

A new name and a new life ... I'm moving on

"Hi, this is Keely Wygonik, no Kaleski, how can I help you?"

Excuse me, I'm having a little identity crisis - a new name, a new life.

My husband David and I would have been married 20 years on June 28. He was diagnosed with Acute Myelogenous Leukemia on Labor Day weekend nearly two years ago. We were shocked, and hopeful when he went into remission on Oct. 2. But he was readmitted to the hospital for more treatment Oct. 24, and died Dec. 17, 2000. His death was unexpected. Instead of planning Christmas dinner, I planned a funeral, and buried David on Dec. 21.

On Dec. 22 my brother Mike took me to the emergency room at Henry Ford Hospital. I was devastated, having trouble breathing, and wondered how I would get through Christmas without David. Leukemia strengthened our marriage, and caused us to re-evaluate our priorities. We made plans to travel, spend more time with family and friends, and talked about how precious and fragile life is.

After being examined by a doctor who wrote prescriptions for drugs to calm my anxiety and help me sleep, I talked to a therapist. It was the beginning of my journey to discover - "who is

Keely?"

She told me that part of my life had ended, and another began. "Look at photo albums to try and remember the person you were before you got married," she suggested. "What do you like to do? Are there things you used to do that you stopped doing after you got married?" Women don't mean to, but they give up pieces of themselves after they get married. It was the truth, and it hurt.

As a child I enjoyed camping with my dad and brothers, but stopped because David wasn't a camper. When I went back to school to work on my MBA I stopped playing clarinet in the Hamtramck Community Band because it meant one more night away from home. I wanted my marriage to work because most of the marriages in my family failed. My parents are divorced, and so were their parents. I allowed a distance to grow between me and my family because David wasn't comfortable around them.

But that changed after the funeral. My family rallied around me, and it felt good. I got together with my family more now than I did when I was married. Every Friday there's a card in the mailbox waiting for me from my dad. He's always telling me I'm doing great and that he's proud of everything I have and will accomplish.

I've started to build a new life and reconnect with parts of me that got lost. I joined the Farmington Community Band, bought a touring bicycle and biked across Wisconsin with my dad, Mike and about 1,000 other people, lost over

60 pounds, replaced all my size 16 clothes with size 8, and let my short hair grow long. I was always the tall skinny girl, but I gained weight after I got married because we didn't lead an active lifestyle.

When I tell people I'm 43 they don't believe it. I've gotten carded at bars, and have begun dating. Six months ago I decided to go back to my maiden name - Kaleski. It's not easy, you have to go to court, and prove you're not changing your name for fraudulent purposes.

My hearing was Thursday, May 16. The judge asked me why I wanted to change my name, and I told her because my husband died and I wanted to go back to my maiden name. Then I cried. She wished me luck, and I left the courtroom feeling happy and sad at the same time.

David and I never had children. I graduated from Michigan State University on June 12, 1982 and walked down the aisle with him on June 28. At the time I said "oh well, I'm just trading one Polish name for another."

Kaleski is my family name, and I'm proud of it. In 1998 I met my Polish relatives and visited Sulejow, the village where my grandpa was born. My relatives were happy to see me, and we all went to church to thank God for bringing us together. I felt a strong sense of belonging, generations of Kaleskis grew up in that village and still live there today. I used to think there was something odd about my family because everyone, even my dad's siblings, and my little brother, got divorced.

Mom's an only child. Now I know better. I spent my first New Year's Day alone with my little brother and his second wife. He made meatloaf for dinner, and we watched a really dumb movie with his step children. It was one of the nicest New Year's Days I can remember. On the way home I said, "thank-you God for giving me my family back."

I love my in-laws, but as I began reconnecting with my family, and "Keely," I felt less of an affiliation to the Wygonik family. I wanted to be a Kaleski again, part of the clan.

Change is part of life, you can't stop it any more than you can stop seasons from changing. But you should never change yourself to make someone else happy. It was an important lesson to learn.

I've embraced change, and am open to new experiences. On June 28 I'll be on my bicycle with 700 people, somewhere between Stevensville and Luna Pier. It's the first vacation I've ever taken alone. I don't know anyone who's going on this trip, but am sure I'll have lots of new friends when the bus drops us off in Ann Arbor on June 29.

David's gone, but not forgotten, he'll always be a part of me. Sometimes I feel his presence, and it's always peaceful and loving. I'm not afraid of death or life anymore. I held David when he died, and know that death is cold and still. Life is warm and full of possibilities, something to enjoy and cherish.

Keely Kaleski is assistant managing editor of features for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. She can be reached at kaleski@oe.hometown.net or call (734) 653-2105.



KEELY KALESKI

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RELIGION CALENDAR

If you want to submit an item for the religion calendar fax it to (734) 591-7279 or write: Religion Calendar, Observer Newspaper, 36251 Schoolcraft Road, Livonia, MI 48150. The deadline for an announcement to appear in the Thursday edition is noon Monday.

NARDIN 75TH
Nardin Park United Methodist Church in Farmington Hills will celebrate its 75th anniversary at 10 a.m. Sunday, June 2. The service will be followed by an all-church picnic.

NARDIN KIDS VACATION CHURCH
Nardin Park United Methodist Church in Farmington Hills will hold its annual Kids at the Park Vacation Church School featuring God's Great Gallery Monday-Friday, June 24-28 at the church. Camp runs 9:30 a.m. to noon for kids in kindergarten through fifth

grade. Registration forms are available at the church office and should be obtained by Saturday, June 15.

C'VILLE CHORUS SHOW
Clarencville United Methodist Church, in Livonia, will host the performance of The Plymouth Community Chorus at 8 p.m. Friday, June 7. Tickets are available in advance or at the door. The suggested donation is \$5. The church is at 20300 Middlebelt. Call (248) 474-3444.

C'VILLE NEW SCHEDULE
Clarencville United Methodist Church will make the following schedule change effective Sunday, June 2:
Traditional Worship Service - 8:45 a.m.; Sunday School for all ages - 10 a.m.; Casual Service for "Late Risers" - 11:15 a.m. (The casual service will be replaced by a contemporary worship service in the fall)

ON-GOING

WIDOW/WIDOWER SUPPORT

New Hope Center for Grief Support, a Christian-based bereavement outreach center, offers support for widows and widowers with children on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month. The group meets at 7 p.m., at St. Kenneth's Parish office, 14951 Haggerty, Plymouth. New Hope for Kids meets at the same time and place and is aimed at children, age 4-11. (248) 348-0115.

ENGAGEMENT

BOLLA-HOUCHINS
Mr. and Mrs. David Bolla of West Bloomfield announce the engagement of their daughter Jana Lynn to Robert Lloyd Houchins, son of Betty Jo Houchins of Novi and Rodney Houchins of Columbia, Tenn.

The bride-to-be is a graduate of Harrison High School and Michigan State University. She is currently employed as an auditor for Citimortgage, Inc. in Farmington Hills.

Her fiancé is also a graduate of Harrison High School and attended Oakland Community College. He is currently employed as a hardware technician for Equus Computer Systems in Plymouth. He is also co-owner of Studio 7 Productions, a recording studio in downtown



Farmington. An October wedding is planned at First United Methodist Church in Farmington followed by a reception at Links of

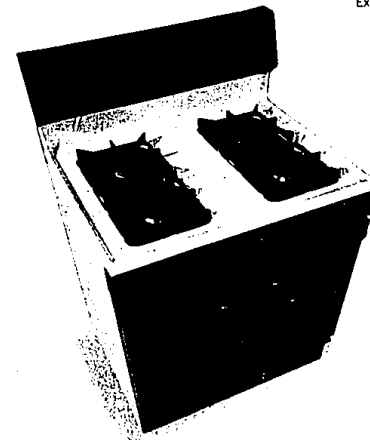
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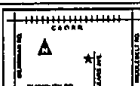
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