experiencing anticipatory grief but you didn't have a term for it. I'm curious, when you learned that term and also kind of what you had been told or did expect from grief and how that compared to what you actually experienced?

Cindy: Oh boy, I mean I was given a very stern message that I needed to be strong for David and I needed to be strong for my family. And he was the one who was going through the rough stuff and get your act together, girl. I think that's the messaging that I got. I mean I had a lot of sympathetic people who would let me cry to them and all of that. But at the end of the day the message was, get your act together because you've got to do this for him and your family.

Krista: Wow. Yeah, not an uncommon message though when you've got someone who's got a terminal illness, it's not uncommon for the partner to get that message.

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Cindy: But in fairness, toward the end I actually, well, when I met Marika and then I actually, I did get a grief therapist who was very experienced. And the two of them introduced me to the concept of anticipatory grief. And were much more generous in kind of helping me think about my experience.

Krista: Yeah, okay, yeah. So knowing now what you know and thinking about you then, if you could go back and talk to yourself and give yourself some advice or talk to other women who were maybe going through something similar, what kinds of things do you think you would have told that version of you or other women who are in similar positions?

Cindy: I know that when David died I was desperate for someone to say, "You're going to be happy again, it's okay, it gets better." And I didn't find it anywhere. Everybody just said, "Feel the grief, now's your time to experience this. Of course you're miserable", blah, blah, blah. And yes, I wanted to be validated but I really wanted hope. So I would just tell any woman out there, if I can do it, you can do it because I was in the depths of despair, I truly was. And I never saw myself being able to be where I am now, I really, really didn't.

So I would just send out a message of hope. And the other thing would be to be patient because this is something that takes time and it's baby steps. And to claw on to one thing at a time.

Krista: When you say one thing at a time, what comes to mind?

Cindy: Well, my dinners or taking up your yoga class or whatever, one little bit of normalcy or something that brings you comfort to just follow your instincts, to go toward the things that feel good.

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Krista: I love it. I also think it's really interesting that you had family members and people around you telling you to feel your feelings. And this is your time to grieve because you almost never hear that. You almost always hear that this culture of toxic positivity, that people don't have the capacity to be with you in the grief. And so they're, "It's going to be better, you're going to be okay, you'll meet someone else." All of these happy, happy things and that's not at all what you experienced. It's like the pendulum swung the complete opposite direction for you.

Cindy: Yeah. I think that all of my friends and relatives, everybody in my age group, they viewed what happened to me as all of our worst nightmares. They just said, "Cindy's got the worst nightmare. Of course it's terrible. We feel so sorry for her." And I think it's beyond their capacity to even imagine that I could actually be okay. Because before I lost David, before David got sick, I thought that way too.

Krista: Yeah, completely. So what did we miss?

Cindy: Well, the only other thing [inaudible] say that I really felt was important from the program was that you helped me to see that I was suffering from some trauma. And I was having, I told you, some difficulties with sleep. I was having a lot of bad dreams, recurrent dreams about David ditching me, going for another woman, these awful dreams and some of them were vivid dreams that were really awful. I was having intrusive thoughts where I would remember specific really difficult things that had happened in our journey and they were really making life hard for me.

And that's where my work with Melanie really was transformative. So I worked with her, I think one-on-one three times. And I can tell you, I don't have bad dreams anymore, I mean maybe occasionally, but they stopped happening. And okay, occasionally I do think back to some of those sad

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thoughts and images, but they're not causing me the distress that they were. So I think that's a really, really important part of the program.

Krista: So glad. Melanie, if you're wondering what Cindy's talking about, Melanie Fay is who she's talking about, Melanie is a tapping coach, Emotional Freedom Tapping. And she's been on the podcast before. And she hosts a bimonthly, so twice monthly calls in the group. And then some people love her so much, they go and hire her to work with them individually. But I do feel like there are just some things we don't solve at the level of thought.

There are some things that require safety in the nervous system, they require reprocessing and tapping's good for many things, not just that. But we don't try to solve everything with our thinking so I'm really glad you were willing to do that work and are now experiencing the benefits of it, yeah. So what's next for you?

Cindy: Well, I feel that I'm in a good place overall. I would say that most days I'm in a happy mood. Where someone once said, "To be happy you need to have someone you love, something to do and something to look forward to." And I've got all three of those.

Krista: I love it. I think it's a Matthew McConaughey quote.

Cindy: Is it?

Krista: I love it, yeah.

Cindy: [Crosstalk], but anyway, yeah. So I work to the degree that feels good for me and I'm enjoying. I find it valuable and I'm doing new projects in my work. I do volunteer work that is very meaningful for me. I have lots of kind of fun stuff like working out and playing mash with my girlfriends. And

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signed up to do line dancing, and so lots of hobbies and fun stuff. And my social world has become more comfortable for me and I host dinner parties now with couple friends and widow friends and just the whole works. And I'm going traveling a few times over the next few months.

Krista: I'm so proud of you. So proud of you. So proud, so good. And also here's what I hope people will take away too from this, because we only have the podcast interview conversation but we don't have the post podcast interview. And I always want to be a human. It is not as though you come into a coaching program like mine and we fix all your problems and you leave and you never have negative emotion again or you never have grief again. Or when you do have it, it's easy peasy. It's not that. We're still humans.

So my hope is that you come through the program and Cindy, like you, you walk away with different ways of thinking about yourself and different ways of supporting yourself and different ways of being able to coach yourself, all these tools that you come away with because life is going to happen. We don't know what's going to happen in one month or two months or a year or whatever. But my hope is that your quality of life improved because of the work you did and the next time you have a challenge, be it big or small, you're better able to support yourself through that. That's my hope.

Cindy: Thank you.

Krista: Thank you so much for coming on the podcast, I really appreciate it.

Cindy: It was wonderful to talk with you.

Krista: Yeah, let's keep in touch, please.

Cindy: For sure.

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Krista: Okay, alright, take care, Cindy.

Cindy: You too. Bye bye.

If you like what you've been hearing on this podcast and want to create a future you can truly get excited about after the loss of your spouse, I invite you to join my *Mom Goes On* coaching program. It's small group coaching just for widowed moms like you where I'll help you figure out what's holding you back and give you the tools and support you need so you can move forward with confidence.

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