

Debbie's Story



Three years ago, Debbie Snow sat next to her husband Ron as he lay in bed. Three of their children stood in the room, watching and listening as Debbie whispered, "You have fought the good fight and are wearing many crowns. Go on and be with Him and I'll see you soon." Within seconds, Ron took his last breath.

"Trying to find yourself again is the hardest part."

Forty-three years earlier, Debbie had married Ron when she was just nineteen-years-old. She remembers their first date with laughter. She was energy and enthusiasm in a four-foot-eleven-inch frame and he was a quiet and polite college guy, muscular from his summer work on a construction site.

In the years that followed, the couple had four children and celebrated the marriages of each of them. Ron and Debbie were very active in their church, leading Bible studies and hosting ex-offenders in their home on Thanksgiving.

Ron was about to retire. They planned to move to Texas to a house with a pool and be near their daughter and grandchildren.

Instead Ron's doctor told the family that there was nothing more she could do. Ron left the hospital room he'd called home for several months and at home, surrounded by his family, Ron passed away.

Debbie received hundreds of condolence cards. "The funeral was full," she says. "There

must have been 500 people there." At church, people would ask how she was doing. She felt like she couldn't answer honestly because people didn't want to hear the truth.

After a while, her children suggested that Debbie make a list of things she would like to do and fill her calendar with activities to take her mind off her grief. "I would think, 'you don't have any idea.'"

"You are used to unity with another person," Debbie says, "When he is gone, more than half of you is gone. How do you deal with tonight? How do you put your right foot in front of the left? I didn't even want to brush my teeth."

So Debbie turned to Google. She found Stand in the Gap for Widows. After meeting with the ministry staff and learning about the ministry, Debbie remembers, "I got real excited that my church needed this." At the time, she was sixty-two-years-old. She'd been a widow for six months. She approached her church with the program, asking them to implement it in whole

or in part. She was told that her church was already doing enough to support widows and the ministry wasn't needed. Debbie and her husband had been members of that church for 16 years.

Shortly after this conversation, she left and began attending a new church where she felt more welcome and understood. This is a relatively common experience for widows. According to Stand in the Gap's survey of over 1,400 widows, 73% of widows say their church does not have a widow ministry. Fifty percent of widows leave their church home and 17% actively search for a new church with a ministry to widows. Many widows report feeling like their church family provides excellent support in the early days and weeks but fails to respond to the long-term devastating impact of widowhood.

Debbie was invited to a Stand in the Gap for Widows small group meeting at Asbury United Methodist Church. At the time, Debbie's grief was still raw. But through her interactions with the other widows in the small group, she grew to feel embraced by their shared experiences.

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Debbie (left) with some friends at a Stand in the Gap for Widows event hosted by Asbury United Methodist Church.

Over time, her small group experiences empowered Debbie to take other steps towards healing. She goes dancing at a local senior center every Monday night. She went on a mission trip to Peru. And she invites other widows to join her at the monthly Stand in the Gap for Widows small group meeting at Asbury. The small group has grown to at least twenty women who go to the movies or share meals together between meetings.

"It's after the cards stop coming, that's when we need Stand in the Gap," Debbie says. "When my husband and I were in ministry together, we were oblivious to the needs of widows. People don't do it consciously or maliciously, they just go on with their lives and assume that I have too."

But it has taken many years, many conversations, and many late-night phone calls to her Stand in the Gap for Widows small group friends for Debbie to find herself on the other side of raw grief. "Trying to find yourself again is the hardest part," Debbie says. "For 43 years, my purpose was to be married to my husband and raise our four children. I'm very proud of that, but it's over. The second chapter is being written. Stand in the Gap gave me wings to go forward and embrace others."



Debbie fulfilled a lifelong dream by going on a mission trip to Peru where she met new friends and hiked to Machu Picchu // Debbie (head of table) with some of the ladies from her Stand in the Gap small group.