

Before Belinda's husband died, he left her a hidden note. It set her free to find love again



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When a person loses their partner, the love and connection for them often continues long after their death. Even as the surviving partner builds a new life, “joy and grief will often exist at the same time”, says Rebecca Adams, co-founder and CEO of First Light Widowed Support.

Grieving partners can face many obstacles once they decide to begin dating or enter into a new relationship, such as uncertainty from a new partner about where they fit, as well as judgment from others.

“[But] a new partner is not a replacement, and doesn’t erase the grief for the person lost,” explains Adams. “The challenge is often not about ‘moving on’, but about finding a way for new love to exist alongside enduring love and grief.”

Here, three women share their experiences of finding new love after loss.

“There’s passion, but friendship matters enormously”: Belinda Barrie, 56



“Sometimes it’s simply someone noticing you have sticky fingers and silently handing you two wet wipes.”

“Over the years, my relationship with my husband, John, changed; by about 2014, I had become more of a carer for John than a wife.

His illness [T-cell non-Hodgkin lymphoma], medications, and deteriorating health affected his personality and behaviour. At times, he became angry, and the relationship became abusive. John died at home in October 2021, with me beside him, exactly as he wanted.

When I eventually sold our house, I took our wedding photograph down from the wall as I packed. Hidden behind it was a card from John I had never seen. He apologised for everything he’d put me through and said he wanted me to go on to have a very happy, stress-free life after he was gone. I sobbed. I think that was his way of setting me free.

But in 2025, everything I’d been carrying finally caught up with me. The grief for John, my father, my brother – who had both also died – my life, and years of caring came tumbling down at once. I had a major breakdown and needed intensive therapy. I had to rebuild myself and realise that at 55 I was allowed to start again.

Then, this April, a friend introduced me to Dan. I wasn’t sure about him at first. He was gentle, quiet, sweet and kind, but he had also recently come out of a relationship and was healing. So we didn’t rush.

We spent time together and gradually realised that we really liked each other.

Dan recently moved in with me; we have our own bedrooms, though mine gets considerably more use. We're letting the relationship become whatever it's going to become rather than forcing it into a predetermined shape.

I've been fortunate that the people who genuinely matter have supported me. I've also removed from my life those who believe my grief or relationships require their approval. One thing I've learned about widowhood is that everybody seems to have an opinion on how you should do it. How long you should grieve. When you should date. Whether you should have sex. Whether you should sell the house. What you should keep. What you should throw away. How much you should talk about your late partner, and eventually, whether you're allowed to be happy with somebody else.

Love at 56 feels different. At our age, we've already built lives and had them knocked about a bit. This feels more like sharing.

There's passion, absolutely, but friendship matters enormously. Sometimes it's simply someone noticing you have sticky fingers and silently handing you two wet wipes.

John and I shared the deepest love, the best laughs and an extraordinary bond. I'd love to have that depth of love in my life again. Maybe that will be with Dan, or maybe life has other plans. I don't need to know yet."

"He's accepted my pain, sensitivity and fears": Lisa Blair, 60



"Sean was the unexpected blessing who walked into my life in the midst of my healing."

“After my husband Kevin died tragically and suddenly in 2025, I was numb, confused, and lost.

I honestly had no intention of dating. A conversation with friends even had me saying I wouldn’t ever use dating apps, that I could only consider [a new relationship] if I met someone organically, with shared interests, and that he’d have to understand grief and my need to honour Kevin and my daughters. Bizarrely, about a week later, that all came true.

Sean and I knew each other through our community theatre connections and had many mutual friends. In September 2025, we were both supporting a mutual friend who was debuting a play she had written.

We didn’t really start talking until November, and then it became a message every morning and night. We then went on a dinner date. We agreed nothing was off the table and had an open, raw conversation about love, loss, divorce, mental health, and grief – his and mine.

Our connection grew stronger from there. It was easy, comfortable, and safe: a beautiful friendship became so much more, right when we needed it most. For a while, I didn’t think I deserved love again, that I’d already had my shot, so learning to receive was a big thing for me at the start.

We kept it secret for a while, just enjoying getting to know one another without judgment or interference from others. Then we chose just a few trusted family members and friends to share it with, and we were both overwhelmed by the positive response and support we received.

I’m also aware of some who judged me, unfriended and unfollowed me on social media, or spoke behind my back. I’m disappointed they didn’t come to talk to me or try to understand that I wasn’t replacing Kevin – I never could.

Sean fell in love with a very different version of Lisa. He’s accepted my pain, sensitivity and fears, and loves me as I am. He never got to know the Lisa before grief, but he gently supports and tends to the person I’ve become.

In July, Sean proposed while we were in Cornwall, UK, at his mother’s memorial bench overlooking the ocean. We both shed tears of joy.

We are excitedly planning our wedding for next year and sharing our travel dreams and goals. Life now is full, rich and beautiful. Sean was the unexpected blessing who walked

into my life in the midst of my healing, and he's committed to continuing that journey with me."

"I have never felt guilty": Megan Daley, 50



"We both still adore our late spouses ... we can hold our love for them alongside our love for each other."

LITTLE FAMILY PHOTO CO

"After my beautiful husband Dan's unexpected death in April 2017, I loudly and proudly declared that I was happily single and would remain so forever. A wise friend and colleague asked me not to proclaim this so loudly. While I appreciated her well-meaning advice, I was determined to be a strong, single woman and mother.

In 2020, a dear friend introduced me to my now-husband, Murray, a widower raising two young boys while wrangling one of Queensland's largest beekeeping operations. I have always had a thing for bees and was midway through writing a picture book about them, *The Beehive*, when we met.

We were introduced at our friends' party; he was witty and loud, full of dark humour, and spoke with such confidence that I was both annoyed and intrigued.

We were both absolutely categorical that our kids not be mucked around with, given the grief they had already been through. Once we quickly realised what we had in this relationship was great, we told our family, friends, and our kids. The younger children were pretty accepting, but my eldest daughter was very close to my late husband and found the news very hard.

Murray has always been very open with her about her dad, explaining that he would never seek to replace him. Now they are extremely close, to the point that they regularly gang up on me. Our extended family, including the family of our respective late spouses, were absolutely beautiful and supportive, and always have been.

At the beginning, I was very conflicted, as I never intended to re-partner. I felt strong and independent and was doing just fine. When I met Murray, any reservations I had were quickly quelled by his love for me, our family, my family, and my late husband's family.

We have worked incredibly hard to ensure our four children are at the centre of all that we do, and they all get along so incredibly well.

We both still adore our late spouses, so there is no comparison. We can hold our love for them alongside our love for each other and for the new family we have created. I have never felt guilty because I know Dan would be so proud of me.”

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