

AJR Liza Barrows-Lane Transcript

0:00:01 - Annncr

Julie Ryan, noted psychic and medical intuitive, is ready to answer your personal questions, even those you never knew you could ask. For more than 25 years, as she developed and refined her intuitive skills, Julie used her knowledge as a successful inventor and businesswoman to help others. Now she wants to help you to grow, heal and get the answers you've been longing to hear. Do you have a question for someone who's transitioned? Do you have a medical issue? What about your pet's health or behavior? Perhaps you have a loved one who's close to death and you'd like to know what's happening? Are you on the path to fulfill your life's purpose, no matter where you are in the world? Take a journey to the other side and ask Julie Ryan.

0:00:44 - Julie

Hi everybody, welcome to the Ask Julie Ryan Show. It's where we blend spirituality and practicality to help you live a life of purpose and joy. We have Dr Liza Barrows-Lane on the show with us today. Liza, a professor of social work at the University of Houston, specializes in young widowhood, a reality she knows all too well. At 36, she became a widow left with a three-year-old son. In addition, Liza founded the Young Widowhood Project, an organization dedicated to advancing research and raising awareness on this often overlooked experience. With my maternal grandmother, having been a young widow with small children, I'm interested in understanding the complexities of this type of loss and, more importantly, how we can support those who endure it. Please remember to subscribe, leave a comment and share this episode with your family and friends. Now let's go talk with Liza. Dr Liza, thank you for taking the time to come join us today.

0:01:52 - Liza

Thank you for having me. I've been so excited.

0:01:55 - Julie

Oh, me as well. Please tell us how you became interested in studying young widows.

0:02:02 - Liza

So I was a. I got my PhD in social work. I finished in 2018 at the University of Houston and I was studying trauma related issues and the lived experiences of vulnerable and marginalized populations, and so I already had this research background. When, in 2020, ground, when, in 2020, when I just started as a professor at the University of Houston, downtown, July of 2020, my husband, who was a psychologist Brent Lane he was a little, he was feeling a little antsy because of quarantine and COVID and everything. So he decided to buy a boat that was new to him an older boat, but new to us to just be in nature, get out. And so he bought to buy a boat that was new to him uh, an older boat, but new to us, to just be in nature, get out. And so he bought it on a Monday and he went to try it out on Friday and within like an hour of him being at the lake, or two hours, the police was at my house letting me know that someone had found his boat and that he was missing. So they had found his boat in the middle of a lake and so two days later his body was found, and that is what started this whole.

You know, it took me some time to catch my breath right, to actually even figure out what I could do, what I wanted to do as a result, but I began to realize there is so much that is not understood or known or talked about in the literature in the way that is meaningful to me as a widow. There is research on young widowhood not much, but there's some, but it's really describing what's happening to the widows versus like. This is what it's like to be me, you know, and so I decided I need to, I'd like to start looking into widowhood research and that's the start. What started this whole thing? Tell us about your husband, Brent.

Brent Lane, like I said, was a psychologist. I just found a video that he had made for his psychology practice, which he called Yellow Rose Counseling, because it had that strong Texas connection of Yellow Rose, and he was just a kind, sweet, good, intelligent person, supportive, always very encouraging, and he worked a lot with grief and loss, actually, you know. And so he was also very wise and grounded. And you know, I know that people idealize people after they die because we try to hold on to the better parts of them, but I think that in hearing so much of what people said about Brent after he died things that I didn't know he was even doing, like he would write notes to every single one of the clinicians he worked with, that worked in his practice, and would leave them a note saying, hey, you're doing great, you know, thank you for the work that you're doing. I, you know, I made you some tea, I left the light on for you, like just little things that he, and every time he would pay. Then he would send them a thank you note for what they were doing.

So he was just he had. He was like bigger than life, just a, really, you know, always seeking to do good, to have fun. He was pretty irreverent, which you know. You wouldn't realize that because he also worked with such heavy topics of trauma and death and especially deaths by suicide and survivors of suicide. He worked a lot and he could handle it. He could handle it. He was like I was like do you ever, does that ever stay in your mind whenever you're on your own? And he's like no, no, I'm there with them in the moment, and then I leave and then I go do other stuff. So just a wonderful human being.

0:05:28 - Julie

And when that police officer was at your door, tell us about that, give us the cliff notes without re-traumatizing yourself.

0:05:36 - Liza

Yeah, so do you want to know, like the leading up to it, because there is a story that leads up to it. Okay, so I spoke to him last at 7 pm that night and by 8 o'clock he had told me he was going to send me pictures of the lake. Because I asked him, I told him you haven't sent me pictures, I go, I haven't been out there. I would never be out there without sending you pictures. I was like, okay, cool. So at 8 o'clock I had not received pictures and I'm not someone that is really good at keeping track of time I have like time blindness and but for some reason I was like what is going on? So I texted him and I said, pix, are you okay? That is the first that came to mind and I got no response. And then 15 minutes later I called him and it was straight to voicemail. And then I called him five more times to see like, is he picking up? And then I felt something's happened. I just felt it. I knew something had happened to him and so I called his best friend and I asked him do you know exactly which lake he went to go try the boat at? Because I was very preoccupied that day because I had been tested for COVID and it was my first time ever getting tested for COVID. I was kind of scared and his best friend was like I think he might be in Lake Houston. Do you want me to go check? It's 30 minutes away from my house, and one thing about me is I don't like to bother people, I don't like to ask for favors, but for some reason I was like please, like I'm so sorry to ask you to drive 30 minutes. And the reason I couldn't is because I had our three-year-old son that I had to put him to bed, you know. And so I was at my parents' house and we lived across the street from my parents at that time and I said, well, while he's going to go check on Brent, I will take my son and put him to bed. And the whole time, as I was holding my son, carrying him across the street, I had a voice in my head that said you're now a widow and the kids have lost their father. You're now a widow and the kids have lost their father. And I was just shaking inside, you know. And so I but, but I but I was like what if? What, if there's what if I'm just making this up? What if it's just my anxiety, right?

So I took my son to bed saying to him, did all the things that Brent normally did with him when he went to bed, and um, and then I my sisters, and I told my sisters I don't dare call Brent's family because I don't want to scare them, but I think something, I have a bad feeling,

something's happened to Brent. And they were like oh no, do you want to do a police report? And I was like, yes, but I'm so scared I can't even remember his license plate or anything like that. And so they said why don't you look, where can you find on your computer? So I logged into our easy tag, which is the toll tag system thing that we have in Houston, and I realized that he had exited the Lake Houston location while I was on the phone with him and had not come back. So my, my heart just dropped. I was like, oh my God, like he's there, that is where he is.

And so, um, as I'm talking to my sisters and I'm, you know, they're like do you want to say a prayer? Like, what do you know? I see police lights outside my house, you know. So that is so. When the police came, I already knew. And when he said, does Brentling live here? I just lost it and my sisters were on FaceTime. My parents were across the street and I remember this being this um, almost like um, uh, this being this almost like a slow motion movie and I'm out of my body and just screaming. I don't even recognize my own behavior at the times. I was just in so much pain and panic and the police was like I didn't tell you he was dead yet and I'm like, but I know, but I know, you know, and so that's how I found out that he was missing.

0:09:06 - Julie

How did you know he was already gone. Had you ever had a voice in your head like that before?

0:09:11 - Liza

Okay, no, this okay. Is it okay if I say some of the stuff that happened leading up to it?

Absolutely yeah, this is the first. You know I'm very much like I used to be very much what I receive in my, like, my senses you know what I mean Like I haven't really trusted intuition as much. I didn't know what it was, and you know you're always you start to question yourself and I think that being a scientist doesn't take away your belief in intuition. But I'm used to reading things that I can observe. You know what I'm saying and taking that information in. You know what I'm saying and taking that information in. And so a couple of things happened leading up to, probably in the six weeks leading up to his death. There's just too much evidence that I cannot refute. So one thing was the first thing was that one night I was asleep in bed and I woke up like I think, like at three in the morning with this trepidation that I needed to learn how to parent my son on my own. Because out of both of us, my parent, my husband, was the better parent. You know he knew how to play with him. He already had a child that was 11 years old. It was my first kid and I was like sometimes I'm like I don't know how to you know, be fun. I want to be fun too, just like he is. And I just buying toys for my son and I to play together and my husband woke up at five and I was crying and he said what's wrong? And I said I just have this heavy feeling that I need to learn how to parent Roswell on my own. And he was like you got me, babe. Like just watch me, I can make game with a box, you know, just watch what I do. And so that was the first thing that happened. Looking back, I was like, oh my God, I was starting to get a feeling.

So then, maybe two weeks after that, my husband, we went to bed and he got up to watch a movie on his own, a zombie movie. I didn't like to watch zombie movies, they scare me. And so I was asleep and I rolled over and I was a hard sleeper at that time, when my husband was alive, I was a really good sleeper and I rolled over and my hand hit the cold bed and it was like this reverberation in my system like, oh, like. And in that moment I knew he was dead, like I. It was. Without a doubt, my husband was dead. That's what I felt like at the time, one month before he actually died, and I was like I woke up in a panic and then I thought, oh my God, that's thank God, is not true, he's really not dead. So I started sobbing and sobbing and I got up and I went and told him. He turned off the TV and it was really funny because he was the more romantic gentle one of both of us. But at that time he was like I'm watching a zombie movie and you're bawling your head off telling me how much you love me. And so I was like I just want you to know that if anything ever happened, I wouldn't be able to really go on without

you. I love you so much. And I had this experience and I'm hugging him and he's doing the little awkward pats on my back which made me laugh, because I was like this is so not like him. But he was like nothing's going to happen to me.

So that was one month before he died and then, two weeks before he died, we had this conversation. We normally had these check-ins in our marriage how are you doing? Are you happy? What do you need? And he was like you know, I really wouldn't love it if you made me brownies. Like that makes me happy, it makes me feel loved and I love back rubs. And I'm like, okay, okay.

So that same day I ran to the store to me. I said, when the spirit moves me, I'll make it for him. But I had two packs of brownie mix and the night before he died I was analyzing data for a paper that actually was published shortly after he died. And when I'm doing analysis I don't like to be bothered. I have a hard time concentrating already, so I focus on what I'm doing. And I had this voice inside of me that said make him the brownies. And I was like, okay, and this is weird because I'm analyzing data right now. But I made the brownie mix, I stuck it in the oven and I remember while I was sticking in the oven I was thinking what am I doing? This is so strange. So I stood by the stove the whole time the brownies were in the oven analyzing data. You know, I'm just like looking at it because I just didn't.

I was so stressed out with the timeline that we had to submit this paper and so I brought him the brownies like around 10 o'clock at night and he was like oh, thank you, babe, what is this for? And I said I don't know. I just want you to know that I love you. You know, remember. You told me. And he was like oh, thank you so much. You know, this is sweet of you.

And so then the next morning I woke up an hour early and and I thought, yay, my son is not going to wake up for another hour. I have an hour to code. And a strong voice inside of me said be intentional. And I was like what? Like I was sitting up in the bed like, like what? And it said stop, be intentional right now. It was very punctuated and and I said be intentional with who you know. And then there was no answer.

So then I looked over to my husband and I said, oh, I guess, I guess I need to be intentional with him. So to my husband, and I said oh, I guess I need to be intentional with him. So I tapped him and I said, hey, are you awake? And he was like yeah. I said can I give you a back rub? And he was like why? And I said I don't know. I felt like I need to be intentional with you right now. That's what I felt right now. And he said oh, thank you, okay.

So I started giving him a back rub and while I'm giving him the back rub, he told me that he had a dream the night before and he said I had a dream that I went somewhere in the dark and when I woke up, when I got to it and it light came on, I was in the most beautiful place I'd ever seen in my life and we were all together. And to me, all those, these things that I've shared with you, are like I've never experienced anything so strong and I've never experienced obeying them and being so grateful that I listened, you know, because I have zero regrets about the the last day, you know, because I listened to everything that come, that came to me at the time and then. But then things continued and he told me this dream he had that looking back was a gift, because for me that has made some meaning of like that there was a pre-existing plan that this was going to happen and it wasn't like just random. That is very hard for me to deal with just from a trauma perspective, you know. And and so um that day also, at 11 o'clock, as I was coding, I had this urgency to go check on my son across the street, which again is not something that I would normally do, cause I'm like head down coding. So I took my computer across the street and then my mom said hey, can you get some vegetables for your sister-in-law? I'm making her some soup cause she has COVID. And I said, well, I'm about to have a meeting. And she goes okay, well, can you stay with your son while I go to the store? I'm like,

yeah, absolutely I'll stay. And my son came running. He said I want to see daddy. So I FaceTimed my husband and it was the last time that we all were four of us together, you know.

And so at around you know, my son, my husband, was going to take the boat out to try it out at two o'clock yeah, before two o'clock because he had to drop off his son, my stepson, at his mom's house because they were going to go on a trip by two o'clock. Well, the guy who was working on the boat that day did not finish in time for him to take his son, and so he dropped his son off and he called me and he was really irritated. Like at four o'clock he called me and he said this is so annoying. You know, this guy took so long all this stuff and I was just commiserating with him right and then at five he texted me and he said I want to revise our previous conversation with some insight. He said I'm grateful for the means, the opportunity and the people I love.

So something struck me about what he said.

I'm like this is really deep, you know. So I called him and I'm like what is this message? You know, what are you trying to say here? He said I don't know, I have a really strong feeling I shouldn't be complaining about my life because my life is beautiful. You know, like I just have a strong feeling I shouldn't complain. And I was like, well, okay, you don't have to, but if you want to make you happy, I'm here. And so then I spoke to him again at seven and so then like, like I, you know, I'm kind of going back to the, the getting this feeling this had never happened to me, or if it had, I had not listened, you know. And so this is the first time and this to me has been a turning point of listening to these, like recognizing that intuition and that these messages that have no physical evidence, you know, but they have evidence because it happened over and over and over and you can't refute that. You know like that was a turning point for me in this kind of like belief about receiving messages.

0:17:42 - Julie

Who do you think sent the messages? I think God.

0:17:46 - Liza

That's my opinion. You know God or angels, or you know guides? I don't. I felt, but the one message that I felt really that was from God was stop and be intentional right now. That one felt very like you have no idea how important this moment is and I'm trying to spare you Like that one feels to me. The other ones I don't know, because some of them, some of them like, especially the one that you're a widow, he's dead. Now, that was scary, you know it was a scary, but I think it's a scary reality. You know what I mean. So there's no kind way to tell me you know that I'm going to be a widow or that.

0:18:24 - Julie

I am a widow already, so you had multiple premonitions. And he was having premonitions too, although he probably wasn't aware of it, but he followed his intuition as well. Yes, and what a gift for you and your son. Such a gift, yeah. Such a gift, yeah. Have you, in your research, run across other women who have had a similar situation before their husbands passed? They've run into anything like that.

0:18:55 - Liza

I've seen, not in my research. That is something I want to ask. I do want to ask, but I have seen that in other people's research where they say that like and I and I resonate with that personally where they said that people in hindsight realize that they had premonitions, you know, and so that they're grateful because that allows them to make meaning of the death. I think what they find is like the hardest thing to deal with is to feel like something is so random and so meaningless, like there was no reason for you to die like this or to die at this age. But when you have premonitions and you listen to them or think about them in hindsight, you start to feel like

maybe there was a larger purpose. I don't know it and it doesn't make this existence better or easier, but it helps it have some peace, that it wasn't just completely meaningless and random and you know like this world is a very terrifying place. So what do you?

0:19:52 - Julie

think the bigger picture is with all of this happening? Certainly, you founded the you know your Young Widowhood Project and that's serving people around the world and we'll get into that more in detail here in a couple of minutes. But what do you think the bigger picture is here for Brent and for you? Was he the catalyst for you to start this project to help all these women around the world? Do you believe that that's part of the equation? I think so.

0:20:23 - Liza

You know, I think that Brent and I we were co-labor. I think so, you know I do too. I think that Brent and I we were co-laborers in life, you know, in mental health. You know, in supporting people and trying to. You know, I mean I was a therapist in his practice when he died. I stopped seeing clients when he died but we had a lot of compassion and have a lot of compassion for people suffering, you know, and wanting to be a part of relief for people.

And I remember in the weeks when, after COVID started talking and saying, you know, when all this is said and done, almost every family we know will be touched by death, you know, and we need to do something to help people, and thinking like maybe we can do some pro bono grief work, maybe. And I have never been, I've never loved grief work because I've had a lot of unresolved deaths growing up, you know. So that always felt very tragic to me, very painful, and I had not done my own work. But I was like, well, yeah, I guess we need to be doing grief work because people are going to need support just to survive their lives without their loved ones. But Brent really loved that work. He felt, you know, he helped people prepare to go to the other side, like he worked with in a nursing home, with older people and people saying like things I've never told anyone since I was five years old, but I was abused when I was younger, you know. So they were saying things like that to him and he was helping them cross over. That was part of his work here, and so when he died I felt like his mantle was passed on to me in some ways. You know, in a different way, like in my own flavor of things. I would not have approached grief, I would not have done this had he not died, you know.

And so I feel that, like Brent understood a lot of, I mean, he knew what young widowhood was, you know, I remember him having a client that had been young widowed, and so I learned a lot about young widowhood from him, wow. And then after he died, some of the things that he told me I could reference back specifically, like the being afraid to die because then your kid has no parents, and also the very vivid, terrifying memories of body stuff and that kind of thing. Like that was something that I learned from him that when they happened to me. I felt they were horrifying, but I also felt like at least he knew. You know, he understands me. He would have understood me if he were here and been my counselor. He would have understood me. So I do feel that like that mantle was passed on to me and his wisdom continues to resonate within me and his compassion. You know, like I feel like some of that was left behind with me and like he took some of me with him.

0:22:57 - Julie

Yeah, you were being led. Yeah, Lots of steps along the way, like on a, you know, on a stone path. You were stepping from stone to stone, to stone to stone is what it seems like to me. So how did they finally find his body and what did you ever figure out? What happened? He went out at night.

0:23:15 - Liza

He went out in the evening, so it was still it was summer, so it was still light outside. So he said it was going to be a 30 minute run, just try the boat out seven o'clock at night and he was

going to try it out and nobody saw what happened. We still do not know, you know. All we know is that somebody found the boat and because of that, you know, there was this confusion at least in my mind I was. So, you know, part of me knew he was dead. Another part of me was like, was he kidnapped? Like you know what happened? Like where is he? I mean, his boat is here.

And so there was all this search parties on land and on water, you know, and just going back and forth, back and forth, and I think that they located his body in the. So he went missing on a Friday night, I think Saturday evening. They located his body but did not tell me. Like there was a bunch of us there at the lake and one of the people who was in the, in the, in my group, said, I think they she didn't tell me, but she told me later that she said I thought they found his body because they started circling this area and then they stopped and came to talk to me and they said we want to be the ones who will find his. To find him, we'll be the ones to find him. We don't want anyone else to find him. And even in that moment, although a part of me knew he was dead, I was like, do you think he's alive? And they like looked at each other, like and they're like, we don't know, but we'll be the ones to find him. And I was like, okay, you know so that next morning at 630 in the morning, they had sent drones out from Hobby Airport, which is close to I mean, I guess that's where they have the drones for the search and rescue or search and recovery and EquiSearch. The people from EquiSearch went out with one of our friends from our church who is the fire chief from Galena Park, and he went out with them and they're the ones that found the body. So they called the medical examiner, the medical examiners that just hold it like don't let it drift off anywhere else, cause there was a lot of like trees. It was not a good, obviously not a good scene. It was it's it's hot in Texas, you know. So it was.

So I never did get to see the body. Um, I think we talked about that before. I didn't realize that I even had a choice. You know, there was a lot of like, no, no, like, do not come. So the police called me, the chief detective, and he said you know, we don't want you to come out, tell everyone not to come, you know. And then, talking to the medical examiner, they're like no, don't. And the funeral director was like no, don't, don't see the body. So nobody knows what happened. Just, you know, the autopsy report is. I was, I was. I don't know what I was hoping for. I was hoping for answers and I think I was hoping to connect back to him too through the autopsy report, and maybe that would bring him back. I don't know, but when I read it, it was just this sterile description of the body and that the conclusion is that he drowned. I'm like okay, and but by by that time they can't tell why he would have drowned. Like was there an embolism? Was there a heart attack? They don't know.

0:26:05 - Julie

Heart attack? Yeah, you think heart attack. Yeah, that just came in. How old was he? 43. Yeah, heart attack. He threw a clot. Oh, I can't even imagine. Tell us about your son. Tell us about your son. How do you break that to a child, let alone a little child, who doesn't have a good understanding of even what that means? I mean, certainly you had lots of experience from a clinical perspective, but when it's your life and your child, where do you go from there? When it's your life and your child, where do you go from there?

0:26:51 - Liza

you know, I really didn't have experience, even clinically. I stayed away from death. I really did stay away from death. And what's interesting that you're asking this question? Because my colleagues and I um, I'm I'm second author on this paper that we're about to submit within a month of what are the challenges of parenting as a widowed parent. And the first challenge is breaking the news to your kid.

0:27:12 - Julie

Yeah, I can't even imagine.

0:27:14 - Liza

I, you know, my son is bilingual Spanish and English and so bilingual children tend to speak later because they're taking in all this information and then they all of a sudden, like erupt in language, you know. So he was a lot more nonverbal at the time so I first of all didn't want to tell him. I was terrified. I didn't even know how to say to explain missing. You know, he did hear me screaming and crying when the police came, and so my dad went into his room and he was like what happened? What happened? Like he was asking, you know, and then I went to the room and I hugged him and he said what happened? I said nothing, everything's fine, which in hindsight I wish I hadn't done that because it wasn't helpful. But I the first instinct of a parent is to protect your kid Like I do not want to mess. I know that I will be the one to have to break the news and destroy your life, and I don't want to do this yet because I don't even know what's happening. So I went to the lake and I stayed there till midnight and then I came back and I left very early in the morning. I was there all day, till the evening and my son spent the night at my parents' house, and so they found my husband's body on Sunday, and so everybody had been asking me, how's Roswell doing? And I felt so much shame that I had not told him. And looking back now I knew that I wanted to protect his existence until I possibly could, like I knew the moment I told him would shatter his world, and I, you know, as a parent, you don't want to be the one to put the dagger through your kid's heart. You know it's traumatic. It's traumatic to be the one to give those news and it's traumatic to watch your kids grieve and to have the shock that you've also received. And so someone gave me some advice while I was at the lake, and they were like well, we don't know if this is going to happen or not, but you know you need to tell them like give no hope. You know, like they have to understand they're not coming back. The body doesn't work like give no hope. And so and I know that's true Cause if you, if you think that they might come back, like it will really confuse and and and and jeopardize the grieving process. And so, um, when I came home, I, you know that.

So that was on on Saturday, Sunday, Monday morning is when I decided to tell him. And when he woke up and I was just dreading the moment he would wake up and my twin sister was there with me and and we both felt like who's going to rescue us? And we're like, no, we're the adults, we're the ones that have to do this. So I picked him up, you know, and I just said you know, something really terrible has happened to daddy. He was in an accident. His body no longer works. Daddy's never coming back home. You're never going to see daddy again, you know.

And my son just got this really angry, shocked, look. And he looked at me like what you know, and I didn't even know if he understood me, but he just, like he cried a little bit. We held each other. I was hoping that I'd die of a heart attack before I had to tell him, like I did not want to do this. And then he, he got up, went in front of my stepson's bedroom and just fell asleep on the floor. It's like he just collapsed, you know.

And then, when he woke up, I'm like I guess I got to gotta tell him again, because I don't know if he understood. So I picked him up again. I'm like you know, what I said earlier is I've got. These are really sad news. We're never gonna see daddy again. And he looked at me angrily again. That's when I realized, okay, I think he did understand. And so an hour later my friend was there and she was changing him, getting him dressed, and he said my daddy's dead. He told her that, and you know, and so it's, it's the most brutal thing. It's the most brutal thing because you're, you're, you're, you're reeling yourself. But then to watch your kid, also like that, I, I, I feel like parents really have a lot of secondary trauma and the children have secondary trauma watching us suffer too. So it becomes this family thing. That is just very difficult and you do a lot of work around children's grief. You know, I know, with books that you've written and stuff.

0:31:19 - Julie

Yeah, all grief. And that's why the children's books were written, because I had so many clients who either had small children or were grandparents of small children saying you know how do we explain this? And they say grandma's in heaven, now, grandma's died, grandma's in heaven, and they're at the visitation and the child who's three is saying no, she's not, she's asleep in that box up there in the front of the room. Or how do children know that it's their deceased loved ones that are coming to visit them? And they know information about them that there's no way they could know, because these kids are too little, they don't even read yet. And then how do kids know stuff about past lives? So you're right, I have four children's books and then my big angelic attendance book that you know. That helps everybody that grieves. Has he talked about that? His daddy, that he talks to his daddy or he? Is there anything?

0:32:22 - Liza

like that. That's gone on. Yeah, at the beginning especially, there were several things I remember. I think a week after the funeral we were, my sister was driving us to her side of town, which is 45 minutes away, and all of a sudden my son was like Daddy, daddy, daddy, and he starts pointing up at the cloud. He said Daddy's right there, daddy's right there. And of course I just burst into tears, you know, because it was just so emotional. But I would hear him sometimes at night laughing and he's like oh, daddy, you're so funny. I heard him say that one time. He also would say that daddy was sitting on the roof and I was like daddy's standing, he's like no sitting, like he wanted to make sure it's sitting, you know. So there were things like that that happened. There was one particular moment that was I don't even know how to explain it, but we were all in bed. Because after my husband died, I started sleeping with my son because we were both left so terrified and my son, I had originally thought I need to do the same routine, put him to bed like my husband would, but he could not sleep.

He would just roll around calling for me and my heart would just break. I was like I can't, like he needs me, I need him, like we just need to. Just, we're so scared together, you know, and we can maybe have some comfort, especially him, cause I still couldn't sleep with him, but he could sleep if I was with him. And so one night we were laying down and I was sleeping, but in my sleep I felt like I was almost hovering over my body and I was watching my son and I on the bed and Brent, our son and I were together spiritually, outside of the body, and we were just hanging out and then Brent told me he needs you get him. So in my sleep I grabbed my son, I grabbed his arm and he started screaming from a nightmare that he had had.

So it was like this, very interesting. You know, co-parenting, you know, and I knew that Brent was watching over Roswell and warning me like he's going to need you right now. So, and I just held on to him. So you know, that was not something that my son, Roswell, experienced, but it was about Roswell. But I, you know, but Roswell has, it's become a lot less now that he has these experiences, even though I've always validated them. I cause I know that if you don't, as they get older they start to lose that connection. You know, but it was a lot more frequent he. They get older, they start to lose that connection. You know, but it was a lot more frequent. He was younger, and he's how old now? He's seven, he's about to be eight.

0:34:54 - Julie

He's seven. God love him. Oh, how wonderful. Oh, my goodness. Well, thank you for sharing that story. And what a tearjerker. I just commend you for all of your courage that, just on a personal level, to get through all of this and then parlaying that grief into something so productive to help all these other young widows and their families. And I'd like to pivot and get into that some more. Why do you think people are so uncomfortable with death and grief and you know that whole thing? It's like, okay, there's a time to grieve and then it's been long enough, okay, get on with your life, kind of a thing. Have you run into that yourself and also in?

0:35:45 - Liza

your research, in my research more so than even in myself, I think. I think that people have this perception of wounds as healing and closing, you know, of this being something that just heals and then one day you're all better, but there's no real resolution because you continue to miss this person, and so it's not the same as in the early days or if you have prolonged grief, in that like just that, the misery of wanting them in the present moment, that's like why it's so anguishing initially, is that yearning, but then it becomes missing and it's less jagged, it's less heart rending. It's still painful, though, and people, I think, because they see this like very marked change between you're despondent, and then you come back to life, you come back and reengage with life, that then you're all OK, it's just black and white thinking, and you might be OK. That does not mean you still that you don't miss this person, that there's still something you have to learn to live with as you get older, as you realize. Oh, we would have been doing this, he would have been a part of this milestone, that kind of thing, but definitely the widows that I've.

I wrote a paper on disenfranchised grief in young widows and some of the things that they've experienced is first of all that because you can repartner, then it's all good. You're good, you know you're fine, and so because you're able, thank God you're young enough and some widows said that, like they're at the funeral itself People are like, well, thank God, you can remarry, you know, as if that will erase the years together, the love you have. You know it's a very painful process to even start reengaging in the romantic part of your life again, because it's a human need. So you do it only because you're kind of forced to like, you're forced by your own need to have connection to do it. But it's hard, it's so hard. People said that to you at his funeral, not to me, to widows that I have interviewed.

0:37:45 - Julie

Oh, okay, yeah, Not to me.

0:37:46 - Liza

No, people have been very good to me. I've been very lucky. I've been very lucky for the most part. I mean, I've had a couple comments here and there, but nothing like what you hear from widows. So that's one of the reasons why people in young widowhood disenfranchise their grief is like, well, you can repartner. So it's kind of like just kind of, you know, like one's in kind of thing, and it doesn't work like that.

People can really really love a new partner and have all the space for a new partner and still very much feel the empty, gnawing pain of the old partner's absence. That, like you have to learn to exist with both realities. The other thing that they tell so it's about like timelines. Timelines is a big one, you know, being able to replace the person. I'm trying to think there was another one, but it's kind of oh yes, it's about they're told because they see you as being very strong, because you're having to move forward. You know people they get a lot of praise for like look at you, you're so strong, thank God. And I think people do that because it's.

I think it's very painful as human beings to see other people broken, so you want to see them as strong. You want to see them like oh the good, good, you're doing well, but they're not doing well, you know. And so people are like I'm strong because I have to be. I didn't ask for this. This is not my children and so they feel very unseen in that aspect of their of like how hard this really is and it continues to be. You know and I, why are we death phobic? I don't know. I it's so weird because I still continue to be death phobic even now. I think it's because it hurts so much I. I just can't imagine anything worse than than losing people we love. That's permanent, that is, and there's many other losses and there's traumas and all that stuff. But I don't know. I kind of feel like losing people you love. I don't think there's anything worse and there's no, there's no fixing that, and that's terrifying for people.

0:39:47 - Julie

Have you talked to his spirit through a medium or through somebody else? I know that research shows that that's very healing when we lose a loved one, and I do it all the time with my clients and we'll talk with deceased loved ones and usually they're usually every time, all the time, 100% of the time. They're funny, they're joyful, they say things that lets their loved one know that it's really them with whom they're conversing and it really not only brings closure and peace to this situation, but it brings a levity that I think is much needed as well.

0:40:32 - Liza

Have you done that yourself? I did, and so this is. This is a hard part for me because it doesn't. You know, there are things that you do when you're grieving or ways that you become that you're like is this me, is this? Your identity begins to shift very rapidly, and so I grew up in a religious tradition that was very much against the mediumship. You know experience, and. But when Brent died, I was so desperate, I was so incredibly desperate.

You know that I did talk to someone and it was as you said. You know there was a lot of, you know, validation and grief, and and and and but, and it was very and she was evidentiary, like so she she's just told me all these like it started off with, you know. You know I sent some young male I see this heart above y'all, that means that you were romantically connected and I said yes, and she was like I don't understand this. He was out in nature in the evening by himself, but then he falls down into this wide expanse and he cannot breathe. I don't understand what happened and I was like he drowned. She's like, oh that, because she was like I don't understand the whole falling down and not being able to breathe thing, and so, but there were things that came in that were both heartbreaking, but also there was levity. You know, she, she was seeing signs of him like pulling on his hair like this, and she was like he's really into his hair. He keeps pulling his hair and I'm like, no, he is not actually into his hair.

He loved, for some reason, he loved when I had like little curly cues on my sideburns. I don't know why he liked those wispies and I'm like I knew that's what he was trying to tell me. He was like you know that kind of thing, and she said something like he's laughing because he said your son used the restroom where he wasn't supposed to. And it's true, my son had just pooped on the carpet and I was so embarrassed I was like, oh my God, how could you? You know, like what were you thinking, you know? And it was at my sister's house, and so there were some things like that that were helpful. I think the main thing that were funny, I think the main thing that helped me from that interaction was to know that he was okay, you know to know, because, like he died in the way, like his biggest fear was dark water and he died in a dark lake.

0:42:52 - Julie

And so that really? Do you think that was a premonition too on his part? I wondered.

0:42:55 - Liza

Yeah, I've wondered. Yeah, because it's too horrific, it's too like, it's too ironic to not feel like. But that was his biggest fear Every time he drove over. There's this big bridge in Houston, over the ship channel, and I would be like, can you drive over the other way? Because I'm, I've always been afraid of just just like what if the car falls over. You know, I always had those kinds of weird thoughts.

But he was like, can you imagine the dark water? It's so terrifying. So I'm like stop adding more things into my intrusive thoughts. So I would, I would, I would, he would be driving and I'd have my hand, like this. So I wouldn't even look at the water, like I was that like nervous about it, but it wasn't because it was dark, it was just like the fear of, like the car, just you know, going over the bridge. But he was always afraid of dark water. And so to me I was so traumatized that he died in the very way that he was terrified that when she said he, she was like he didn't like

Darkwater, he didn't like that, did he? I'm like no, and she said he said to tell you it wasn't that bad.

0:43:57 - Julie

You know, what I get from that, liza, is that he had other experiences in past lives that involved that, and then, as we go through subsequent lifetimes, there's always a semblance of a script that plays out, and so he was exploring it in this way, in this time, in this version.

0:44:18 - Liza

All of that Different set of variables, same basic script oh, so, like you think, he might have had like experiences with dark water in the past. That brought fear for him and he said I'm going to face that again here.

0:44:32 - Julie

Multiple lifetimes and so he experienced it in a different way, with a different set of variables, because it was a different time, it was a different set of circumstances, but it was still the same outcome. And what I've seen in my non-scientific research, just in working with tens of thousands of clients and doing a lot of past life work. I do scans. I don't hypnotize anybody, I just have a whole technique that I use that's instant, and then a scene will come up and we'll know where it was, when it was, what the year was, all that kind of thing. And it's been my experience that it's all related. And so they're looking at it from a different perspective. Okay, maybe he died in dark water, in the ocean, on a ship, a sea voyage, kind of a cargo ship or something in the 1700s. Maybe it was a Viking who knows what the scenario was? But he wanted to explore it this time to see the different nuances of it. And we look at that from our human perspective and we're like, why in the heck would anybody choose that? And yet the analogy I like to use is if you think of Hamlet, how many times has Hamlet been performed since Shakespeare wrote it in 1602? Who knows? Certainly same script, different perspective. Where was it performed? In what language, in what year? What was happening in the world? Was this person an actor, a director, a set designer? Was the performance inside, outside?

All those different variables come up with a different experience. And so, since time doesn't exist in the spirit world, time's a human creation. These lifetimes can be a nanosecond, based on our understanding of time. And there are lots of schools of thought and I've heard, yes, from spirits, thousands of them over the years that say we do exist in multiple lifetimes concurrently, and that makes my head want to explode because I don't understand that from a human perspective. So I go to the place of well, it makes sense to me, eventually, when I'm in heaven, you know, is it feasible? Yeah, do I understand it? No, will I understand it when I get back to heaven? Yeah, absolutely yeah.

0:46:58 - Liza

That's really, you know. Thank you for saying that. I've had the same idea because I've heard that, like you, make decisions, that the decision to have this much loss and trauma in my life. When I get out of my body and I go to my, so I'm going to slap her around a little bit to my over so I'll be like what were you thinking? Like why have you put me through so much in this lifetime? You know, um, I did have somebody tell me uh, she's like you know this could be your last one, if you want it to be, but you're going to have to really jump off the suffering path and go on to like a less like. I like I'm trying to remember what it was that she said, but it was just interesting to me and I was like there's been just so much, an overwhelming amount of trauma in my life.

You know, which is why I first became a social worker and why I studied people going through traumatic. I'm very and even the widowhood stuff I really observe and try to, you know, parlay to others. This is what it's like to suffer in this way for these people. You know, like just kind of like be a voice of empathy for people going through certain experiences and I wonder if that's

you know part of the plan right Is? You know you go through suffering and you understand there's a lot of nuance to it. So then you want other people to understand just why people tend to struggle so much after they go through experiences like this. Like nobody wants to struggle like this, nobody wants to feel this way.

0:48:25 - Julie

But you're shining a light on it in a different way now and you've been through this horrific pain yet again. God only knows how many lifetimes we can find out when we're done recording, if you want. But you're creating out of that pain something that is a bright light for people on a global basis, for women and their children on a global basis in this day and age. Before we didn't have the internet, before, there were a lot of women that didn't go to college because it wasn't the accepted practice, let alone get a PhD for God's sake. And so you. My guess is and I'm hearing a yes from Spirit is you've been through all of these experiences in many lifetimes and they've all been heart-wrenching. You've learned from all of them. This one, you're like okay, guys, I got it, I don't need to experience this anymore. What can I do to help others on a global scale? And you got that alphabet soup at the end of your name and all those degrees. So that gives you credibility, and you have the experience of being a young widow yourself with a small child, which gives you even more credibility for people to really pay attention to what you're talking about. It's an amazing opportunity for you to change the zeitgeist, I think. I mean, I think you don't think I know you're being led to do this work and you're helping so many people and when you're dead and gone and you're back in heaven and your little family is all put together, you're going to go. You know that was awful going through it, but look at what we've created through all of us playing these roles in this bigger part of this movie that we've survived. So kudos to you, girl. I'm so impressed with everything you're doing.

From your research, what, obviously, other than small children? But what are the other nuances of being a young widow? Or are there other nuances of being a young widow versus being what? An old widow or a widow in middle age? Or, you know, what do you do? Young widow versus an old widow? And how old do you have to be to qualify as a young widow?

0:50:51 - Liza

All of this comes with qualifications. So I you know I didn't create this, this number, but the way the research has defined is 50 and below is classified as young widow, however, as a young widow. But however, in this parenting study that I was telling you about, there are widows who are in their 60s that have young children, because now people are having children at an older age, and so what that means is that you're having a young widowhood experience, even though you're not technically a young widow. Does that make sense? Because that your family's young? But one of the nuances that I'm exploring and I'm not saying that this is just among young widows, this could be among older, but I have not seen it there because I hadn't studied that population is the sexuality piece.

You know, when you lose a sexual partner, you know. I think that, like let's just let me back away from sexual when you lose a sexual partner, when you go through a death experience, a lot of people and this is why, like Yalom and existential kind of theorists, say that death and sex are very related, because sex is the antithesis of death. It's like the life force versus death is like the end, and so people, when they go through a bereavement. A lot of times their sexuality is affected, you know, and so I've heard people talk about this. I even, like I even have seen some blogs writing about it.

But when I was widowed and I entered into these Facebook groups, you know there's a whole range of groups. Some of the groups are like for the very sad, depressed like you know I'm going through it widows with young children, or widows and widowers with young children, and then you have this like range of from very serious to very funny widow groups, right? So the widow humor groups, they're the ones that really talk about sex. So I remember going into

it and it was the first time I ever really like laughed at that and I stayed up laughing till like two in the morning because everyone's talking about sex in this particular group during this season when I, when I walked into this, stepped into this like online group and basically it's this idea of like I'm never going to have sex again.

You know what I mean? This person who I had sex with is dead and you would think that that doesn't matter because you're too sad for it to matter. It is one of the first things that people think about, not because they want to have sex. I mean, you have no sexual desire, obviously at the beginning, but it's this idea of like, oh my God, I lost the one person that I could have intimacy with and that's gone, it's over. Like I've never, like you've, in that moment, feel like that's never going to happen for me. And so then there are memes that I saw that it's you have to make fun of yourself because like or otherwise, you're going to cry.

0:53:34 - Julie

You know what's the term to describe that. You told me this and I said what I never heard of this? Widow's fire, widow's fire. I never heard of that until you told me about it and I said what is that?

0:53:46 - Liza

Yeah, so, so, so that's the first, so I can tell you about that. Like Widow's Fire is this obsessive and unbidden, like nobody is asking for this because it's very difficult to go through it. It's this unbidden surge of sexual desire and obsessive thoughts about sex that come up after you lose your spouse, and I heard a lot of young widows talking about it. It's like, you know, putting memes up like day 345 without sex. You know, my barber accidentally pulled my hair and I called him daddy. You know, it's just like people are making fun of themselves, you know, because everyone's missing. And so then people are really talking about having this longing and they're like, is it wrong? Am I crazy for wanting sex? You know, am I crazy that this is all I can think about? So as I read that and I went to the literature and I was like this is actually not in there. You know, this is not being written about. So I decided to do this study to describe what widow's fire is, and so the first paper on widow's fire was to describe, you know, what is it like to lose a sexual partner and how do your feelings change. And not everyone goes through this, but the people who do go through widow's fire, the first thing they talk about is like immediate loss of desire, you know, but a real acknowledgement, and a visceral acknowledgement that what they lost sexually was catastrophic. They know that immediately, you know, or very quickly they begin to realize oh my God, like the one person who I wasn't embarrassed to be naked in front of, the one person that loved me for who I was, who saw me before children and after children. Because when you're widowed in your 30s or in your 40s, you're like already not feeling as beautiful as you felt when you were younger. So that immediately begins like, oh my God, when is this ever going to happen for me again? And then, am I ever going to be comfortable enough to do this again? But I want to. You know what I mean. So it's just like you're stuck between this rock and hard place, and so people feel very ashamed of themselves when they feel the surge of sexual desire, because it really goes against grief norms, like you're not supposed to be desirous of sex when you're that sad. You're not supposed to be desirous of sex when you're that sad. You're not supposed to be desirous of sex when you lose the person who you were having sex with you know. So all those things. People begin to feel like they're monsters, like what is wrong with me, you know? Like please stop, I don't want anyone to know that I'm going through this. I'm so embarrassed. There's a lot of shame around it.

And so what happens is that, you know, when somebody dies, you have to kind of reconstruct your sense of self, especially if it's a spouse, because through their eyes you know yourself. You know, if they thought you were sexy and beautiful, then you feel that you're sexy and beautiful and for some reason, being sexy and beautiful is not important until you lose a person who told you you were sexy and beautiful and all of a sudden that becomes the most important

thing in your life. And that's what widow's fire does. This urgency forces you to contend with what in the heck am I going to do that? I'm feeling all these feelings. I want to have sex, and most of the time people want to have sex with their deceased spouse. So that already brings so much grief up, you know, because it's like I want, like I want to drink coffee with you, I want to eat breakfast with you. I just want a hug from you. I just want to have sex with you Anytime. Those urges and those yearnings come in any arena. It's very painful.

But then people begin to realize at some point they're not coming back. You go through these waves of unbidden, like horrible, horrifying memories as your brain is trying to understand what happened and then, to balance that out, you have numbness. So then, like that's what we all kind of go through is like this, like a lot of replaying of terrible things and numbness, and so then you're just experiencing bad or nothing, bad or nothing. And so in that nothingness, widow's fire makes you feel alive again, like, oh my God, I actually work.

I still have feelings, you know, like I still have something. That's because you feel like I has my chip was removed from me that made me human, like I has my chip was removed from me. That made me human. You know, I remember the first time I even experienced that, you know, I was like, oh my God, I feel something, even though I always felt something terrible, but it felt like this numbness of pain. I don't even know how to explain it, you know. And so people are like maybe it's our body's way of reminding us we're living. And then the second reason they say it's our way, it's our body's way of yearning for the connection we lost.

0:57:55 - Julie

And you're shedding light on it. Changing topics, I want to switch to traumatic bereavement for a minute. My grandfather was a detective in the Columbus Ohio Police Department and was killed in the line of duty in 1938. My meemaw was 36, my beloved meemaw and my mom was 12 and my uncle was 10. And they wanted my grandmother to testify during this bank robbers trial and she was so distraught she couldn't talk on the witness stand so the judge let her go Fast forward 50 years.

I'm at her house and I asked her. I was with a girlfriend and I asked her a question about it and she handed me this scrapbook. They had this hero's parade for him for his funeral and she stayed in the kitchen while I looked through his stuff and she did not want to talk about it 50 years later. And I thought, traumatic bereavement, I mean, you talk about that. And I thought my Meemaw went through that and at her funeral she died six weeks shy of 100. The police chief was there. Now, Columbus is big, Columbus is a million and a half, two million people. The police chief was there. They had a special escort for her. They sent a bagpiper. It was amazing.

So traumatic bereavement, there was nothing for her back then and one of his buddies was a boxing manager and he had a boxing match for her to raise money to pay off her mortgage, because they didn't have any insurance. There wasn't police insurance back then. Now there's the PBF, the Police Benevolence Fund or something, but back then they didn't have anything. So they had a boxing match and they raised enough money to pay off her mortgage, which was \$29 a month back then in 1938. And her brother's-in-law tried to take her kids away from her because they said she was gonna be, she couldn't support him, she was single. I mean, what was she gonna do? I can't even imagine what she went through. So talk to us about traumatic bereavement. The bank robber died in the electric chair. They executed him, wow yeah. So it was a big deal and there's all these articles and stuff about it. That's in the family history and I could even research it online if I wanted to know more. But I think about her and I think how did she survive that?

1:00:44 - Liza

Oh, my goodness, First of all, like I just feel so much pain and I feel the empathy that you feel for her, and I feel that too, just it's so painful to know people who you love so dearly have gone through such tragedies.

1:00:56 - Julie

Yeah, and all these years later, I'm named for her.

1:00:59 - Liza

Oh, are you named after her.

1:01:00 - Julie

Yeah, she was Julia Ann and I'm Julian. You know I was her favorite. All my siblings will tell you that, all my cousins. But yeah, I think, as I was her namesake, yeah, and I'm very, very, very close, yeah, and I'm very, very, very close, yeah, so you know, back then there wasn't anything and then she told her brothers-in-law over her dead body they were going to take her kids away from her and I remember my mother saying that every Sunday they would go to the cemetery to visit his grave after church and she would just cry for two hours.

1:01:35 - Liza

Oh honey, oh, my goodness, that breaks my heart.

1:01:38 - Julie

I know, yeah, you know that's traumatic bereavement in my book.

1:01:42 - Liza

Yeah, traumatic bereavement and possibly I don't know, but so there's several things. Traumatic bereavement, definitely, what she went through is the type of death that is a premature death, or it's violent, you know, or caused by self or others out of order, you know, and so she had several elements, like there's the elements of violence here, the elements of it being she was so young I was also 36 when Brent died, you know and so just all these and having to tell her children like she went through all the trauma of all of these things.

1:02:16 - Julie

And it was during the depression too. Keep that in mind. Let's just complicate things. Yeah, let's complicate things, oh goodness.

1:02:24 - Liza

And the financial. So the financial? That's one of the things that they, that the research has shown is that when you have financial stress, like very significant financial stress, it can complicate your bereavement process. And so one of the things I don't know, if you've heard of prolonged grief, you know, and there's like there's or complicated grief, but there's a lot of in the grief world. People are like well, you know, don't pathologize grief. But what I feel like is important to understand is that you know when you lose someone, you're going to hurt for the rest of your life. And then, when you hurt them and lose them in a traumatic way, not only do you have to deal with the learning to live without them, the learning to love them in physical separation and the learning to manage the pain. Those are the three big things that you have to do.

When somebody dies, you also have to deal with the trauma, and sometimes, because the trauma is so overwhelming to you, you cannot even deal with the grief, you know. And so then it's hard to process, and processing does not mean, oh, I'm going to get over it, but processing means I'm trying to accommodate my life so that I can accept that this happened so that I can learn to live, you know, and manage the pain and regulate emotionally and things like that. And

so I really struggled tremendously with pain and pain, dysregulation, and for years, for three years, I was just disabled by my grief, you know. But at first it was the trauma flashbacks and I had PTSD after my husband died and it became hard to even shower, you know, because the water on my face would remind me that he had drowned and you know.

So it like really disabled me, you know. And so dealing with the trauma did not allow me to do the things that are helpful in being able to process the grief. So this is why traumatic bereavement can be so difficult, because you've got two different things happening trauma and then loss, and one sometimes is subsumed under the other, you know. And so for people with traumatic bereavement, sometimes even remembering the loved one brings up so much trauma for them that they can't even approach it. You know what I'm saying, like what you're saying, like they can't talk about it, they can't think about it. Fifty years later she couldn't talk about it.

1:04:39 - Julie
It's raw.

1:04:40 - Liza
It's just as raw as the day it happened, as the moment that it happened. And so, you know, with prolonged traumatic bereavement sometimes can make people predisposed to prolonged grief, which what that is. I think one of the because I experienced that one of the central things is that the raw pain you feel in those early days does not dissipate that much, and so you feel that forever. I mean, you feel that until you and there is a treatment for it to help people and I did go through the treatment. I felt like it saved my life, you know. But prolonged grief is just this intense, horrific pain that you know. Like now I don't feel it in the same way that I used to.

For those three years, you know, and it can shorten your life because your body is not meant to have that much stress. I started losing my hair, I started having infection after infection that they could not explain what was happening, and it was because of all those years. Those three years I hardly slept, I hardly took care of myself. I was just surviving my life and just waiting to die. That's really what I was waiting for, just to die, because I couldn't see a future without my husband in it, you know, and so, and I avoided a lot of reminders that he had ever been alive, and so, and I avoided a lot of reminders that he had ever been alive, like I couldn't hear his voice, I couldn't, like I didn't sleep on our bed for three years, you know, I never went back to our room, you know. And so there were, but your son probably saved- your life.

1:06:08 - Julie
My son kept me going, yeah.

1:06:10 - Liza
I bet my son kept me going and at the same time you know like seeing his pain, you know there's this. You're in this double bind. If you have children, they keep you going and they also hurt you. Not that they hurt you, but their suffering hurts you. But if you don't have children, you don't have that purpose. So it's damned if you do, damned if you don't.

And I feel like with with with this. But I think traumatic bereavement can lead to this, this situation where even years later I can't talk about it, I can't approach it. And I heard there was a case study of a woman who for 10 years could not sleep if she was not in her husband's grave. And so people can live with this horrific pain for years because something happened in the grieving process. And it's not just trauma. Sometimes it's other things, Like if you had any faults or if you thought you were at fault for the death. It just makes it hard to accept the reality, and by accepting does not mean I like it, it just means to accommodate to a reality you didn't want.

1:07:10 - Julie

So there is therapy now to help people who are grieving. Go through that like what you did, because it sounds to me like what you're saying is it is a form of PTSD.

1:07:22 - Liza

No, it is. It could very well. So PTSD is the most dramatic presentation of trauma. But I think a lot of widows have trauma. Young widows have, you know, like how your grandmother and myself, like we lose our spouses and be sudden, unexpected, terrifying, or very quickly dying to cancer. You know those kinds of. So those are all traumatic bereavements. And so when? So PTSD is the full-blown diagnosis. But that doesn't mean you're not experiencing trauma. Like research shows that even two to four years after the death of a young partner, people are experiencing significant trauma symptoms. So that doesn't just go away. So you need treatment for trauma. But then if the trauma complicates the grief, so that's like an organ system failing and then another organ system starting to fail. You know what I mean. Then you start having system failure. To me that is how I experienced it. I experienced that I was slowly falling apart.

1:08:20 - Julie

So what are the options for grieving people now, a days like versus 1938 for my Meemaw? But in nowadays, if somebody finds themselves in the position that you were in or that my Meemaw was in, what are they looking for in a therapist or a counselor? Are there free or pro bono kind of centers that they can go to? Is there something online that they can do? How can they help not only in traumatic grief and bereavement, but also just in regular, you know run of the mill, horrific grief when a loved one is lost?

1:09:00 - Liza

Yeah, so you know, okay. So several things. One is that what people say is that most people will not need support beyond social support, because people tend to be able to somehow accommodate to the loss. You know and so, and then there's several layers of support that are needed depending on how much you're suffering and struggling, and some people don't. Like you know, as horrific as loss is, people are able to demonstrate this amazing resilience and, within time, accommodate and they're okay. Now, when people go on to be disabled by it for long periods of time, like I was and probably like how your meemaw may have been there is you know, there's information so the Center for Prolonged Grief at Columbia University. They have trainings for practitioners to just teach them about prolonged grief, because grief is not really well understood in society. Even in counseling programs or in social work programs, people still kind of still talk about the Kubler-Ross, you know stages of grief model which has been debunked in research. Like that's not, like you don't start it has.

Yes, wow, I hadn't heard that there's never been any real support for people actually going through these stages. You know, because they talk about the first one is like shock and denial. But really, what research has shown that people? That yearning is what people experience the most. That's a predominant feeling and yearning is not missing. Missing is a nostalgia of the back, like, oh, I remember when we used to. Yearning is like I want this now, like I want this valued thing right now, and that's what makes you feel so much pain. Because you know, every time you get a reminder that we used to do this together. Oh, I wish they were here right now. Oh my God.

It comes with so much anguish and when you're widowed you get those reminders constantly. It's different than if you like saw them once a year or you saw them every couple months. It's like I brush my teeth oh God, they used to do this. I take care of my kid oh God, they used to do this. So you're in this constant pain.

At that level of pain can really destabilize a person. It can make them like I'm too overwhelmed, I don't want to. I got to take care of my kids. I can't be in pain all the time. So they begin to avoid. You know so that avoidance can sometimes lead to this other stuff.

So the Center of Prolonged Grief at Columbia University. They train practitioners and that's where I found my therapist. She has been amazing. So right now there's a protocol there's only one that I know of for prolonged grief treatment, but there might be more written by Kathy Shearer and her team and, and basically this protocol is what it does is that it helps you to, with the support of the therapist, to face the grief and trauma of the grief. You know what I mean. So to face it and to start, start like coming towards your grief instead of fighting it.

So one of the first things that I had to start doing was journaling. You know, every day I had to journal what was my high of pain, what was my low of pain, what was happening when I had the high, what was happening when I had the low and what was the average throughout the day. How did I feel? And I was like I didn't understand why we were doing it initially, and then I began to realize that's just you reconnecting with your grief, because I was so used to just holding my breath and just powering through and working, and even though I was always in pain. I didn't want to feel it, so I was just like I'm not going to think about it. I'm not going to think about it. You know, that was so bad for me, you know, and so that started.

That did other exercises and you know, like writing down from, like like most scared to least scared of activities that you've been avoiding, that you need to do in order to rearrange your life and accommodate for this loss. So there were so many things that I had not taken care of. I was too afraid to approach it. You know, like, even including clothes that I used to wear when he was alive, I couldn't look at them anymore. I was just avoiding, even though I thought about him all day long. I was avoiding because I was so afraid of the pain.

There were things that we did, and that was it was a hard protocol to go through, it was brutal and it should have been like like you know what the research shows is it's a 16 week protocol. I had to do it over nine months. It was. It was so destabilizing at times, and so my therapist realized that she said, okay, let's pause this, let's help you get through this. And then and several people died while I was going through it, you know, and so then we had to pause it, you know, take. So my therapist was amazing. Her name is Sonia Lott and she's on that. She's on that website. So unfortunately there's I don't I don't think that there's pro bono, but I really wish there were. There was because so many widows and but there's other people who go through it, but young widows, there's a lot of young widows that I'm reading the, the Facebook forums. I'm like they're years out and incredible amount of pain and this is not to judge to say, oh, you're not allowed to hurt, but it's destabilizing and it's disabling.

1:13:54 - Julie

You know, not only the widow, but for their children as well, they lose the other parent.

1:13:59 - Liza

They lose the other parent. Yeah, like I, I feel like it's very traumatic for children to lose one parent and watch the other parents suffer like this. And even you know, I had a. I had a friend who told me that her mother would take them to the grave site every weekend also, and it being a hard memory, like I don't want to do this, you know, but it's almost like you're stuck here because your parent needs this and the parents begin to struggle to attune to their children when they're stuck in mental health issues, you know. So it's like research shows that mothers with postpartum depression or PTSD they can't even hear their kid crying in the same way that kids with parents without this have. You know what I mean. Like your ability to hear your child even is challenged because you're in so much distress. So that becomes, you know I. That's why I feel like that's part of why I'm doing the Young Widowhood Project is because

I'm really concerned for the widow but also really concerned for the children of a widowed family.

1:14:54 - Julie

Well, my Meemaw God bless her went to work and put both of her kids through 12 years of private Catholic schools. Both of them graduated from college, both of them had wonderful careers, and she was orphaned when she was in eighth grade oh goodness and went to work full time. So, goodness, yeah, her parents. She were gone when she was 14 and didn't even finish the eighth grade and she was an only child, and so I think about the trauma that she went through, but God bless her to power through. And she had a lot of joy when we were born, when the grandkids. It was like, once the grandkids were born, it was a different situation. And then, when the great grandkids were born, oh man, that was just like a whole new ballgame for her, and that's what brought her the most joy was the babies and you know, and new life and all of that.

Speaking of that, a couple more questions as we're winding down. I could talk to you for hours. Thank you for sharing all your wisdom with us. I know it's helping a lot of people, and if it's not somebody who's a young widow that's listening, we all know people that know someone that this information's gonna help. So what can the family do to support their young widow and, whether they have children or not, what's the most helpful? If you named like two or three things that the family could do to help that widow feel supported, what would they be?

1:16:40 - Liza

supported? What would they be? So I think the first thing is, you know, realize that this is a long haul for them. It's going to be years of of hurting, of, you know, and so that they're going to they're, they're going to be going through milestones in their lives where their partner would have been there. And so just being mindful, like anniversaries, their birthdays, anything special in their lives has now taken on this, you know, it used to be joyful, now it's sad as well as joyful, or tragic as well as joyful, and so like realizing that their, their loved one, their widow and their family is going to hurt for a really long time and maybe for the lifetime, maybe for a lifetime, but they're going to be in like the intense, acute pain for a really long time and maybe for the lifetime, maybe for a lifetime, but they're going to be in like the intense, acute pain for a really long time. And so like to just help them feel like they're not alone. You know, just just remember them, just see a hey like hey. I know that this is your anniversary, I know that that was hard. It must've been hard for you Remembering them on their anniversaries, remembering them on their birthdays, remembering them on their partner's birthdays, like they still continue to celebrate and love and honor their partner throughout the rest of their lives, you know.

So I know, like for me in February, I start, you know, struggling because that was my husband's birthday, you know. And so I begin to struggle and people who remember that are like, hey, I know that you were going through a hard time. That just helps me to know I'm not alone. And the other thing is to not expect. People want you to get better and you feel the pressure from other people that they want you to get better and you're like I'm not getting better and I can't hurry it along, you know. So, just one of the most helpful things that one of my friends told me at like nine or 10 months after Brent died. She said you know, liza, I know you're about to come on the one year anniversary and I want you to know that there's no pressure from us that you get better. You know, like, if you're a mess, if you're a hot mess, like you are now, at the one year mark and beyond, we'll be here. And if you're like that at eight years, we'll be here. You know like, we don't want you to feel this way. But if you are, it's okay.

So I think, letting me be a hot mess and accepting me, you know just like, oh, come along, you know, and if I'm crying, she's crying, let's give her a hug and let's carry on. That just made me feel like I wasn't isolated. You know, because when people begin to feel like, are you still struggling like that? Like we know that people get tired of us. You know, we know this. But

when people tell you I'm not tired of you, you know, like if you need to cry, we'll cry and then let's go do our thing, just make me feel normal. You know, tell me your problems too, you know.

So I would say that, like, remember it's a long haul and don't as hard as it is for you and I recognize this that as a bystander, it's traumatic to watch someone you love fall apart in this way. Like I know this. So try to take care of yourself. If you need breaks from them, take them. You know, like they don't expect you to be there for them all the time, but also they don't disappear fully. Like just go take a break and then come back. My family used to talk me around like a volleyball. You know, my mom would call my sister to be like come pick her up, I can't take it anymore, I can't see her crying like this. So my sister would pick me up and take me to their house, you know. And then they'd be like okay, I'm done, like go pick her up. And I had no idea this is all happening in the background. They were just coordinating so they could survive watching me fall apart, you know, and so that you know just kind of like it's a long haul and yes, yeah.

1:19:52 - Julie

Great suggestions. I know you're in a new relationship. Tell us how did you know that it was time for you, or did it just happen, you know, just kind of out of the blue, and you just took step by step? Or just tell us real briefly about that.

1:20:18 - Liza

About this one. It just happened we met at dance school but I felt like I knew that I was ready because I'd had one previous relationship before this one that I had thought I was ready to start dating. My therapist had told me you need to start dating because I wore my rings for 14 months and then I had all this anger that he had abandoned me. And she was like he didn't abandon you, he's dead. She's like can you start acting single? Is there any way you can start like to behave in a way that lets you know that you're single? So I thought, okay, it's been 14 months, I should try. And it was very painful.

But what was different then, when I had my first relationship at versus now, is that I I don't like. I feel there's space for both. I don't have to hide my love for Brent and I have a lot of love for Henry. You know what I mean. Like they're both great loves and I'm okay. I mean sometimes I'm not okay with it. Sometimes I'm so confused about like, hold on, how does this even work? But my heart is okay with holding space and I feel that Brent's okay with it and Henry's okay with it, you know. So I think that the biggest way that I've known so far, as it's evolved, is that there's space, that there's space for both and that I'm not sitting there yearning for Brent while I'm with Henry.

You know, I think that was something that was happening to me in my previous relationship, where I would be yearning and then I would feel guilty. So I thought I'm cheating on the new guy, you know, because I'm sitting here wishing it was Brent, you know, and not wishing that it wasn't this person, but just wishing that Brent was around, you know, and that would make me feel so anxious because I'm a monogamous girl, you know. Like I'm like a one person person, and so to feel like I'm with one person and wanting to be with another, that didn't feel right and it didn't happen until after I got into the relationship. You know what I'm saying. So then I'm like, oh my God, you know what is happening, like what's wrong with me, and now I miss Brent. I hear Brent's voice in my heart. Brent will always be a part of me. He's an ancestor, he's a great love and there's space for the new person.

1:22:18 - Julie

Oh wonderful. Last question why do we incarnate?

1:22:23 - Liza

Why do we incarnate? That's wonderful. I hear, and this kind of makes sense to me is to learn to love. I hear that you know that. I've heard from people that I think it's so that we learn to love in a deeper way. So we have the human experience the human experience and the suffering that comes with it and the joys. They teach us how to love better.

1:22:48 - Julie

I think that's why I don't know what.

What do you think?

Expanding your love for all those young widows out there in the world who are benefiting from your counseling and your research and your wisdom, and as somebody who's been there and has survived, so that's a different kind of love, perhaps, than what you ever thought you'd be involved in, you'd be involved in, but certainly just as beneficial and just as what's the word I'm looking for Not efficient, but just as much of an experience as romantic love or familial love or something like that.

You're just doing it and you're doing it in a way that's different, because you're sharing love with people who you will never meet and you're sending them love and you're affecting their lives in profound ways you and your team that's doing this research. And for you to have the courage to share this, you to have the courage to share this such intimate stuff about your own life, is just remarkable. So I just think you're so extraordinary and I'm grateful for you and for the work that you're doing and how you're benefiting people from all over the world. So carry on, my girl. You're doing remarkable things. How can people learn more about you and your work?

1:24:18 - Liza

So I am on a Facebook platform and an Instagram platform called the Widowed Researcher, and there you can connect with the Young Widowhood Project and also a podcast that I just started is still very much slowly building up, but it's called WidowPod the Stories and Research of Young Widows, and so I also have academic papers that people ask me for. I'm happy to share them. I have some of them linked also in my bio, so that's what I can find. Yeah, wonderful.

1:24:46 - Julie

And anybody listening who's been through this. You are welcome to a free copy of my book Angelic Attendance what Happens as we Transition From this Life Into the Next. Just go attendance. What happens as we transition from this life into the next. Just go to julieryangift.com and we'll give you our free digital and audio book download. And it's about how we're surrounded by angels in the spirits of deceased loved ones and pets, and that's my parting comment to you. Brent was surrounded by angels and deceased loved ones and deceased pets when he passed, and deceased loved ones and deceased pets when he passed, so I hope that gives you some comfort as well. Yeah, Thank you for coming by and talking with all of us today. Lots for us to all think about. You know, gosh, if we're in this position or we know somebody who is, please share this video with them, and I envision people will watch this multiple times because there's so many golden nuggets here In the meantime. Sending you lots of love from Sweet Home, Alabama, and from Texas too, where Dr Liza is. We'll see you next time.

1:25:54 - Annncr

Thanks for joining us. Be sure to follow Julie on Instagram and YouTube at AskJulieRyan, and like her on Facebook at AskJulieRyan. To schedule an appointment or submit a question, please visit AskJulieRyan.com.

1:26:08 - Disclaimer

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