

“Planet Widow” Author Speaks at Moraga Library

By Jennifer Wake

Most people don't expect tragedy to strike them, but when it does, Lafayette resident Gloria Lenhart says it's best to be prepared. After her husband died suddenly of a heart attack nine years ago, Lenhart – then at age 42 – was faced with the terror of the unknown as well as the loose ends of wills, insurance and custody that had been put off for another day.

In her book, “Planet Widow” (Seal Press, 2006), Lenhart describes not only the emotional struggles she and her family faced, but the bureaucracy and paperwork surrounding her husband's death, and the difficulties of dealing with grief in our society. She will be discussing her book, her thoughts on widowhood, and how others can write their own story on Tuesday, July 31 at 7 p.m. at the Moraga Library.

“There are lots of things I've learned about grief, about being a widow,” Lenhart writes.

“Planet Widow” follows the days and months after her husband Nick's death, the roller coaster of emotion that ensued and the turmoil that was created. Unlike a typical memoir, Lenhart allows the reader to follow her through this difficult time without seeming pitiful, offering insight into the outlandish behavior of a culture no longer accustomed to death.

Far from maudlin, Lenhart's book is a poignant, frank story filled with complex, sometimes quirky, characters. It is an enjoyable read containing pithy dialogue that keeps the pages turning. In addition to a well-written story, however, the book offers valuable suggestions for all of us.

Lenhart encapsulates what she learned with these six thoughts: “Funerals are important; everyone will want you to get over it fast (you won't); grief is not a road (it's a roller coaster); some people can't deal with death (at all); life insurance allows you time to grieve (so make sure you have enough); and finally, get your legal stuff in order (no excuses, do it now).”

Unlike many of us, when death happens, Lenhart now knows what to do.

“I watched the people around us shrink away from the proximity of death, afraid of facing the possibility of their own mortality,” Lenhart says in her book. “For me and my sons, death is not scary. It's not unfamiliar. It's not extraordinary. It's just something that happens. And it is something that we know how to help someone get through.”

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