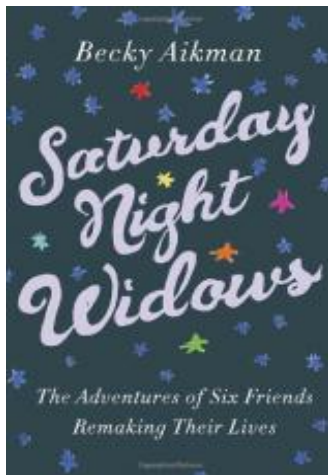


# Saturday Night Widows: The Adventures of Six Friends Remaking Their Lives

by Becky Aikman

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## About the Book

In her 40s --- a widow, too young, too modern to accept the role --- Becky Aikman struggled to make sense of her place in an altered world. In this transcendent and infectiously wise memoir, she explores surprising new discoveries about how people experience grief and transcend loss and, following her own remarriage, forms a group with five other young widows to test these unconventional ideas. Together, these friends summon the humor, resilience, and striving spirit essential for anyone overcoming adversity.

Meet the Saturday Night Widows: ringleader Becky, an unsentimental journalist who lost her husband to cancer; Tara, a polished mother of two, whose husband died in the throes of alcoholism after she filed for divorce; Denise, a widow of just five months, now struggling to get by; Marcia, a hard-driving corporate lawyer; Dawn, an alluring self-made entrepreneur whose husband was killed in a sporting accident, leaving two small children behind; and Lesley, a housewife who returned home one day to find that her husband had committed suicide.

The women meet once a month, and over the course of a year, they strike out on ever more far-flung adventures, learning to live past the worst thing they thought could happen. They share emotional peaks and valleys --- dating, parenting, moving, finding meaningful work, and reinventing themselves --- while turning traditional thinking about loss and recovery upside down. Through it all runs the story of Aikman's own journey through grief and her love affair with a man who tempts her to marry again. In a transporting story of what friends can achieve when they hold each other up, SATURDAY NIGHT WIDOWS is a rare book that will make you laugh, think, and remind yourself that despite the utter unpredictability and occasional tragedy of life, it is also precious, fragile, and often more joyous than we recognize.

## Discussion Guide

1. When Becky first convenes her group of 'renegade widows,' she worries that they won't feel a bond because their

personalities are so different. Which is more important in forging friendships, similar personalities or shared experiences?

**2.** Becky and the other Saturday Night Widows hold preconceptions about how they would live after losing their husbands. How do they reconsider those assumptions over the course of the story?

**3.** How do you think you would proceed if you lost someone close to you? Did your own views change as the story progressed?

**4.** Becky's visit to psychological researchers introduces her to the idea that there can be more to grief than sadness and pain. Grief can be a process of finding comfort, she is told. "The process can even bring new insight and new joy." Are these ideas illustrated in Becky's journey, and in the journeys of the others in her group?

**5.** SATURDAY NIGHT WIDOWS is a true story. What storytelling techniques does Becky use to integrate the narrative of the women's lives and the material she learned from outside research?

**6.** "I had been half of a whole," Becky says of her marriage, "and now, without that other half, I wasn't certain what was left." She and the others question their identities now that they are alone. To what extent are we defined by the people we know and love? How would we be different without them?

**7.** The people the group encounters during the course of the story hold varying views about how widows think, act, and feel. An official from the museum suggests that the group would want to view art that depicts death and dying, while the guide Becky hires presents beautiful images like lotus blossoms because they bloom in the mud. How do you think the various characters formed their attitudes?

**8.** The group tries to reach some "highly invalid and unscientific conclusions" about how widows and widowers differ by inviting a group of men for an evening. What can the men and women learn from each other?

**9.** The women in the group often talk about feeling guilty when they make choices to move ahead in their lives. "Should you feel liberated?" Tara asks the group. "That you got a second chance? Or should you feel guilty for the sense of liberation you feel?" What is the role of guilt in their progress? Does guilt serve a purpose in recovery from loss, or is it merely destructive, inhibiting any impulse toward growth or pleasure?

**10.** Becky's dream, in which she is choking on a beautiful bee and then sees her departed husband, makes her aware of the value of memory, both painful and joyful. What is the value of finding this balance after someone has died?

**11.** Widowhood reminds Becky of adolescence, "a time of uncertainty, of transformation, of trying on new identities." Is this concept frightening? Does it introduce enticing possibilities?

**12.** The women soon learn that complications --- children, careers, habits --- make it harder to reinvent themselves at midlife. How do these complications alter the course of each woman's transformation?

13. "This has made me totally fearless," says Lesley. "Because the worst thing that could happen has already happened." Does an awareness of mortality affect the attitudes and decisions of the women in the group?

14. Dawn would like to remarry. "I want my life to be settled!" she says. "No more uncertainty!" Tara resists marriage, saying, "I'm trying to appreciate the lack of knowing." This tension between seeking certainty and embracing the unknown is present for all the women, not only in matters of love. Which way would you lean?

15. When Becky meets a new man, she explains that she is afraid of involvement. "Maybe I am a coward," she tells him. "But cowards are safe." How does falling in love differ for someone experiencing it for the first time versus someone suffering from a devastating loss, whether through death or a broken relationship?

16. Becky takes two trips to places she has never visited before --- one on her own, on the water to the Galapagos Islands, and one with the group, through a desert. What contributions do new experiences, including travel, make to her recovery?

17. Would you treat someone who has lost a spouse differently after reading SATURDAY NIGHT WIDOWS?

18. The book begins with a sad time in the characters' lives. By the end, how did it make you feel?

## Author Bio

Becky Aikman is the author of three books of narrative nonfiction: her memoir, SATURDAY NIGHT WIDOWS; OFF THE CLIFF: How the Making of *Thelma & Louise* Drove Hollywood to the Edge; and SPITFIRES: The American Women Who Flew in the Face of Danger During World War II. A former journalist at *Newsday*, Aikman has written for the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and other publications. She lives in New York.

## Critical Praise

### A Pulpwood Queen Book Club Selection of 2013

"[Aikman's] hard-earned understanding, piercing humor and superb writing skill make this book about grief and recovery an unexpected delight, rich with wisdom and laughter."

— *Washington Post*

"[An] engaging, life-affirming story."

— *San Francisco Chronicle*

"Their stories of loss are touching, and the wisdom they gain is a testament to the durability of the human spirit."

— *People*

"[Aikman] and five other young widows reenter the world of the living, laughing, and ? *gulp* ? dating, all the while

sharing frank talk, insight, and hope from the trenches."

? ***Good Housekeeping***

?Aikman's memoir is an EAT, PRAY, LOVE for widows, and her voice is as companionable as Elizabeth Gilbert's. SATURDAY NIGHT WIDOWS should become required reading at support groups everywhere.?

? ***Newsday***

?Often desperate, sometimes feisty, partly hilarious, and warm as a fleecy blanket, SATURDAY NIGHT WIDOWS is a surprisingly feel-good, girl-bonding, which-role-will-Meryl-Streep-play-in-the-movie kind of a book. And I loved it?.It's sad, it's happy, and, in fact, once you start SATURDAY NIGHT WIDOWS, you won't be able to part with it.?

? **Terri Schlichenmeyer, *Independent News***

?Compelling?.Along with the stories of six remarkably resilient and admirable women (ranging from an entrepreneur to a housewife), the book offers an arresting analysis of the literature of grief?.A compassionate, inspirational and deeply personal read, SATURDAY NIGHT WIDOWS is relevant for a wider audience than the grieving. This book is for anyone who has faced adversity but refuses to let it define them.?

? ***BookPage***

?What should be depressing ? six real-life young(ish) widows ? is instead joyous and life-affirming without losing its edge.?

? ***Family Circle, Momster blog***

?SATURDAY NIGHT WIDOWS is a brilliant read that will be enlightening whether you have experienced the loss of a loved one, or know someone who has. It is brave, it's funny, it's informative and it's real life at its best and at its worst.?

? ***Times Record News***

?A story of loss and resilience, of sadness and starting over, of tragedy and endurance and of bravely seeking out the sunlight despite the gathering clouds.?

? ***Winnipeg Free Press***

?Throughout her tragic tale, the widows speak through Becky, rendering deep and sincere accounts?.Readers learn what it means to be left behind and how one must answer the questions that remain?.More than anything, Becky leaves readers with the best remedy for overcoming loss ? move forward, living and loving without trepidation.?

? ***The Weekender***

?A spirited, insightful memoir about a group of young widows who gather together once a month to cheer each other on and have fun.?

? ***Shelf Awareness***

?Aikman tells this life-affirming tale with compassion and candor.?

? ***Booklist (starred review)***

Engaging and entertaining but not maudlin, Aikman shows a side of life that many readers probably don't think about. A compassionate narrative about how one group of friends helped each other thrive after the deaths of their spouses.

? *Kirkus Reviews*

Can six disparate women who've just suffered unimaginable and premature loss find wit, irony, strength, and growth with each other? Becky Aikman's SATURDAY NIGHT WIDOWS proves it in a laugh-inducing, page-turning way. It's like THE HELP. Female bonding ? a subject we *thought* we knew ? gets a delicious, heartwarming overhaul, and you, the reader, didn't see it coming. Lucky you!?

? **Sheila Weller, author of the *New York Times* bestseller GIRLS LIKE US**

It's the spirit of a book that makes you love it. And the spirit here, Becky Aikman's spirit, is tough, honest, funny, smart, and generous to the world ? all the equipment one needs when dealing with grief. One would not wish to qualify for the widows' club, but reading about it is heartening.

? **Roger Rosenblatt, author of KAYAK MORNING AND MAKING TOAST**

For anyone who has ever loved, lost, and relied on the companionship of women, SATURDAY NIGHT WIDOWS is a gem of a read that will affirm the power of friendship, new beginnings, and the ability of the human spirit to survive and thrive. I cheered on each of these women as they faced their own darkest moments and looked to the power of sisterhood and shared experience to remake their futures.

? **Lee Woodruff, author of THOSE WE LOVE MOST and IN AN INSTANT**

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