

“There’s always another chance for happiness!”

Every year, 700,000 American women lose their husbands. At just 40, Colleen Phillips was one of them. How will I go on alone? she wondered, trying to do everything—from working long hours to raising her son—by herself. Until she found a better way . . .

Pulling the shirt from the hanger, Colleen Phillips slipped her arms into its sleeves. If she breathed in deeply, it still smelled like him. And if she closed her eyes, she could still feel Rory there . . .

It was their 10th wedding anniversary. Yet there were no roses. No weekend trip. No whispers of “I love you.” And as the young Bradenton, Florida, widow fell onto her bed, the tears came so hard, her body ached.

Oh, Rory, she wept. “Til death do us part” wasn’t supposed to come so soon!

Blessed. That’s how Colleen had felt, marrying her best friend, then welcoming their son, Ryan.

But at just 36, Rory—who’d never smoked—was diagnosed with stage III lung cancer.

“I’m not going anywhere,” he promised.

Even during chemo, Rory would joke and laugh, then come home after treatment to give Ryan rides on their tractor.

But one day at a baseball game, Colleen could

see the pain on Rory’s face as he struggled to climb the stadium steps—and she knew. He’s fighting hard, trying to live life to the fullest.

But I’m losing him . . .

A month later, Rory was gone—the day before they would have celebrated a decade of marriage. And now Colleen railed:

How could you take him from us?

Hope, help and healing

In the weeks to come, Colleen felt a certain part of her had died, too. It was just too much: The day her washing machine broke and the house flooded. Every time Ryan asked, “Where’s Daddy?”

“He’s watching over us from Heaven,” Colleen would explain gently. But Ryan was just three. Will he even remember the sound of Rory’s voice?

Still, she had to go on, for Ryan. So she threw herself into her job.

Just get through today, she’d tell herself, getting up at 5 a.m., bringing Ryan to preschool, then meeting with clients—

only to rush home to get Ryan to bed.

But the nights seemed endless as Colleen lay awake in the dark, her fists clenched and head pounding with loneliness and sorrow and the pressure of being responsible for *everything*.

Then one day, Ryan’s pre-K teacher took her aside. “Your son is having trouble focusing . . .”

She hadn’t meant it to be judgmental. “But all I could think was: Here’s this boy growing up without his daddy,” Colleen recalls, “and a mommy who’s so busy all the time. *Something* had to give.”

Soon after, surfing the Internet, Colleen found a website for a life coach, a young widow like herself.

“Shouldn’t I be back to normal by now?” she cried at their meeting.

The coach took her hand. “You can’t keep running to avoid pain,” she said gently. “And things will never be ‘normal’ again. But you can create a *new* normal.”

From tragedy to triumph

As Colleen gave herself permission to slow down—to take Ryan to the beach, or even to pore over her wedding album,



“We’re all dealt cards in life that we might not have chosen,” says Colleen with Ryan. “But it’s up to each of us to create the best life we can!”

crying until her eyes were ringed red—she began sleeping better. Her headaches vanished. She could actually *breathe* again.

And with her coach’s guidance, she also began jotting down what she longed for in her future:

*More time with Ryan . . .
To do something really meaningful . . .*

“I think,” she determined, “I’d like to help other women who’ve suffered a loss. Like you’ve helped me . . .”

So Colleen decided to become a life coach herself. And after completing her training, Colleen was introduced to her first client, Cindy Johnson, who’d lost her husband to a heart attack.

“I feel . . . stuck,” Cindy sighed. She had no job, an empty nest. “And now I’m a widow, too.”

So Colleen helped Cindy pinpoint her goals and guided her toward making them happen. Sometimes she just comforted Cindy as tears fell, be-

cause Colleen understood her pain all too well.

But with every day, Cindy—just like Colleen—felt stronger. As Colleen coached other women (CoachingForWidows.com), she felt her own heart healing.

Ryan, now eight, is happy again, too. “Wann hear a joke?” he’ll ask Colleen on their walks. And with every giggle, Colleen thinks: You sound just like your Daddy!

You are missed, they recently wrote in a card to Rory that they tied to balloons and let fly skyward. And you are loved.

Today, five years later, Colleen will never stop loving Rory. But she found love again.

“Losing Rory was the hardest thing I’ve ever experienced. But I know now that he’s smiling down on us,” she says. “I know, too, that we can beat any obstacle. And there’s always another chance for happiness!”

—Kristin Higson-Hughes

Could a life coach help you? Yes, if . . .



- ✓ **You’re stuck in a rut.** A coach (find one at [Coach Federation.org](http://CoachFederation.org)) can help you prioritize what’s important.
- ✓ **You’re searching for Mr. Right or longing to improve any relationship.** A coach can pinpoint patterns that need changing and help you fix them.
- ✓ **You’re looking to change jobs.** A coach can determine what path suits you and your available options.

NOTE: Life coaches are trained to help you get your work and personal lives on track. But if you’re feeling depressed or hopeless, it’s important to see a psychotherapist instead.