

A new life

My second chance at love

When Linsay Given-Black, 50, lost her husband, she was in despair...

This time last year, I would never have believed I could be happy, in love and looking forward to Christmas. But I've been lucky enough to meet a wonderful man who came into my life just when I needed him most. And this Christmas, our first together, he's giving me the most amazing gift – a second chance at love.

Four years ago in August 2006, my world fell apart when my first husband, Douglas, 47, died of liver cancer, leaving me to bring up our four-year-old daughter, Chloe, alone. He was a busy lawyer and like many men, put off going to the doctor when he started to feel unwell. By the time the cancer was detected, it was

too late. We were told it was terminal and he died just a year later.

Losing your soulmate throws your world out of order and I wondered how I'd ever get through, let alone learn to love another man.

Looking back, the initial weeks without Douglas are still a blur. Some days I could barely get out of bed. But I had to stay strong for our little girl. I

explained to Chloe that Daddy had gone to heaven and would always be looking down on us.

But it was horrendous. For the first six months I was on autopilot, surviving on two hours' sleep a night and grateful that I managed to get through each day.

Some people talk about 'moving on' after you lose your partner, but you never really do. You just learn to cope with your grief better. For me, it was counselling that helped me start grieving for Douglas. Having someone to

talk to and who'd listen was such a great help.

As the years passed without Douglas, I focused on caring for Chloe and making sure she felt safe and loved.

TOUGH TIMES

Every year at Christmas, I kept up the little traditions Douglas and I had always shared with Chloe, even though it almost broke my heart. Together we'd leave out a mince pie and a glass of sherry for Santa and a carrot for his reindeer. Then I'd creep in late at night while she was sleeping and fill up her stocking at the end of her bed. Each year, I also bought Chloe a brand-new Christmas

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'For the first time in years, I'm looking to the future'

decoration, just like Douglas and I always had.

Although she understands now that her daddy isn't here any more, she stills puts a present under the tree for him each year and I tell her Santa makes sure to deliver it to him especially.

As time passed, I learnt how to get through the lonely nights and days without Douglas as best I could. I never for a moment considered trying to meet another man. But after three years without Douglas, I

felt ready to consider meeting someone else. I just thought it would be nice to have some male companionship, someone to talk to and go out for long walks with.

So last October I signed up to a dating website. Just two months later, I met Martin. He was the same age as me and worked as a university lecturer about an hour's drive from my hometown of Edinburgh. We clicked immediately.

Martin explained that his wife Maureen had died in July



NEW FAMILY
Linsay with daughter, Chloe, and new husband Martin



HAPPY ENDING
Linsay and Martin have found new love after tragedy

2008 at the age of 47 – the same age that Douglas was when he died.

It was comforting to know we'd been through the same experience. We both knew what it was like to love other people – people we hadn't been parted from through choice – yet be falling in love with each other at the same time. And we both knew our partners would have wanted us to be happy.

NEW JOY

It was when I first saw Martin with Chloe, who was about to turn eight, that I knew he was the one. Chloe loved spending time with him and they got on so well. Within a couple of weeks, I'd told Martin that I loved him. He told me he felt the same way about me too.

When Martin took me away to a beautiful hotel in the Highlands for Valentine's weekend last year and proposed, I said yes straight away. We'd only known each other a couple of months but I knew it was right and we both felt ready for the next step.

Just a few months ago, in October, we got married in front

of 50 of our closest friends and family. It was a wonderful day, so full of promise and joy. All Douglas' family were there, as were Maureen's, which made me very happy.

Although Martin is my family now, we still talk about Douglas and Maureen and we'll light a candle every year on the anniversaries of their deaths. And, of course, we have pictures of Douglas dotted around the house – I never want Chloe to forget her dad. Martin and his wife were unable to have children and he's become the most wonderful stepdad to her. Chloe knows Martin will never replace her dad but having him in her life has given her lots of love and happiness, which she deserves above everything else.

Meeting Martin has changed my life. For the first time in years I'm actually looking forward to the year ahead. This Christmas will be the first we spend together as a family. And we can't wait to get up early, open our presents with Chloe around the tree and drink a glass of champagne to celebrate our wonderful new life together.



LOVING MEMORIES
Linsay and her former husband, Douglas, on their wedding day