

A wide-angle photograph of a beach at sunset. The sky is a gradient of soft colors, from pale blue at the top to a warm orange and yellow near the horizon. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow. The ocean is calm, with gentle waves lapping at the shore. The beach is wide and sandy, with some darker patches of wet sand reflecting the light. In the distance, a low-lying coastline with some buildings and hills is visible under the twilight sky.

STORY OF THE M50 SOUL FRIENDS







M50 Soulfriends WhatsApp Group for Widowed People

Seeds grew from online Forum Widow.ie and Facebook Group Widowed in Ireland.

- 🌻 September 2021 Retreat House Garden Workshop “Let’s Talk About Death”
- 🌻 December 2021 Soul & Nature Self-Care at Christmas Weekend Residential Retreat for Widowed People. Safe Space, Grief, Trauma Embraced, Mindfulness, Nature as healer, Group work, Leaning into pain, Facing Light.
- 🌻 Bereaved 6 Months to 19 years, had never experienced anything like it, Transformation, Empathy, Compassion, Healing painful, tears and laughter, Complicated Grief, Unspoken Trauma so more common than any of us knew.
- 🌻 January 2022 inspired by The Widows Association Charlotte Boyd and in Desperation to meet others, I knew must feel as I did, being first of family and friends, I organised a Gathering: Marlay Park Walk and Lunch two weeks in a row 11-12 Participants. So Encouraging, another baby step.
- 🌻 February 2022 Dinner 27 Participants. Decision to set up WhatsApp open to anyone in the Country with access to M50. Members joined from Dublin, Wicklow, Wexford, Athlone, Waterford, Kildare, Limerick, Cork Meath, Louth, Roscommon.
- 🌻 June 2022 Soul & Nature One Week Residential Retreat For Widowed People in Spain.

Nurturing The Group

- ☀️ Four Volunteer Admins each on our own Grief Journey. Vital as anything could happen to any of us. My experience as a Facilitator and Trained Supervisor stood to me in unforeseen ways. Each New Member is verified as Widowed through RIP.IE. A chat in advance with admin to explain how the group works. Events that are coming up.
- ☀️ Began with 12 Desperate Widowed People. Has Grown to today 146 Members, many deep friendships, A Lifeline. Some members won't do Facebook, Some won't do Widow.ie, but they will do Meeting in person and or chats on the Whatsapp Group, love to see encouraging photographs, giving HOPE. Embracing every good hour.
- ☀️ Each New Member is promised a warm welcome and a safe space to heal and create a life they would want to live. No Hierarchy any group member can organise a Gathering. No pressure to do anything, opt in opt out freely.
- ☀️ For me personally, the deep connections, friendships, healing, fun, love have been deeply rewarding. Witnessing people heal, grow in confidence and thrive is incredible. The right people generally show up, at times conflict arises and needs guidance and action to protect the group. Grievers are Vulnerable Adults.
- ☀️ I will be away with other widowed people two weekends in September, for a week in October, concerts, hikes. December 28th we have our own Christmas Gathering: Hike, Lunch, Overnight Stay 3rd year, New friends we have not yet met. I could not be more grateful to the beautiful broken hearts who have shown up.

Activities

☀ Weekends and Bank Holidays Festivities are the most difficult times for the whole group. Individual anniversaries, firsts, raw grief and learning to live with grief as our companion is easier together. Isolation and Loneliness are eased. Not a pity call, others are delighted to be invited out. Sacred Stories shared, Laughter alongside tears. Ripple effects on families, culture immeasurable. We get it, have each others backs, love to hear about each others spouses/partners. Community Friendships. Practical support through illness, parenting, Administration, accommodation etc

☀ This is our Tribe. We chat online, we encourage each other, empathise, lift each others spirits. Not wanting to live is normal, Helping each other Creating a life we do want, Grief is normalised. We learn to live again, with our grief not to get over it, we don't move on, we move with. We advocate for each other, the generous capacity for love and ability to embrace each others pain, never ceases to leave me in Awe

☀ As simple as a Park Walk, a Cup of Coffee, Lunch, Dinner, a Hike, Concerts, Comedy Shows, Yoga, Self Defence, Rowing, Boat Cruise, Craft Weekends, Weekends Away, Glendalough Hike, optional Dinner and Overnight During Christmas 12 first year 35 last year. One Week Holidays in Nerja, Soul & Nature one Week Residential Retreat in Spain.

☀ Today there are Whatsapp Groups sprouting up all over the country, Nth Side Dubs, Meath, Wexford, Cork, West, Sligo,

Members comments on their
own experiences of the
group



Ann Thank you so much for sharing. I'm so glad to hear your Javi was able to be part of the plan being put in place. It is so comforting to know at such a horrific time for you in another country away from your family and friends you got amazing care 🧡💔❤️ That is how it was for us too up to last few weeks and is very consoling. I had thought Covid was at the root but it is very clear from so many here that is not the case. When Derek was diagnosed terminal 16 months before he died. I nearly lost my mind. I searched for an anticipatory grief counsellor there was only one in Leinster and privately 120 per session. A fabulous woman as were the day Hospice and Respite care team and community team. We built up relationships over the 9 months before Derek died with them all. They made our heartbreak easier and showed us how to live as well as possible through terminal illness. I knew from experience with my fathers experience in hospice some of the possibilities. I'm really sad that I seem to be an exception rather than the norm. Our major issue was with Private Hospital Palliative Team didn't know us.. fighting to get home for over two weeks.. torture, one hour visit in 3 weeks for our daughters . Thankfully I was allowed 24 hour stay, but always under threat once HSE took over the hospital. We got six very precious days at home. The night nurse was a nightmare. That was a deep shock as I had only ever heard of angels. I wrote an 18 page report on the recommendation of the Consultant to try and show the best and the worst. So very sad for the vast majority of staff who are so committed and full of love. Our voices do matter and we do and will make a difference 🧡🙏❤️

I have been reading through all your stories and I did not realise how much of that final week of Charles' life I had buried. Charles was diagnosed with IPF in 2009 and at the time of his diagnosis was given 2 - 3 years. That in itself is a very long story but suffice to say that initially it was an off the cuff diagnosis with no real explanation or discussions about treatments (which at the time had no medical treatment other than a lung transplant). When I finally realised what was happening and did some research all patient stories talked about pneumonia type illnesses that ended life. Fast forward 5 1/5years and Charles after visiting his consultant walked into the _____ on his own and 3 days later he was on a ventilator with a million machines around him. Staff in ICU could not have been kinder or more dedicated to their patient(s) or more compassionate with us, Charles' family - until the last night before he passed away. Charles' brother and wife had come over from the UK and we were sitting vigil with Charles. The staff that night were certainly efficient but caring? Absolutely not. Given that Charles was literally dying in front of us they were awful in how they treated us. I will never forgive them for that final night and believe I had PTSD afterwards. I've never spoken / written about this before so thank you for allowing this space as a safe space to have these discussions. We can't have them with people who have not lost a spouse or partner. They simply do not understand. (((❤️)))



Annmarie M50 Soulfriends

Eileen It is so important to have a group like this. Grief is highly misunderstood and although Funerals and the initial stages of family and friends being there, it is the aftermath of loneliness and isolation that is sometimes hard to process 😞 This group supports that 'after stage' because it is continuous and the events that are organised are so important to bring people together who know the pain of losing a spouse. Only last weekend I had a beautiful Service and Lunch for my husband Bill's 1st Anniversary of his death. It was all wonderful. The aftermath now is a little like the aftermath of the funeral which is feelings of sadness, loneliness, a lot of tears, and just the pain of not having Bill in my life. This group supports those feelings. You are so welcome to use this message in your talk Eileen as you have been a wonderful lead person in teaching me that life can be OK, even when there is pain. Pain can run along side great joy and putting one step in front of the other each day is often a challenge after the great loss of a spouse. Thank you for all you contribute. Annmarie 🙏🌻🕯️🌻

13:00



Cathy M50 Soulfriends

I honestly don't think I would be in as good a place as I am, 6 months after losing Brandon, if it weren't for you and @Colette O'Neill M50 Soulfriends for adding me to these groups, and then following that, the wonderful close relationships that I've gained with the North Dublin group in particular (you know who you are ❤️) I was craving a face to face connection with people who have gone through what I am going through - and this group did exactly that. An example of kindness and empathy of this group was when a get together was arranged so I didn't get back from a trip away to an empty home, with nothing to look forward to, just sums this group up. Really special people.

16:11



Ber M50 Soulfriends

I liken my grief experience as being in a parallel world, the twilight zone, where I'm apparently functioning on the surface but drifting in a storm of turmoil in my heart and soul. It's absolutely true that my friends who are still enjoying their spouses don't really get it until unfortunately it happens to them also. I mostly keep quiet about my loss as I feel it's not my place to upset another's "normal" life. This increases my distress and sorrow but also helps me recognise how invaluable a place like Soul Friends is. It's comforting to be understood by people who unfortunately are also forced into their new normal life of grieving
I wish you all well xx

14:27



Colombe

This group has been a life saver for me. Many dark days, particularly through covid and after kieron's passing but the friendship, empathy and understanding amongst this group is the light in the darkness. I have met the most amazing beautiful people and I know that life is a gift to enjoy. I know kieron would want that for me and my family. ❤️

20:16



Caroline M50 Soulfriends

This group and especially the meet ups have been a wonderful gift for me. It's wonderful that there are like minded people who understand me and get me especially when I don't understand or get me. A lovely safe and supportive community here ❤️

19:49



Dermot M50 Soulfriends

Eileen you helped me after talking to me back when I joined first. I would be very hesitant to meet new people and you encouraged me to come and do some meet ups and I've met some amazing people and I'll never forget that your kindness is amazing 🙏

19:49



Julie M50 SoulFriend

Hi Eileen, I'm good for you to share this at the conference - the M50 soul group, especially in those darker earlier days, provides a source of comfort and support, a safe place for my grief, a sort of lifeline...a purpose and connection, and lots of laughs (grief gives you a dark humour!!). It has also gifted me with some close friendships which I cherish today. Thanks for everything Eileen & all members ❤️🙏

Edited 15:26



Jean M50 Soulfriends

Eileen, from first time I met the M50 Soul Friends (Northside Contingent 😊) I knew they understood my grief. They really know what it's like. Without them I would be still struggling to live this new life, that no one wants. I am not alone I know they are there especially when a listening ear is needed. Thanks Eileen I don't know if you really realise what a lifeline you have given us all.
Jean x

18:30





Annmarie M50 Soulfriends

Hi Bernadette...it's a very undulating and painful path of mixed emotions. I have found that some friends who have not been through the loss of a spouse don't really fully understand and there is the attitude that one has to move on. The thing is, I am moving on, there is no choice in life with that. However some days are easier than others. Today is a day I can hardly function with tears. The loneliness can be crippling. Everyone gets back to their lives with their husband's and I sometimes feel I'm in a dark space in the middle of no where 😞 It's not like that everyday but today it is. Thank you for your kindness and support. We are not alone, and all feelings are NORMAL in this difficult experience 🙏💖💔💔💔🕯️☀️

14:00



Robert M50 Soulfriends

Hospice grief personal note -

The hospice and the hospital at home team supported me to look after my wife at home. She was very unwell and in a lot of pain. The system was very poor but some of the nurses were incredible. I had been looking after her for over four years and she was stable with cancer.

She died suddenly of sepsis after the medical team pulled back on the level of support for some reason. She died in my arms at home. The hospice nurse came after she died and helped me treat her wounds and look after her one last time.

That nurse was remarkable and a human angel. Then silence. No grief support. No support of any kind. I was in an empty house with my dead wife and I was utterly exhausted.

I stopped sleeping and everything started to go wrong with me. I called the hospice. They told me they could arrange counseling but there is no point for three months! I was alone and had to come to terms with this mental tornado alone. Three months later as indicated I called the hospice looking for help. I was told there was a three month waiting list and my situation which included PTSD and flashbacks was "too complicated" I was left alone again. I must conclude that The hospice service does not understand or support grief. I was at risk from the moment she died and there was in fact no system to support me. I truly hope this will change and others do not have to go through this grief hell. This WA soul group is carefully controlled by the administration only widows are permitted and language and behaviour is moderated. This is essential. I am very vulnerable and I need to know there are no predators in the group. Having a like minded tribe is essential in my next stage where I learn how to understand and carry my grief for the rest of my life. Small hikes are a good start. This group and these people are my true support in my new journey R

21:35



B

Ber M50 Soulfriends

Lorraine M50 Soulfriends

While my own husband died suddenly of a Coronary blockage, I was a hospice nurse in a former life in the UK and when I moved back to Ireland I looked after people in their homes for their last few nights. Care was always holistic and I looked after the whole family, especially in the home ...

Lorraine I absolutely believe in and have witnessed the selflessness and beautiful care given to all in my family who have been and are in need of hospice care.

I feel from my heart that all who work in such places are very special people and are to be cherished and applauded by all of us who need their help. Thank you for giving me your insight into the gaps that sometimes take place in the aftercare for the bereaved.

I'm so sorry for your loss also and wish you well ❤️

22:36



Please could you advise that when my husband passed within 24hours after surgery I was given a hospice pamphlet. I cried at first and then was outraged that the hospital had thoughtlessly given me a hospice pamphlet and the husband had already passed. Much much later (2 years) i found out that hospice also offer assistance with bereavement and counselling. My young boys and I would have availed of this service instead of navigating this all alone. Maybe you can stress the actual functions of Hospice?

Eileen, I have another comment that may be helpful for other people in the future. It is about Hospice Care. I had great expectations, based on what I had read and heard about hospice care. Then I was dumbfounded when about 10 days before Gunnar died I was told by a Palliative Care Consultant in _____ Hospital that Gunnar didn't qualify for palliative care because he wasn't actively dying. Now I know that 'actively dying' is a specific medical term but I didn't know that then. We were never offered any other Hospice Care. And this little difference adds to the grief burden. Hope this may help, Theresa

Widowed in Ireland found me, I didn't know anything like this existed and it popped up on my feed on one of the darkest days of my life. I had recently lost my beautiful husband of almost 47 years, after a brief 6 weeks battle with colon cancer. I didn't know where to turn, I had no widowed friends and nobody could comprehend my pain, terror and fear as well as the gut wrenching pain of losing my soulmate. I was 8 months on this horrendous journey when I went on a trip to Portugal with 12 total strangers. My kids thought I was bonkers but I knew I was bonkers. I knew I had to find a way to navigate this journey of grief. At Dublin airport I met the most unlikely crew who have become the most beautiful friends and support group. They assured me I wasn't losing my mind, this is grief. Lots of them were further along on their journey and they gave me great hope and courage. But even more importantly they taught me how to laugh again and see a tiny chink of light in this black hole. I can honestly say I wouldn't have got through these past two years without the amazing people I've met through this group. It's the most important support I have, in fact it's vital to my survival. I love them all dearly. Thank God for Widowed in Ireland

General Guidelines: M50 Soul Friends

- The Admin Team will be extended as the group has got much bigger. The Admin Team Eileen Pugh Maeve Kidney Christine Treacy Julie Hanrahan have been meeting to improve our Group Interactions. This must be a Safe Space for all of us. Please remember we are all volunteers on our own Grief Journey. The success and growth of the Group has been the commitment to the following Ethos and Code of Behaviour. These guidelines will be reviewed and amended from time to time. We continue to encourage people to Post on Facebook Group Widowed In Ireland or Widow.ie.
- This group is for Widowed People only. Everyone is Verified as widowed before being admitted to the group by one of the Admins. Each member must read and agree to adhere to the guidelines in order to join and continue to be a member of this WhatsApp Group and Organised Events.
 - Widowed People are vulnerable, regardless of the length of time widowed and all members should be mindful of this and post in a respectful, kind and considerate manner.
- The purpose of the group is to provide support and to organise in person group activities. All group activities are undertaken at one's personal risk. Give and Receive Welcome. We get it.....Share laughter and consolation. Anyone can organise an activity or event. To limit the number of messages it is not necessary to respond to every message. Mute!
- To protect all of us - Any member receiving unwanted messages from another member should report this immediately to one of the Admins and block the contact sending the messages. This is a Friendship group. It is not a Dating Site. Any inappropriate behaviour brought to the admins attention may result in removal from the group. There are no double standards, Male and Female will be treated equally, and deserve equal respect.
- To make sure everyone feels safe. Bullying of any kind isn't allowed, regarding things like race, religion, culture, sexual orientation, gender or identity will not be tolerated. No Hate Speech.
 - Admins have the right to remove any member who does not adhere to the guidelines. We don't do Drama.
- Procedure for Organising an Event/Activity: The organiser of any event should post details of the event, venue, date and time, options and costs involved, if any.
- A group poll is simple and a good way to gauge interest in an activity or to decide the preferred date etc. Please answer the Group Poll then privately text the organiser to avoid influx of unnecessary texts to whole group. If the organiser is booking for the group, the money should be paid in advance to the organiser.
 - The organiser can then if needed, set up a temporary WhatsApp group for the event. All messages and information relating to the event should be put in this group. The temporary group is to be deleted after the event.
 - The main group guidelines apply to any and all temporary groups. The Admin Team.



*“Be like a Sunflower,
Face the light,
and the shadows
will stay behind you.”*

