

## Ep #16: Handling His Stuff



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Krista St-Germain**

[The Widowed Mom Podcast](#)

## Ep #16: Handling His Stuff

Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 16, Handling His Stuff.

Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, the only podcast that offers a proven process to help you work through your grief to grow, evolve, and create a future you can actually look forward to. Here's your host, certified life coach, grief expert, widow, and mom, Krista St-Germain.

Hey there, welcome back to another episode of the podcast. This one is going to be for any of you who have had to deal with your husband's belongings, even if you haven't done it yet. Maybe you've done it in stages. Maybe you still have more things left to deal with. Maybe your husband just died and the mere thought of dealing with his stuff is just unthinkable for you right now. Maybe you've dealt with the lion's share of it and you have some regrets. This one is for you.

Before we do that though, I'm going to jump in and do a couple of podcast reviews. I've decided that I really want this podcast to reach a million widows. I think that's a reasonable goal. I looked on the internet, and I don't know which site, but what I learned was that, according to that site, as of 2018, there were 11.67 million widows in the United States. So I think it's a good goal to reach one million of them, at least for starters, right?

So, reviews of the podcast, whether it's five-star ratings or actually written reviews, that's the way that the podcast becomes discoverable. So thank you to these two ladies who took the time to review the podcast. It really does help broaden the reach. It helps other people find us. And if you haven't done it yet and you're getting something out of the podcast, please, would you take a couple of minutes?

And I would love especially a five-star review, that would be fantastic, but any review would be great. And, of course, your comments, your feedback would be lovely. Written reviews would be amazing.

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So, the two that I want to read for you today, the first one is from a listener who calls herself Z-Sanchez. And the name of her review is Thank You, Just Amazing. “I’m so grateful to have found Krista’s podcast. I have an amazing therapist, but I needed more. Krista is genuine and natural. I love her philosophy on grief. It’s a rollercoaster and she acknowledges the thoughts and fears we feel. Thank you again.”

You are so welcome. That is exactly where I was, Miss Z. I had an amazing therapist, but I definitely needed more and I am so grateful that I found life coaching and that I get to share what I have learned from my experiences and my training with all of you.

So, the second one is from Wendy Bucey and her review is titled Very Uplifting. “Glad I found this podcast to help me navigate through my very recent loss. This podcast started the week I became a widow, and as a frequent podcast listener, I immediately searched for one that might help. I landed here and very glad that I did. I particularly like the helpful positive focus, which is very much needed as I’m motivated to heal, move forward, and keep living.”

This is exactly what I want, you guys. I want this to be discoverable. I want, when somebody is lost and in the dark, as I was, and as I bet you probably were, when your husband died, even if it didn’t happen as a result of an accident, even if you saw it coming, we’re all completely in a new world when it happens.

And I love, love, love, Wendy, that you found it so early on. I hope it’s going to be a useful resource to you as you heal and move forward and keep living. So thanks for sharing your review with me.

I’m still running that competition, by the way. We’re almost done, but if you would like to take your shot at winning a \$100 gift card to Amazon, all you have to do is go to [coachingwithkrista.com/podcastlaunch](http://coachingwithkrista.com/podcastlaunch). That’s where all

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of the entry instructions are. And simply by reviewing the podcast, you could potentially win a little shopping spree. Maybe it takes care of some necessities that you have, or maybe you can spoil yourself with something. I don't know, either way.

Alright, let's talk about stuff. How do we handle his stuff? This tends to be a subject that brings up a lot of emotion for us. I know for me, I definitely had to deal with it in stages. So I want to talk about the common struggles that I see, whether or not you have dealt with his belongings already or you are yet to do it or it is a phased approach for you, or maybe you've already done it and you're feeling some feelings about having already done it. I want to talk about all of that.

I'm going to share with you a little bit about how I handled my husband's stuff, not because the way I did it was right or wrong or better or worse, but because I just think it's useful to hear from other people, because maybe you can relate to some of what I did. Maybe you can learn from some of what I did.

And then I have some concrete steps and thoughts for you that I want to share, especially if you haven't done this yet or you're struggling to do it. And we're going to just jump on in.

I think this is such an interesting process to talk about because it's so filled with emotions. We have all sorts of thoughts, and therefore feelings, about our husband's stuff. It's not because of the stuff, by the way. The stuff is totally neutral. The stuff just sits there. The stuff doesn't cause our feelings. It's not the presence of the stuff or the absence of the stuff that causes us to feel any emotion. I'm not the absence of our husband that causes us to feel any emotion either, it's our thoughts.

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And because our thoughts are all over the place about stuff, then our feelings are all over the place about stuff. Now, none of this is right or wrong or good or bad. I just want you to understand how it happens.

So some of the thoughts that we seem to have tend to show up, very often, in the form of questions. What does it mean about my relationship with my husband if I get rid of his stuff? What does it mean about my healing if I get rid of his stuff? What does it mean about my healing if I keep his stuff? Am I stalled? Am I stuck? Is something wrong with me if I can't let go of it? Is there a timeline that I'm supposed to adhere to? What are other people going to think? What would they think if they knew that I donated his stuff? Or what would they think if they knew I still had all of his stuff? What would they think if they knew I threw some of his stuff away? I don't want other people using his stuff, it was his stuff.

Sometimes the idea of thinking of someone else using your husband's stuff is just intolerable, you can't imagine it. We often tell ourselves that if we do something with his stuff, if it's no longer in our house, it's no longer in our possession, if we get rid of it, then it means he's gone, like he's really gone. But it really doesn't, I promise you.

All of this though is an opportunity for you to be compassionate towards yourself, to offer yourself a tremendous amount of love and understanding and compassion. None of this is improved if you add judgment. It does not feel any better to decide what to do with his stuff if you are judging yourself the whole time. It does not serve you to keep his stuff and then judge yourself for keeping it.

Maybe you've got other people in your life who have expressed opinions about it. Maybe they're telling you that you just really need to let it go or that holding onto the stuff is keeping you stuck and it's blocking your healing, or maybe you have people running into your house trying to take

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things, take things that they want before you're really ready to deal with any of it.

Maybe you've already dealt with a lot of it, you've gotten rid of things, and you're having some regrets. You're feeling guilty or you're doubting yourself. All of it is so common. I hear it all. So because we have all of these different thoughts, then we have all of these different feelings because feelings are caused by thoughts. So it would not surprise me if you are feeling insecure, if you are feeling self-doubt, if you are feeling guilt, if you are feeling sad, if you are feeling despair.

All of these things, I see them all. Of course you are. Think about what you're thinking. If you're noticing yourself wanting to please others, of course, our brain thinks that our happiness is only possible if other people are happy. It's a little confused about that.

So just notice that your feelings are all over the place, and it's okay, it's just because your thoughts are all over the place, and that's okay too. Let's just hold space for that.

Before I give you some kind of concrete takeaways, I just want to tell you a little bit about how I handled my husband's stuff, because maybe there's something of value for you there. So for me, in the beginning, I really didn't do anything for quite a while, several months, in fact. And I remember the items that I struggled with the most; the toiletries in the bathroom, just seeing his toothbrush, seeing his razor, seeing all of the things that were his. Oh boy, just seeing them was a slap in the face, is what it felt like to me.

His shampoo bottle in the shower, I struggled with so much. He used to use Irish Spring soap, the liquid kind, and just having that in the shower, I wanted to use it, but I didn't want to use it. I wanted to smell it, but I didn't want it to go away. And I felt like it was ridiculous, I would judge myself that

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it was still there, but then not want to do anything with it. And it just felt like a lot of those things, there was really, in the beginning at least, no winning for me.

His dirty laundry, I wanted everything – anything that smelled like him, I wanted it to stay smelling like him because I was afraid I would forget how he smelled. And I just wanted to be near his things and keep them close to me because it seemed like if I could keep his things close to me then somehow I could keep him close to me.

So in the beginning, I didn't do anything. I just – it's funny, I don't even remember. I am pretty much sure I just walked around in a daze. And I go back and think about how I handled his stuff, some of it I remember very clearly, and some of it I don't remember at all. I attribute that to widow fog. I also don't have the best memory anyway, let's be honest. My best friend from middle school would very clearly back that up. It's just not that great.

But I don't know what I did with a lot of his stuff, you know. That's okay. I'm alright with that. But what I do remember, and I went back to my journal before I decided to record this podcast, to look and see, because I kind of remembered a journal entry about it.

For a long time, for specifically the first year, regularly the first six months, I wrote in a journal to Hugo all the time. It was very cathartic for me to be able to tell him about my day and things I was thinking and things that were happening. And that was kind of my way to communicate and get everything out. I did it on paper.

So I pulled that journal out and looked, and about three and a half months after he died was when I did the biggest amount of working on his stuff. I tackled the master closet. And I decided I wanted to do it alone. I don't remember really planning to do it. I know that my kids weren't home that day for whatever reason, and so I just decided to tackle it.

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So I chose a local charity, United Methodist Open Door, which I had never donated to before, but I had heard of them. And even though there were other organizations closer to my house, for some reason, I felt really good about giving to this particular charity because, in my area, they don't actually charge people for the clothing. They just help anyone who needs help. And I don't know how they make those decisions, but I felt good knowing that the people who got those items were probably going to be people who really needed them, and so that's what I chose.

So I remember going into the closet and the first thing I went through was his pants, his work pants, because to me, his work pants didn't have a lot of emotion attached to them. And so I could easily rationalize that others in my community could use them, so I started there. And then I went through some of his older shirts and shirts that didn't have a lot of emotional meaning to me, also his suits and his dress clothes, which some of them did have some emotion to me, but I just decided other people could benefit from them.

I could bless other people, and that felt like a more logical thing to do than to have them sitting there in my closet where no one could use them. I also did that with his shoes, but not all of them. I kept his favorite pair of running shoes. I kept his everyday work shoes. He had this one pair of Doc Martins that he would – I don't know how many of these shoes that he bought, but I'm sure he bought this same pair of shoes several times and I just wasn't ready to let go of them, so I kept those. And I kept a lot of his shirts.

He was known for short-sleeved plaid shirts – long-sleeved plaid shirts too, but a lot of short-sleeve plaid. And he got teased relentlessly about it. At work, it was always a joke that Hugo loved plaid. And the way he would do his laundry, I could tell what he had worn recently because the way that he would do it is that he would just grab – all he owned for work clothes were khaki pants and mostly plaid shirts.

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And so every day, he would go into the closet and he would grab a pair of khaki pants, like the next ones in line, and then he would grab the next shirt in line. And then he would wear them both. And then, at the end of the day, he would hang them both u, back on the hanger, but put them at the end of the line. And then he would do the same thing the next day. He would pick the next new shirt and the next pair of khaki pants. It was the simplest system. It worked very well. And then he wouldn't do his laundry until everything had been worn once.

So, a whole lot of his plaid shirts still smelled like him. I was not interested in any way in parting with those. And there were a lot of t-shirts that sentimental memories attached to them, so I wasn't really interested in getting rid of those either.

So, I left them. Some of them I still have, in fact, a lot of them I still have. And I filled up 12 bags – 12 bags of stuff – and I took them in my minivan and went down to this place. And I wanted to read from my journal actually, maybe you can relate to this. This is what I wrote.

I wrote, “Hugo, I took 12 bags of clothes today to the United Methodist Open Door. I kind of wanted the lady who took them to ask why there were so many bags so that I can tell her I lost my husband, that you had died, but that all the clothes were clean and in good shape. I guess I was looking for empathy. Maybe I wanted a pat on the back for being so strong. I'm glad I couldn't see the stuff in the bags and I'm proud of myself for doing some good, even though it was painful.”

I remember feeling so conflicted. I wanted that lady to ask so that I could tell her, but at the same time, I was terrified that I would cry. And I also didn't want to be told that she was sorry for my loss and I kind of wanted it to be private and I didn't really want her pity, but yet I wanted her to ask me about it. It was the strangest thing. It was a very interesting day, to say the least.

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So, since then, I've gone through other things in phases. And I still have a lot of stuff. I'm three years out; I still have a lot of stuff. Most of what I think other people can get good use of that I'm not emotionally attached to or that I'm not saving for my kids I have gotten rid of.

I have either donated it, especially clothes and utilitarian types of things. I still have bookshelves of books. I still have a bunch of sports equipment in my garage. I still have things in our bedroom that were very much us, not me, but us. And I don't just mean photos. I still have photos in most of the same places they were when he died.

But things like I have a sign in the bedroom that says "You and me" and I haven't moved that yet. But I notice, every once in a while, that I feel a little pull towards an item and I kind of start to contemplate it. Am I ready to part with this item? Does it make sense to me? I'm kind of feeling like maybe it's time for this item to go.

I don't rush it. And when it feels like the right time for that item to go, which I think that picture's time is coming, it's starting to feel like it's the right time. We have some letters in our bedroom that light up. They're like little metal letters and there's an H and a K and then an ampersand sign, so H & K, and those have been calling to me too. Like, maybe it's time to let go of the H. Maybe I could bless someone with that, and keep the K. And that would be okay.

So, stages, for me, worked. Doing it by myself worked. In that one day, when I had the desire to do it when it felt right to me, to just power through that one day, allow myself to cry all the way through it, that worked for me. And then, bit by bit, I just continued to release more things, some of them I will keep forever. But I'm not rushing it and I'm not judging myself based on any sort of timeline because that's just completely not useful.

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So, that's what I did. Here's what I want to offer you; quite a few things actually, I have a list. This stuff, the memories are not in the stuff. Our memories are separate from our stuff. So please don't beat yourself up by telling yourself that you have to keep stuff because the memories are attached to it. Memories live in your mind and you will have them forever.

If you're worried that you're going to forget a memory, write it down. Take a picture of the thing. You don't have to hold onto the item because you're afraid of losing the memory. Conversely, you can keep that item forever. You can keep all the things forever. You get to be the boss of the stuff, of his stuff. You get to decide.

So you don't have to rush yourself. There is no timeline required. There is no right way to do this. There is no wrong way to do this. I want you to be gentle on yourself and not force it. If you're telling yourself that you should or shouldn't keep things or you should or shouldn't adhere to a particular timeline, stop it. Don't do that to yourself. It's not fair. It's not necessary.

Maybe you are nowhere near making decisions about which items to keep and which to donate or get rid of, but you cannot stand looking at them. That's okay too. It's okay to put things out of the way until you're ready to make a decision. And you don't have to do this alone. I chose to do it alone, but that's not a sign of strength. That's not a sign of progress. That's just my preference.

I wanted to go through things alone, but you don't have to. So if it is too hard for you, ask for help. Maybe you aren't ready to get rid of anything but there are certain things that you just wish you didn't have to see every day. Have someone come over, tell them what those things are, and have them help you put them out of the way until you're ready to make decisions.

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Maybe you've got someone in your life who would love to be able to serve you in some way and has no idea how to help you. This could be a great gift to them, to be able to let them help you in that way.

Maybe you just label some things in your house with Post-It notes and have other people come to your house and take them where they need to go so that you don't actually have to be the one to take them. Maybe you decide that there are items that can be tossed but you can't bear to actually do the tossing. You can have someone else help you with that.

They could be friends. They could even be someone that you pay. There's a service called TaskRabbit, which I keep waiting for it to come to my area, but, you know, Kansas, seems like we get a lot of things last. But services like that where people will come and do household chores for you at very reasonable rates might be a great option for you.

Now, if you have already gotten rid of things, you've donated them, maybe you've sold them, maybe you've thrown them away, who knows, if you have already gotten rid of things and you are beating yourself up, you are making yourself feel guilty, you are not being kind to yourself, please stop. It is always your option to have your own back. It is always your option to decide that you did the best you could with what you knew.

Of course you did. Even if, in one fell swoop, you got rid of everything, even if you did that, you can still decide that you did the best you could with what you knew at the time. Cut yourself some slack. Show yourself some grace. There is no reason to create suffering over stuff. It's just not necessary.

Now, if you're ready, or you're contemplating the day when you will be, I want you to consider thinking about a couple of things. One, who do you want to have with you, if anyone, when you go through things? Maybe you want someone to come and support you; a friend who's just emotionally close to you, or maybe someone who you think is really good at organizing,

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or maybe you've got some muscle that you need because you've got in mind some items that are heavy. Maybe you know someone who has a truck, if you're intending to move items that are large. Who is it you might want with you? Maybe the answer is no one. And that's just for help.

Is there anyone that you would want with you because you want them to be part of the decision-making? Maybe there's someone with a vested interest, maybe his parents. And maybe you have a good enough relationship with them that you would like to do that together. So think about that. Who do you want to have with you?

And then, whenever you decide to tackle an area, I would consider four decisions, four options for decisions, maybe a fifth one, but let's go for the first four for now. You might consider using Post-It notes for this. You might use bags. You might use boxes. But if every item you hold, you decide it goes in one of four places, it will help.

And here are the four places. Number one, keep for me. These are items that are sentimental, that you love having, that you aren't ready to part with, that you want to keep for you. Number two, keep for others. So maybe these are items that you don't even know if somebody is going to want, but you suspect that they might have an opinion and so you want to help by letting them make the decision.

Maybe these are the items that you want to keep for your children. Maybe these are items that maybe your husband borrowed and they need to go back to someone else. You want to keep them, but you don't intend to keep them for yourself, so you're going to keep them for others.

The third one is dispose, things that you are actually going to get rid of, put in the trash, or in some way dispose of. And then the fourth one is things that you're going to donate. So if every item you hold, you only have four

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decisions to make – keep for me, keep for others, dispose, or donate – that will simplify things.

Now, the fifth category I would consider is not sure yet, but I encourage you to be cautious with this one because sometimes not sure yet can multiply and become the reason you don't make a decision. So if you decide to allow yourself the not sure option, then I would limit the amount of space you're willing to let the not sure take up.

And if you find that it's not sure and not sure and not sure, then maybe the timing isn't quite right. Maybe you just aren't ready yet to do this and that's okay. I don't care if you've got a house full of people who came over to help you. I don't care if you told the whole entire world that today is the day. You still get to decide what is right for you. And if you get into it and you're just not ready, it's okay to stop and come back to it when you decide the timing is right for you. There's no rush.

I also want to offer that sometimes where we get tripped up when we make these decisions about keep for me, keep for others, dispose, or donate, is that sometimes we get caught up in one particular item, collections in particular. So it's sometimes easier if you limit the amount of space for those boxes.

So, how much space are you okay with these items taking up? And then, if you've got multiples, how many of that one thing do you want to keep? Is it okay to just keep one if you've got lots of them? Are multiples really required for any particular reason? And then also, consider taking photos of items that you want to look back at because you enjoy looking at them and thinking about them and having the memory of them. You might consider taking a photo and making a book.

You could even bring in a professional photographer if you want to remember a particular thing or maybe a particular area in the house as it

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was, maybe his office. Maybe you want to remember the way he left his office. You can have someone take photos of that.

So those are some things I hope that are useful to you as you consider how you want to handle your husband's stuff, whether or not you're there yet, whether or not you're contemplating it someday, or whether you're in that spot where you just can't even imagine it. Just let it unfold as it will. Trust that when you are ready, you will know. When you are ready with the next thing, you will know. There is no rush. It doesn't mean anything about your healing. It doesn't mean anything about your relationship. It's just stuff and you can decide.

Alright, remember, I love you, and you've got this. I'll see you on the next episode. Take care, bye-bye.

Ready to start building a future you can actually look forward to? Get a free copy of Krista's "Love Your Life Again Game Plan," and learn her three step process so you can stop feeling stuck and start creating your next great chapter.

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