

How to Talk to a Widower

Jonathan Tropper

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Jonathan Tropper has practically defined the sardonic, lonely voice of a generation of aging adolescents. Focusing on late-20, early-30-something characters in books like *Plan B* (2000), *The Book of Joe* (2004) and *Everything Changes* (2005)—all of which have been optioned for film—he demonstrated his talent for portraying the petrifying confusion of delayed adulthood. *How to Talk to a Widower* is no exception. The book tells the story of Doug Parker, a 30-something writer who lucked into marriage with the elegant older divorcee Hailey, only to lose her to a plane crash after just three years of marriage. To Doug's chagrin, not only has he lost a wife, he's gained a troubled adolescent son. The heart of the book is not the drama of bereavement, but rather watching Doug struggle simultaneously with grief, parenthood and encroaching adulthood. "I'm fascinated with the way that, as adults, we can still be so trapped in the behaviors and relationships we established when we were younger," says the author. "All of my stories deal with people who seem to have made the leap into adulthood only to realize that they still have some growing and changing to do in order to lead fulfilling lives. And watching an adult try to make those changes is ever so much more interesting than watching kids do it." Tropper, a father of three who teaches creative writing at Manhattanville College in Westchester County, N.Y., says that he drew on his own continuously bewildering experiences with fatherhood (even after eight years) to shape Doug's character. "I don't handle my finances well, I'm not terribly disciplined when it comes to parenting, I'm not organized and most of the time I still think I'm 19 years old," he says. "I still have trouble thinking of myself as a legitimate father."

