



## WEBWATCH

### Young widows and widowers

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**ALTHOUGH THERE ARE A NUMBER** of good internet resources for people who have lost their partners, fewer are aimed specifically at helping young widows and widowers. In the USA the Census Bureau estimates for 2000 were around one million widowed people between the ages of 20 and 49. This represents less than 7% of all widowed people in the USA and less than 0.005% of the population. Consequently it is easy for young widows and, particularly, widowers to feel isolated, left alone to cope with issues many of which are very specific to this type of bereavement. One of the most popular websites offering much-needed support is [www.YoungWidow.org](http://www.YoungWidow.org). Launched in 2001, it is sponsored by Young Widow-Chapter Two, a non-profit organisation based in Texas.

A major aim is to help widowed people 'recover, reclaim and rebuild' by facilitating the exchange of experiences, information and support. The site describes itself as a 'thriving online community' at the heart of which is a well-used **bulletin board** where members are free to post comments and raise issues. Forums are moderated and

access is for members only who must register two email addresses and create a user name and profile. The site appears to take user safety seriously and reserves the right to remove any profiles that appear bogus. Clearly stressed is the fact that this is a self-help network and that anyone requiring grief or crisis counselling should seek professional help.

In addition to the bulletin board, the site provides a list of support groups throughout the USA. There is also a **Library** section with an excellent bibliography, covering many aspects of bereavement for men, women and parents. The **Kids and Teens** section includes a discussion board for widowed parents which includes a list of website resources for and about grieving children. A further discussion board for young pregnant widows is accessible from here. **Book Recommendations** takes you to the section of the library dealing specifically with publications that may be very helpful for children and young people.

Although USA-based, with links to regional and national sites there, I feel that many of this website's resources could be helpful to people wherever they may be.

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy has published statistics for the UK indicating that there are around 36,500 widowed men and women under the age of 40 and

approximately 142,000 under the age of 50. Again, UK-based internet resources for young people in this group are rather limited but one organisation offering support and friendships to widowed under-50s is [www.wayfoundation.org.uk](http://www.wayfoundation.org.uk). For an annual fee of £15 this registered charity provides members with access to a secure online message board, a chat room and comprehensive links to other useful sites. Members also receive a regular newsletter, lists of local social activities for adults and children and information about weekend trips and holidays. The book loaning service offers a number of helpful titles that can be borrowed for up to three months free of charge except for return postage.

One link in particular, at [www.greenwidow.com](http://www.greenwidow.com), may be of interest to anyone concerned with the issues surrounding being **widowed while pregnant**. This small website, created by young widow Caroline Green, provides her downloadable publication *A Matter of Life and Death*. This 94-page booklet details the experiences of five widowed pregnant mothers, including Caroline herself.

Finally, anyone seeking more information on financial issues, including benefits, should access the fact sheets at [www.directgov.uk](http://www.directgov.uk) which give details of the **widowed parent's allowance**, bereavement allowance and a guide to benefits and money after a death.

## BOOK REVIEW

### For Widows Only

Annie Estlund



Lincon, NE, USA  
iUniverse Inc, 2003  
299pp  
\$22.95/£19.99 pb  
0 59529 110 4

This American author first started her notes on widowhood influenced by its effect on her younger friends. She says she identified a gap in the market on the topic, but only wrote her book after suffering her own sudden widowhood, aged 55.

Being a writer, she had kept a journal, an

honest and useful record of her grieving and a self-analytical account of her own feelings and coping (and non-coping) mechanisms. Relevant to her own personality, her generalisations are therefore sometimes not meaningful to others and even naive. Grief is so individual to each person in their own social and personal circumstances. Her observations are not as insightful as, for instance, CS Lewis's who, back in 1976, said, 'Why did no one tell me grief felt so like fear?'. Or Joan Didion, a fellow American, in 2006, 'Grief takes one to a place that no one knows till they reach it.'

Estlund's practical advice for post-bereavement is good with chapters on immediate jobs, using all offered help, expressing grief and accepting all invitations, not only to mitigate loneliness but also to maintain social contacts. Financial advice is,

understandably, geared to the American scene. Perhaps she should have advised finding lawyers, financial advisers and doctors young enough to see one out. 'Coping with being alone' is a chapter full of practical suggestions of activities, but with less emphasis on the emotional loneliness so well expressed by Katherine Whitehorn: 'Living in another country where you are an unwilling refugee.' I recommend this book with the above reservations. ●

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DIDION J. *The Year of Magical Thinking*. London: Harper Perennial, 2006.

LEWIS CS. *A Grief Observed*. London: Faber, 1976.

IRONSIDE V. *You'll Get Over It: the Rage of Bereavement*. London: Penguin, 1996.

WHITEHORN K. *The Guardian* Nov 8 2005. London.