

My Heavy Husband

Death brings a big to-do list. Fortunately for me, I am not someone who is daunted by tasks and projects. I think my years of being a real estate agent/broker taught me to take care of the minutia and stay ahead on paperwork. My organizational skills are far above par. That being said, when Bob passed in 2021, I took on the tasks of dealing with my spouse's death like a champ. I had a notebook full of checklists made by others such as AARP, Hospice companies, and even churches. I had my own checklist to add to that. I was ready to start checking tasks off the lists. Check. Check. Check.

A bit of friendly advice. Have a journal or a notebook handy where you can write down what you do each day. Trust me, you won't remember in a day or so what you did. You'll be more of a haze than you ever imagined. I'm sure you've had brain fog before, but this will be beyond foggy. Brain dead just seems to describe it. Write down everything Who you talked to. What they said. What day did they tell you to call back. You'll be glad you did. Check. Check. Check.

I had preapproved and prepaid Bob's (and my) cremation. We discussed this when he was cognitively healthy and for that I am glad. I not only knew what Bob's wishes for his body were, I had them already in place. We had also discussed that we wanted Miramar National Cemetery to be our resting place, and I had both Bob's and my approval in my handy dandy death file. I gave myself a gold star for handling all that ahead of time. Check. Check. Check.

So, it sounds like all was just peachy, right. Organized me, just sailing along through the final steps after Bob's death. Well, I'm sure you're not surprised to hear that things were not always smooth sailing. Emotions run high. People say hurtful things. Decisions are tough. Family has advice. Friends have opinions. There are hurdles. One of the silliest

things I remember is when I was calling one of our credit card companies to remove Bob from the card, the lady had to read me a disclaimer that one removed, I wouldn't be able to add Bob back on. I told her she could skip the disclaimer as my husband was dead, and I wouldn't need to add him back to the credit card. She said she had to read it to me anyway. I honestly can't remember if I laughed or cried. But that phone call stuck with me.

Then came my melt down. I didn't see it coming. Bob's remains were ready to be picked up at the Funeral Home. They were just going to be handed to me in a basic black plastic box. I had purchased the most beautiful urn online that I would transfer them to that urn by myself at home. So here I am, standing calmly at the front desk waiting to be handed Bob's box. The young man assisting me goes out of the room and comes back with a bag containing the box. That box contains my husband's ashes. He said to me. **"Oh, he's heavy, do you want help carrying him to the car? Was he a big man?"** No words came out of my mouth. No snappy riposte. Not a sound. Well maybe a gasp of air. I just collected up my husband's remains and did a hasty retreat. Once inside the safe confines of my car, the melt down came. Tears and tears and more tears. Gasping for breath. Blowing my nose. Sitting there for what seemed like forever.

What was it in that comment that pushed all my buttons? I have thought about it so frequently and I really don't know. At first, I thought it was because he was making a joke about something so serious to me. Was this funeral home humor? Was this comment normal? Then I thought maybe it was just a statement of fact without any humor connected to it. Were Bob's remains heavier than the average Joe's? Did he seriously think I needed help in carrying the ashes? Then I thought that maybe I was just being super sensitive and there was nothing mean spirited or off tempo in the comment. Whatever it was, at the time, it was the real tipping

point for me. I went off the ledge. I felt out of control. I drove from the funeral hall to the church office of the pastor that was officiating Bob's service at the cemetery. I was shaken and still in tears. I told him that I couldn't deal with this anymore. I wasn't sure I could place Bob's ashes in the wall and leave them there. I had questions. Could I have the service but not leave the ashes for interment? Could I bring the ashes back to the cemetery later? Could I just put this all on hold until I felt up to it? What other options did I have? Could I just cancel everything, take Bob's ashes home with me and call it done? I choked out all these questions while crying. I'm not sure I even got all the words out, but the pastor knew I needed him to listen. And that's what he did. Calmly, kindly, without looking shocked or perturbed. I shared my fears, concerns, and sadness. He prayed and listened. And he heard me. He asked me to tell him what I felt would be the best thing to do. He never judged or said my thoughts were a bit whacky although I'm sure he felt I had gone off the deep end. Honestly, to verbalize my thoughts and having a listening ear was all I needed to get myself back on track. Well, that and prayer! Within a few minutes, the storm had passed. Decisions were made. There would be a lovely commitment service at the cemetery with Bob's ashes in the magnificent urn and then I would hand that urn over to be placed in its final resting place in the columbarium wall. I was breathing again and calm, cool and collected. Check. Check. Check.

I think of this day as one of the worst times in the early days following Bob's passing. I just wanted to take Bob's ashes and run. To where, I have no idea. Just run far from the reality of all that was going on. Run from making decisions. Run from handling affairs. Run from any task that reminded me of Bob's death. Run from my check list. Just hide from it all with my heavy box of ashes.

But now I look at the offhand comment about my **"heavy husband"**

in a different light. Yes, that box of remains that I was passed that day was heavy. Heavy on my heart. Maybe the funeral home staff recognized that and was telling me that he knew how heavy this was for me. Perhaps he meant my husband had a HEAVY life—not heavy as in weight but heavy as in scope and magnitude and meaning. Bob’s life was certainly not light and without significance. A substantial life. And yes, Bob was a BIG man. Big in how he lived with kindness, trustworthiness, honesty, respectfulness, faithfulness, patriotism, and love. I now remember the” “Heaviness and Bigness” of Bob when I flash back to this experience. I can only smile now when I remember that day.

I continually give advice and tell widows how to prepare themselves for handling their husband’s death and just what to do after his death. I think I’ll add a new task to the check list.

Grace, give yourself grace.

Check. Check. Check.



