



Back in September 1986, Patricia Lorentzen was living the life she'd always pictured: married for 18 years, working as a teacher's aide, living in a nice home, raising two sons and a daughter with her husband. One phone call changed everything. Her husband called to say that he "needed a life of his own." He would not tell Patricia where he was. He never came home again.

Pain, anger, despair, denial, embarrassment, fear — Patricia experienced all of these devastating emotions. But she didn't lose hope. She'd heard of a new organization that had just formed called Project Self-Sufficiency, and she reached out for help. She began attending seminars on resume writing and finances. She learned about different assistance programs available to help her get back on her feet. There were bags of food at Thanksgiving and toys for the children at Christmas. Patricia's case manager helped her to enroll at Sussex County Community College and by 1995 she had earned a Bachelor's degree from Thomas Edison State College.

There were many ups and downs along Patricia's path to self-sufficiency. She changed jobs several times, balanced school and work, struggled financially, and faced challenges with her children. She remarried and thought her life was back on track for good. But after only a year of marriage, her husband died in an accident. Patricia was a single mother once again, yet this time she felt stronger and more prepared.

Through the connections she had made pursuing her education and career, Patricia was offered the position of Sussex County's Deputy Surrogate. She accepted, and has flourished in that position for 17 years.

Fifteen years ago, Patricia met and married her husband Roy, with whom she shares five children and six grandchildren. She has found in him a true partner in a wonderful life. They are active in many local organizations and take great joy in helping others. As Patricia says, "Life happens. We have no way of knowing what lies ahead. But we can live and learn and love each day." She is proud to share her personal mantra with others: "Get help when you need it and give help when you can!"

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