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Widowed in Service

Finding the answer to 'Where do I go from here?'

By Lorraine McClish
staff writer

A 36-year-old Farmington Hills woman who was widowed three years ago and is now searching for a new way of life for herself and her 11-year-old son says her situation is not unique.

"I thought widows were all little old gray haired ladies, but it just isn't so," said Lynda Clark. "The average age of a widow in the Detroit area today is 52 and the projection is that three out of every four women married now will one day be a widow." Before the death of her husband, she described herself as "a neat little tidy suburban housewife with everything going great and my head in the sand."

Now she is an active participant in WISER, which takes its name from the words Widowed in Service, a widow-helping-widow support network based at Schoolcraft College's Women's Resource Center.

She volunteers her time to help others get answers to questions she once sought for herself.

Where do I go from here?
How do I fit in?
Is it normal for me to want to beat the floor?

Is it normal for me to burst into tears at the most unexpected times?
Am I going crazy?

"IT WASN'T long after the funeral, after the calls, the food and the flowers that I knew I was going to have to get some kind of help," Clark said.

"I couldn't get it from my mother. She was getting ready to celebrate her 38th (wedding anniversary at the time and had no idea of what I was going through.

"That's the beautiful thing about WISER. These people were building up after a crisis. They had gone through or were going through all the hostility and anger connected with the why-me feel-

ings I was feeling," she said.

It was a while before Clark found WISER, after a round of attending like groups in the area, singles clubs, and considering psychiatric help.

"It was just what I needed," she said. She stresses that WISER is not a social group, but rather a self-help group to help the newly widowed pick up the pieces.

"They didn't come to me. I went to them. And this is important," she said.

"You have to take the first step yourself. You have to do your own building. Some may need personal counseling if they aren't moving along, but of about the 30 or so organizations in the Detroit area, and I know them all, I finally found what was best for me. And it is free.

"I found widows there who were making satisfactory adjustments in their lives and I knew I could do it too."

CLARK SAYS she is now experiencing "the peaks and the valleys that come with new growth."

The peaks come with a new-found realization that she is responsible and she is in control. They come with the realization that she has unlimited options in her life.

"My peaks come with a regeneration of the feeling that I am a person. I'm not the second half of a couple, but a person on my own able to pick and choose where I want to go.

"I am gaining a knowledge of my own self worth and this personal growth is the most important thing to me now," she said.

The valleys come when she sees a family walk into church together, a family dining together in a restaurant, or when she sees a father and son doing something so commonplace as walking into a theater together," she said.

Even when she is talking with other widows in her work with WISER,



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Widowed three years ago, Lynda Clark is now a trained peer counselor helping recently bereaved widows work through their feelings of loss. Clark is a member of WISER which offers weekly support

groups and monthly educational programs to help widows adjust to a new way of life.

"Sometimes that will bring back a flood of my own memories. But the more things I do on my own now the stronger I become."

She says she has a few goals in mind since she started on her course of taking charge of her own life, but for now she is just letting things happen.

"WISER is a starting place," she said. "I'm still learning, I'm not making any hard and fast decisions right now, because life is changing too quickly and spasmodically for me.

"I'm still making my entry back into

the world as a single person. I think I know what I want, but tomorrow I might find something else, something better."

WISER MEETINGS begin at 8 p.m. on the second Tuesday of each month in Room B-200, Liberal Arts Building, on the Schoolcraft College campus, 18600 Haggerty Road.

For the newcomer, Clark emphasized, "Remember, it's a starting place. Nobody gives advice. Nobody tells you what to do or how to live your life. There are no guidelines.

"Our goal is to help the woman in crisis know that it really is worth the effort to start from scratch, but we're not saviors or rescuers.

"We don't take responsibility for somebody else's actions. We're there for support and to point to the options and to let the newly widowed know that somebody cares."

Through attending the meetings Clark is one of the volunteers who took the WISER training to become a one-to-one contact person for the widow that has a need to talk to someone who

has gone through the many stages of the grief process she herself is suffering.

"We're a revolving group. Our strength lies in the fact that we take what we need from the group, then move on," Clark said.

"I know that what I've learned couldn't be gotten from any book. I learned it from just living it, with the help of the group."

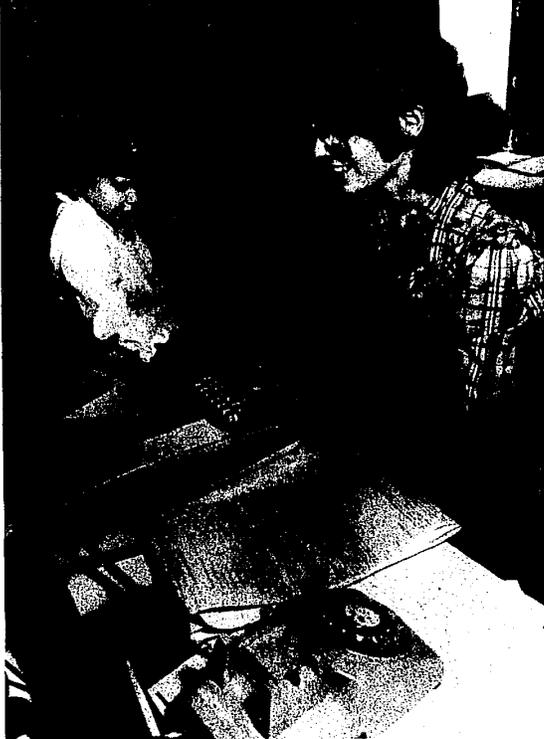
Inquiries will be taken by volunteers who answer the WISER telephone, 591-6400, Ext. 430.



ART EMANUELE/staff photographer

Small Katie Staniszewski gets an early introduction to the world of computers while her mother programs at home for Chrysler Corp. The 8-month-old's mother

grew up in Farmington as Barb Miller, graduated from Farmington High School and got her degree from Lawrence Institute of Technology.



Theresa Radke, 16 months, watches her mother, Linda Pate of Plymouth, work on a program for the Ford Motor Co. Termi-

nals and telephones are home equipment for Pate and Staniszewski.

Home programming:
'the best of both worlds'

By Sherry Kahan
staff writer

When it came to choosing between career and mothering, Barb Staniszewski of Livonia decided quickly in favor of a tiny bit of humanity named Katie. She left her job as engineer at Chrysler Corp.

Linda Pate of Plymouth refused to miss her Theresa's early years, so she resigned from the Ford Motor Company, where she worked as a supervising computer programmer.

Having made the decisions, both young mothers saw little in their im-

mediate futures beyond diapers, baby talk, baby smiles and housework.

But for both there were surprise developments. Their former bosses had separate but similar creative new ideas. Work at home, each suggested.

Today these women have what Staniszewski calls "the best of both worlds." They stay at home, but continue to work for the two auto companies.

Home computers and telephones link them to their former jobs. They now spend 10-15 hours a week at the work they enjoy without leaving the children they love.

THEIR SITUATIONS are unusual, and as yet don't signal a trend.

"We had to go quite far up to arrange this," said M.A. Bowen, manager of the cooling systems department and Staniszewski's boss. "I'm not sure how high, but it was above the vice-president level. This was a special case, not a matter of routine."

And Dan Lenardon, unit supervisor of the engineering computer system at Ford, noted that "Linda had some unique experiences in her employment here."

"The kind of job she is doing for us now relates to her writing skills, and

could fit in an off-site situation. Many other things wouldn't fit because they require meeting with people here."

The computer in Pate's home is connected with the Ford engineering center in Dearborn, where she was employed for nine years. Right now she is writing a software development guide for programmers.

She spends Tuesday and Thursday mornings at the computer, leaving Theresa with a neighbor. When she works on Wednesday evenings, her husband Richard Radtke takes over. Occasionally she goes to Dearborn to talk about her work.

Most of Staniszewski's computer work relates to wind tunnel testing. She does it mostly when Katie naps or in the evenings, when husband Gary, an engineer with Kerr Manufacturing Company in Romulus, is delighted to get a chance to play with his daughter.

THERE ARE MANY reasons why women today are choosing to stay home. One of them is reflected in a story making the rounds. It's about a woman who returned to work soon after the birth of her baby. A few months later she resigned. The reason? "My baby cried when the babysitter went

home at night," she said.

Katie Staniszewski and Theresa Radtke will have no doubt about the identity of their real mother. However, the two mothers give various reasons for exchanging the printout for the perambulator.

"My main reason for staying at home was wanting to breastfeed," said Pate. She and her husband have lived in Plymouth four years.

"I did it for 11 months. But I'm glad to stay at home. I can more efficiently