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## Laying the Foundation: Coping Successfully with Divorce

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## The Aftermath of Marriage

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Barbara, an attractive 40-year-old brunette, sat mesmerized at a divorce workshop. It was the first time she had heard about the feelings and problems that people encounter as they go through divorce. “My God,” she blurted out, “you’re describing my life for the past five months. I didn’t know everyone felt like that.” There was an immediate restlessness in the room—some nervous laughter, some mumbled comments, one or two heads nodding. “God,” Barbara’s voice seemed to boom, “what a relief, it’s not just me!”

Over the past two decades, there has been an explosion of studies on divorce and its aftermath, providing us access to the experience of thousands who have weathered the rupture of their marriages and families. Thanks to those who have gone before you, the course of divorce is no longer unmapped, and you can be prepared for what lies ahead. If you understand the psychological process of divorce and know what to expect, the upcoming months and years will be considerably less stressful.

This book is more than a road map of the coming years. It is a survival guide, replete with the information and coping tools you need to successfully navigate the years ahead and to successfully guide your children through them. Armed with a road map and a repertoire of good coping skills, you can more easily clear the hurdles of divorce and avoid many of the difficulties that complicate the lives of so many divorcing couples and their children. Your divorce will likely remain a significant event in your life, but it does not have to remain the dominant one.

## THE IMPACT OF SEPARATION AND DIVORCE

In the 1970s, two northern California researchers, Judith Wallerstein and Joan Kelly, began an intensive year-long study of divorcing couples and their children. The researchers wished to learn how families are affected by divorce and how they resolve the disruptions to their lives. Wallerstein and Kelly had fully expected families to have recovered by the end of the study, since parents would have been separated 18 months by that time. But the researchers had been mistaken: The majority of adults and children had not yet resolved their divorce-generated difficulties. Wallerstein and Kelly were stunned to find that most families were still in crisis and had not gotten their lives back together yet. More disturbing, a large number of children were doing worse rather than better.

Were the findings of this groundbreaking study a fluke? Since that time, many other studies have been published that confirm that adjustment to divorce is neither quick nor easy. On the average, people need two years before they regain their equilibrium. They usually need additional time to become emotionally detached from an ex-spouse and to establish a stable and satisfying new lifestyle.

You are probably wondering why divorce adjustment should take so long. After all, divorce is the solution to so many problems, isn't it? It may be easy to see why divorce is difficult for someone who had fought against it or for someone whose partner suddenly walked out. But is divorce also difficult for the person who leaves? Is it also difficult for couples who bitterly argue for years and finally call it quits? Usually, yes. It appears that relatively few people escape the effects of divorce easily. In general, divorce is difficult for both the "leaver" and the "left," for men and for women, for those who have bickered and fought and for those who have lived in indifferent silence, for those married 25 years and for those married 5 years (although breakups of short-lived marriages tend to be less distressing). Of course, divorce is more difficult for some people than for others. For some the adjustment period is shorter, for some longer. Two years is only an average.

Once you learn more about divorce, you will see why it has such an impact on each member of the family and why such a long adjustment period is commonly needed. Undoubtedly, the best way to understand the nature of divorce is to look at the experiences that most people encounter.

## Loss and Turbulent Emotions

Divorcing men and women are often astounded by the extent of their losses. The marriage that had been an important part of life at one time is now gone. So is a lifestyle, future plans, a chunk of one's identity, and perhaps a home, financial security, free access to children, and shared friendships. The list goes on. For many, the massive losses create a feeling of rootlessness—a need to feel connected. For many, the feelings of loss and unconnectedness are entangled with a gnawing sense of failure and dwindling feelings of self-worth.

Lives are further complicated by turbulent and conflicting emotions. Men and women who are filled with bitterness, resentment, and anger may suddenly feel stunned by surges of love and yearning for their former partners. Their predominant feelings of self-pity, sadness, and depression are suddenly displaced by intoxicating feelings of euphoria, well-being, and freedom. Then, as suddenly as it appeared, the euphoria is snatched away. The pendulum swings back and forth, leading people to feel as if they were on a tiny raft being tossed around in stormy seas or as if they were on an emotional roller coaster.

## The Upheavals

We tend to think of divorce as a single event in people's lives. Nothing could be further from the truth. Separation and divorce set in motion a chain of events that spans an extended period of time. Each link in the chain represents upheaval and change, and each change must be dealt with—changes in routine, finances, personal and social lives, family life, identity, and expectations and life goals. Studies suggest that divorce requires more readjustment and reorganization than any other stressful life event in our society, except for the death of a spouse.

Few divorcing men and women are prepared for the extent to which their lives are disrupted. Of course, most know there will be major changes, but they usually underestimate them. They also do not anticipate how unsettling and disorienting the changes in daily routines and comfortably entrenched habits will be.

For some, the changes are staggering. Consider the upheavals for a parent who moves out of the family home, sets up a new household, loses daily contact with family life, and becomes a weekend visitor to his or her children. Or the changes for a former stay-at-home parent

who must now find and tackle a full-time job and sort out a confusing array of day care options, all while shouldering the major responsibility for distraught children. Consider the disruptions to the life of a “corporate wife,” whose life has revolved around her husband’s career, or the changes faced by a family whose finances were already spread thin and who now must pay for two substandard residences.

Besides the upheavals, most divorcing men and women encounter a host of practical problems that would tax anyone’s resources, even under the best circumstances.

## The Practical Hurdles

With divorce come time-consuming paperwork, the necessity of dealing with an unfamiliar legal system, new loneliness, difficulties concentrating, countless questions from relatives and friends, and the endless list of decisions (new living arrangements, how every material possession will be divided, where the children will live, how parenting will be shared, how to handle holidays, and on and on).

Divorcing women must suddenly assume the household tasks that may have been formerly in their husbands’ domain. Home and car maintenance and repairs, tax returns, and financial planning often top their list of practical problems. Women with primary physical custody of children have a particularly difficult time. Their problems multiply exponentially with the responsibility for dealing with hurt, baffled children who may develop any number of transient problems in response to their family’s rupture (See Chapter 6). Typically, divorcing mothers’ lives and homes are in a state of disorganization. Financial worries, caused by their inevitably reduced resources, are a major source of stress. Mothers who had stayed at home or worked part-time often must return to full-time employment, turning an overloaded schedule into an exhausting one. Many report having to stay up past midnight just to get the bare essentials done. Yet those who remain at home often complain of being locked in a child’s world. Many mothers report that their stress is overwhelming. (See Chapter 14 for help.)

Divorcing men have their own set of problems. Many wind up in small or furnished apartments, bitter that they have lost so much of what they had spent years building. A surprising number are lost when it comes to the mechanics of cooking, shopping for food, cleaning, and doing laundry. Fathers without custody report feeling rootless, shut out, guilty, and anxious. The great majority miss daily contact with their

children, some desperately so. One 25-year-old man, divorced for a year and a half, complained, “Their mother claims she has no time to herself and tells me about all my freedom. Freedom? No! It has another name; it’s called loneliness.”<sup>1</sup>

Many men are astonished at the intensity with which they miss being involved in their children’s daily lives and say they never would have predicted it. Even men who have not been involved fathers miss their children, becoming aware for the first time of all the things they never did when they had the opportunity. Nor do most fathers predict the practical problems involved in becoming a part-time parent. Where do you go in your time together? What do you do? How do you relate to your own children in these strange new circumstances? (See Chapter 15 for solutions.)

Reflecting their stress, fathers tend to sleep less, eat erratically, develop physical symptoms, and bury themselves in work during the first year after separation. It is also common for them to engage in a frenzied social life, not because it is satisfying or pleasurable but because it helps ward off feelings of being shut out and rootless.

## The Uncoupling Hurdle

In their study of almost a thousand divorced men and women, Morton and Bernice Hunt discovered that few people realized before they were separated how totally bound they were to their former partners because of the years spent together, shared experiences, entrenched habits developed to accommodate one another, children, shared friends and relatives, emotional commitments, mutual obligations, and jointly acquired possessions. Essentially the strands of spouses’ lives are woven together into a single fabric. The task of disentangling the threads of their lives is an enormous one that may extend over a period of years.

Disentangling yourself from your spouse could be the most difficult struggle you have after divorce. It includes becoming *emotionally* detached, which is difficult enough. But you may also find that a large chunk of your identity is entangled with your former partner’s and with your role as a husband or wife. Divorcing men and women commonly talk of an “identity crisis,” and the question they ask over and over again is, “Who *am* I?”

So along with everything else you must do after divorce, you need to forge a new identity for yourself and establish a new lifestyle that is satisfying to you. You will no longer be tied to the life goals you

formulated with your spouse, to the kind of person your spouse accepted or expected you to be, or to the lifestyle you developed together. You can now determine what things you enjoy, what kind of lifestyle you wish to have, what kind of person you want to be, and what you want to do with the rest of your life. Chapter 10 will help you with becoming emotionally detached and Chapter 11 with forging your new identity.

Some people find the prospect of developing a new identity exhilarating, as did 31-year-old Ted:

I felt such exuberant freedom. I had a second chance at life. I no longer had to make the “sensible” and “responsible” choices as Phyllis always insisted. I decided I would leave my dead-end job and take a chance at starting my own business. I didn’t care if I had to work sixteen-hour days, seven days a week to make it work.

Others find the prospect terrifying, as did Helen, a 48-year-old Michigan mother of a 17-year-old son:

I would sit by the window in a trance for long hours watching the world go by, feeling my life was over. I would keep coming back to the same question, “What will I do with the rest of my life?” Sometimes I would become so afraid I’d go into a panic. My heart would race, my hands would sweat, I’d shake all over. At first I was afraid I was cracking up. Then I began to wish that I would so Ralph would feel some guilt about what he had done to me.

By now there may be no skeptics among you. Adjusting to divorce *is* hard work. It requires learning how to cope with extensive loss, pervasive change, endless practical problems, and intense emotions that may play havoc with your life. It motivates reappraisal, soul-searching, and self-exploration. It necessitates breaking with the past, reorganizing your life, and restructuring family relationships. It is no wonder that people so often take a number of years to adjust.

Progression through divorce can be divided into three broad stages: *preparation*, *transition-restructuring*, and *recovery-rebuilding*. Learning about these three stages can provide you with a road map of what may lie ahead. The road map is only a rough one, sketching the types of experiences and feelings common in each of these stages. You will probably have many of the same feelings and experiences discussed in this book, but you may not experience them all, and you may not experience them as intensely as many others have.

## PRESEPARATION

People's experiences are most varied *before* they make the decision to separate and file for divorce. For some, the long months, and perhaps years, before the decisive separation are a volatile period of acrimony and anger. For some this period is marked by mutual indifference and alienation. For others it is a period of sinking disillusionment and hopelessness. Some engage in endless discussions and negotiations in an attempt to save their marriages. Some try marriage counseling. Others are taken by complete surprise when a spouse leaves. In one Pennsylvania study, 29 percent of the people who had been left by a spouse reported surprise at their spouse's decision, as was Jenny:

To this day I still don't understand it. Some sort of midlife crisis, I suppose. We were considered the ideal family in the community—the ones everyone assumed would be together forever. He kept up the charade of the loving husband right up till the end. Oh, he was having more than his share of troubled moods, but he always passed them off as trouble at work. I never suspected a thing. We went out to dinner for his birthday—a celebration, I thought. That's the moment he chose to drop the bomb. I guess it symbolized his independence day or something. No discussion, no nothing. He just wanted out. He had already rented himself a condo.

Women often experience the preseparation stage as more stressful than do men. Women are more likely to report having been depressed, pessimistic, and lonely during this period. Between two-thirds and three-quarters of divorces are initiated by women, so their greater preseparation distress may reflect their turmoil while wrestling with their decision to divorce or not. For some, the preseparation period is the most traumatic period of their divorce. This was certainly true for Jean:

The year before Jean first left Michael was like a progressive, downhill spiral. She was so depressed that there were days she never made it out of bed. And when she did, she was virtually immobilized. She cried uncontrollably and suffered from migraine headaches for days at a time. A friend helped her make the decision to leave and, using connections, got her a job. Although life still was not easy, Jean found she liked working, and co-workers liked and respected her. Eventually, she formed several good friendships, got a promotion, and began to feel good about herself. Then Michael talked her into coming back to him, promising he would change. He tried for a short while but then drifted back to his

old destructive patterns. Finally accepting the futility of the marriage and realizing she was well on her way to establishing an independent and satisfying life for herself, Jean left him for the second and final time.

## TRANSITION-RESTRUCTURING

The stage of transition-restructuring begins with the separation and lasts, *on the average*, two years. It is during this period that the majority of divorcing men and women seem to encounter the most similar experiences and feelings—sometimes referred to as the “divorce experience”—although with differing intensity.

During this stage, divorcing partners usually experience far more trauma and disorientation than they had anticipated. Sure, the continuous battles have ended. So have the constant criticism and uncomfortable indecision. But this is the time of turbulent and conflicting emotions, when people are literally assaulted with loss, change, and practical problems. It is a time when the familiar past is traded for the unknown future.

People express their anxiety and distress in different ways. Some withdraw into the sanctuary of their homes; others engage in a frenzy of activity to escape. Some sleep the days away; others feel fortunate to sleep a few uninterrupted hours each night. Some bury themselves in work; others can’t concentrate. Some barely eat enough for sustenance; others find food to be one of their greatest comforts. Some are apathetic, others irritable. Some cry uncontrollably; others stoically hold in everything. Some turn to friends; others turn to alcohol, tranquilizers, violence, religion, or counseling.

### Transition Phase

In the first half of the transition-restructuring stage, the decision to divorce can become a waking nightmare. Many men and women become tense, listless, painfully lonely, and overwhelmed with feelings of failure, inadequacy, poor self-esteem, and “not belonging” anywhere. Too often, they feel out of control, victims of intense emotions previously unknown to them. Self-pity and depression leave many wondering if they will ever feel like their old selves again. Bitterness, anger, and resentment fuel fantasies of revenge. Guilt, fear, and panic cause some to question their sanity.

Barbara, a high-level manager in a profitable company, was baffled by her reactions.

Why am I acting like this? I'm a competent professional, in charge of million-dollar contracts and 75 people, and here I am, feeling like a frightened, helpless little girl! I thought I wanted this divorce. What's wrong with me?

But it is the intensity of their anger that frightens many people the most. Twenty-five-year-old Wendy, married for five years, entered divorce counseling because she was so alarmed at the intensity of her rage.

At first I was okay. I had no anger at all. It had always disgusted me to see divorcing people acting so vindictively toward one another. I was sure it would never happen to me. Then, just when I was patting myself on the back for being so rational, a dam broke. Right now, I'm so angry, I'm out for revenge. I find myself plotting my next moves! I've never thought of myself as a vindictive person. I don't know what's happening to me.

For a minority, rage is so intense that it incites disturbed and sometimes bizarre behavior toward a former spouse. A New Orleans man shredded his ex-wife's favorite clothes. A New York man held his former wife hostage and shot up her living room. In San Diego, a man left bloody hunting knives in his ex's mailbox. A Dallas woman dumped her estranged husband's \$500 suits out a second-story window into a muddy backyard. A southern California woman rammed her car into her ex-husband's house while he and their children were inside. Breaking down doors, obscene phone calls, physical violence, and hysterical rages are not uncommon. In a northern California study, about one-fourth of the men and women displayed such behavior.

Most people swing back and forth between periods of sadness, anxiety, and anger and exhilarating periods of bliss. In their euphoric moods, people insist the divorce was the best thing that ever happened to them. They talk of feeling intoxicated by their newfound freedom and independence, and they report feeling more alive than ever. They see life as an adventure and feel as if they can attain any goal they want. For some, euphoric periods last for several months; for others it may be only days until the pendulum swings back again.

During the transition phase, divorcing men and women usually become obsessed with thoughts about their former spouse and broken marriage. The history of the marriage is relived time and time again—

the fights, the accusations, the significant events, the trivial occurrences that may have contributed to the breakup. When did the trouble start? Who is to blame? Was it inevitable? For some, the obsessive thoughts become maddening.

Although a minority of couples report they get along better once they no longer have daily contact, the majority report having primarily explosive and conflictual interactions after separation. Yet despite the conflict, the majority of divorcing men and women are haunted by memories of the good times, and many fall victim to impulses to call, initiate dates, seek out information about their ex's new life, or just drive past their ex's home or office. The majority of divorced people studied have questioned, at some time, whether they made the right decision to end the relationship. People vacillate between feelings of love and hate, longing and anger.

During this first half of the transition-restructuring stage, many people report feeling "split," "on the edge," or "not themselves" anymore. Many report their major goal is making it through till tomorrow without cracking up. People who are asked to recall this period of their divorce frequently offer comments such as "I couldn't believe how awful I felt" and "I felt I couldn't go on." When interviewed on *Saturday Night with Connie Chung*, Jane Fonda remarked about her own divorce, "All I can say is that I experienced pain unlike anything I've ever felt in my life."

Not everyone encounters the divorce experience. A minority of divorcing men and women feel primarily relief, hope, and even positive feelings at the end of their marriages. They may talk of being released from prison or bondage, of new beginnings, of a chance for a better life. Sometimes there are celebrations and self-indulgences like massages, facials, new wardrobes, and new cars. They function fairly well and quickly begin to rebuild their lives. Many immerse themselves in dating and the singles scene immediately, sometimes at a hectic pace, as if making up for lost time. Morton and Bernice Hunt found that 20 percent of their very large study group fit into this category.

Although this initial positive outlook and functioning may continue, it sometimes proves to be fragile. Many a divorcing person is stunned to find his or her initial enthusiasm and aplomb shattered after a few months, often when the first personal failure is encountered. It is almost as if a bubble bursts: spirits, once high, take a nosedive and the divorce experience, heretofore unknown, becomes their new reality.

Though it is tempting to assume that the leavers are the ones who breeze through separation and divorce and that their reluctant part-

ners are the ones who suffer, reality is not so black and white. Those who are left usually *do* have more to overcome immediately after separation and frequently do have more problems at this time. They are more likely to feel helpless, vulnerable, and pessimistic. They are more likely to have difficulty accepting the breakup. Their self-esteem may plummet. Many report intense feelings of despair, outrage, and anger.

But the picture is not a rosy one for leavers either. Although they are more likely to feel relief, leavers still have high levels of stress, which is the natural consequence of a major life change. It appears that leavers are more likely than those who are left to experience high levels of stress *before* separation and feelings of guilt *after* separation. In their large study group of almost one thousand, the Hunts found that approximately one-third of the leavers felt bad “all or almost all of the time” after separation, complaining of general depression, sleeplessness, and loss of appetite. They didn’t want to go back, but they didn’t expect to feel as bad as they did. A University of Tennessee study reported that leavers, as a group, felt similar levels of emotional trauma to those who were left, but the *timing* of their peak stress levels was different.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, whether one leaves or is left may not affect how rapidly he or she recovers from divorce. Although reluctant partners have more problems immediately after separation, studies report that these differences diminish. Some leavers have surprisingly slow recoveries, whereas some who were left are found to recover surprisingly quickly, even when the separation had been unexpected. Some people who had been adamantly opposed to the divorce admit later that it was the best thing that could have happened to them.

Incidentally, in the great majority of cases, divorce is not mutually desired. It appears that one spouse wants the divorce far more than the other in 75 to 90 percent of divorces.

## Restructuring

Usually, sometime during the first postseparation year most people begin to achieve a more even keel emotionally. As less energy is needed for survival, more can be devoted to the task of restructuring life and attending more closely to the needs of children. Nothing will mark the onset of this time for you, and your progress is not likely to be smooth. For a long time, you will likely have one foot in each world. You will probably experience a lot of peaks and valleys, starts and stops in which

your productive periods of restructuring will be followed by setbacks, periods of discouragement, and apathy.

The uneven course that progress usually takes was clearly illustrated in a well-known study conducted at the University of Virginia by E. Mavis Hetherington and her colleagues. Within the first year following their legal divorces, people in this study group, as a whole, were immersed in a flurry of self-improvement activities, such as changes in physical appearance, physical fitness programs, new social activities, and classes. Yet at the end of that year, the majority felt they were at an all-time *low*. Perhaps they were merely discouraged that their lifestyles were not yet satisfactory, but a significant majority of the study group reported that they were functioning poorly, that the divorce had been a mistake, and that they should have worked harder to save their marriages. Other study groups confirm that things usually get worse before they get better.

In the process of restructuring, most people at some time enter a phase of experimentation and do things they have always wanted to do by trying out new activities, interests, and relationships. Journalist Abigail Trafford, author of *Crazy Time*, humorously refers to this as the hummingbird phase, because of the tendency to flit from plan to plan, interest to interest, and relationship to relationship. The frenetic pace that is often evident in this phase is easily detected in this man's plans:

My plan right now is to enroll in graduate school, which will be a big switch. And I think I've got to learn to play tennis, because I need exercise bad. And I have bought a ten-speed bike, and I am going to start doing the bicycle trails. And I really want to get back into sailing. I used to play golf, too, and I want to get back.... I plan to go to Europe ... and I could take my oldest son with me.<sup>2</sup>

People enter the experimentation phase at widely varying times, some dashing into it rapidly, others waiting until they gain some semblance of equilibrium in both their own and their children's lives. It is only a phase. Gradually the frenetic pace slows, and people become more selective in their activities and plans.

When Judith Wallerstein and Joan Kelly reinterviewed their study group 18 months after separation, they found that most people were still grappling with restructuring their lives and coming to terms with their divorce. However, three-fifths of the men and slightly more than half the women were pleased with the direction their lives were taking.

## RECOVERY-REBUILDING

The recovery and rebuilding stage is sometimes humorously referred to as the “phoenix stage”—when people rise from the ashes of divorce. Whereas the stage of transition-restructuring was a time of reacting to divorce and surviving it, this is a period of personal growth. The former may have been a time of frenetic experimentation; this is one of self-discovery and carving a new identity. *On the average*, people enter the recovery-rebuilding stage roughly two years after separation, and it lasts two to three years. However, some people get stalled here for many years.

Those who successfully complete this stage have learned to accept the end of their marriages and the role they played in the breakup. They have disentangled their lives from those of their former spouses and created separate identities. They have achieved detachment from their former partners, so there is no longer a need for either hostility or dependence. And they have clarified their priorities, set realistic goals, and found a satisfying lifestyle.

As in the transition-restructuring stage, progress during this period does not follow a smooth course but has starts and stops. You may find that success in this stage is unrelated to the ease or difficulty you had with the earlier stages. A devastating postseparation period does not predict a poor recovery, just as early feelings of relief, hope, and optimism do not necessarily predict a good recovery. Carl is an example:

Carl and Elizabeth had been married 12 years and had three children. Carl’s life was his home and kids, but Elizabeth fell in love with Ted, a co-worker with eclectic interests that excited her. The two kept the affair secret for a year before Elizabeth made the difficult decision to leave Carl and marry Ted. Carl was devastated, went into a deep depression, and became suicidal. Eventually his rage surfaced, and he ranted about Elizabeth’s “betrayal” to any captive audience, especially the children. Carl and Elizabeth shared custody of the children, none of whom fared well after the breakup. Two of the children were referred for counseling. Fortunately, Carl remained a sensitive and caring father and was able to see, with the therapist’s help, how he was exacerbating his children’s problems. He then sought help himself.

As of this writing, three years later, Carl has picked up the pieces of his life. He has his children much of the time, and they’ve discovered bicycling, hiking, and camping together. He’s developed a passion for cooking and photography, and he reports he is “involved with a

wonderful and caring woman.” He says he is happy, feels whole again, and is finding life to be surprisingly good. Meanwhile, Elizabeth’s second marriage is in trouble. A few years ago, Carl confides, he would have taken great satisfaction in this, but at this point he feels a tinge of compassion for her.

As Carl’s story shows, a successful recovery from your divorce will depend not so much on the amount of stress you encounter but on how well you cope with that stress, how thoroughly you put the past behind you, and how successfully you rebuild your life. Chapters 3 through 5, 10, and 11 will guide you each step of the way so you can emerge from divorce a stronger person.

## IS DIVORCE WORTH IT? THE VERDICT IS . . .

Although the specific figures differ from study to study and from poll to poll, the majority of divorced men and women maintain that yes, the divorce was worth the trauma and subsequent difficult years. For example, in the northern California study reported by Judith Wallerstein and Joan Kelly, about two-thirds of the men and slightly more than half the women reported five years after their decisive separation that the divorce had been beneficial and had improved the quality of their lives. Slightly less than 20 percent considered the divorce to be an unqualified failure, while the remainder had mixed feelings. A University of Virginia study reported that only two years after the divorce was final, 75 percent of the women felt they were happier in their new lives than they had been during the final year of their marriages. Common themes among these satisfied women were their newly found independence, self-fulfillment, and competence developed as a result of the challenges of divorce and single parenting. Studying a divorced sample of almost one thousand, Morton and Bernice Hunt reported that the majority claimed to be both happier and more successful human beings because of the divorce that occurred earlier in their lives. In a national survey reported in *Parents Magazine*, 72 percent of the divorced respondents said they were happier now than they had been before their divorces. And in a Gallup poll, 82 percent of the divorced respondents believed the decision to divorce had been a good one.

Speaking retrospectively about their divorces, many people conclude that their marriages and divorces have played an integral part in their growth as human beings. They are not necessarily people who initiated

the divorce or who sailed through it relatively smoothly. Many were considerably traumatized at the time and experienced a great deal of pain in the aftermath of their marriages. Thirty-two-year-old Louisa is an example. Looking back on a difficult divorce, she concluded:

It was a hard lesson to learn but I'm so glad I learned it. I'm a competent, well-liked, talented human being in my own right. I can survive alone and will never fear it again. . . . Looking back now I'm almost glad it all happened. I'm a far better person, more understanding of myself and others—and isn't that what living is all about?<sup>3</sup>