

LOOKING FORWARD TO THE REST OF MY LIFE

My husband died just over a year ago after we'd spent fifty four happy years together. People expect me to be downhearted but I don't feel that way. How many couples are lucky enough to have such a long happy marriage? Surely it's something to celebrate? Yes it is the end of the life I've known for almost as long as I can remember but it's also the beginning of the rest of my life. It's inevitable that one partner is left alone. I was determined to take a positive attitude when he died and found advice from others who'd suffered bereavement very helpful.

'Accept every invitation that comes your way' suggested one friend. This turned out to be very good advice, although it has led to one or two challenging situations. I found myself walking five miles up a Yorkshire valley to see a waterfall in heavy rain. The torrent was worth seeing but the walk was hard going on the way back. I kept telling myself there's a delicious cream tea waiting for you when you get back and surprise, surprise, I found I could do it.

People asked me to join them for lunch at various venues as our age group seems to prefer this to catering at home as it's a less trouble. Lots of places do pensioners' specials and welcome their custom. Most of the meals are good but it's the company that's most enjoyable. I don't like eating on my own except for breakfast when it's me and the newspaper.

'Go for a walk every day even if it's only around the block,' was another idea that's proved successful. Not only does it get the joints moving and literally puts the colour in my cheeks but I soon got to know the familiar faces I see every day.

'Why don't you join us for a coffee in Wesley's,' proposed one couple. 'We all meet in there.'

I plucked up the courage to go in on my own the first time and after that it was fine. 'There's a seat here,' or 'Come and sit with us,' comes from all sides and I feel really welcome. Now I can always go in knowing there'll be somebody who's happy to chat.

'Before you go to bed make a note of what you are going to do next day' was another useful piece of wisdom. It means there's always a reason to get up in the morning even if you're only planning to clean the windows. The cleaning goes out the window if the phone goes with a last minute invitation as I have a shower as soon as I get up so that I'm always ready for the off.

I make the most of any public events enjoying the Royal Water Pageant in the pouring rain, marvelling at the World Diving Championships in the Olympic swimming pool and watching the Olympic Games on television.

Keeping busy seems to be the solution to bereavement for me. I'm able to do some writing from home. My husband was working two days a week in a school until just before he died. He loved the interaction with the teenagers and always had a funny tale about their outrageous conduct. Retired friends who do voluntary work find it rewarding because it's often so different from what they did before. Work provides a focus to plan around whether it's paid or voluntary. And makes you feel there's some point to life. After a year alone, I'm surprised at how upbeat I feel and look forward to the rest of my days.

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