

Change After Divorce Can Really Be a Second Chance

By Pat Bubash

A decision regarding change, even when of our own choosing, can be difficult. Moving to new city, beginning a new job, transferring to a different school, all transitions involving change can be emotionally stressful. My opinion on this topic, change, is a personal one relevant to my life situations, and, from the words of counselors who work with emotionally drained, emotionally stressed clients. High on the list for one of the most difficult changes encountered by a couple is divorce. This new status is significantly felt the first time we fill out a form asking our marital status, and we mark “single” vs. married”. Divorce has changed not only the marital status on a written form, but the real life and future of the family that “was.”

In the neighborhood where my daughters grew up, divorce was a rarity. The families on our kid friendly street were composed of two parent households. Our children played up and down the street, running in and out of each other’s houses -- houses with a “mom” and a “dad”.

I was a “first” and, not, a first that I would have chosen for my daughters and me. The first to be divorced, among the families, changing our status of two parents to a one parent household. I found that only a few neighbors were a little wary of me, “the token divorcee”. Most were caring people who stepped in when I needed help lighting the hot water heater, starting my stalled car or help with afterschool rides for the girls. And, as I later learned, my very social daughters didn’t talk about the change in their household. They did not tell people their parents were divorced. A couple of years passed before some people were even aware these kids lived in a single parent home. It seemed my young daughters decided mom and dad’s divorce wasn’t to be public knowledge.

As the saying goes, “change is tough”, and so it was. For me, it was the struggle to not only maintain a home, and keep a job, but to be the everything for my three daughters. Now as I am aging, sound continuous sleep is rare, but in the years of being the “only” resident parent, sound sleep came the minute my head hit the pillow. I was exhausted at the end of my long days. No longer having a partner to help with all the needs of a household, attending school activities as family’s acting cheerleader, making sure homework was done, meals prepared, all, made for very full days. I understand when a newly divorced person tells me they are overwhelmed with their new status.

Years later, I still view this change in my life -- the end of my marriage – as the most difficult, emotionally traumatic, and challenging. During that time, my personal world view was conflicted. A part of me ached for the life that was, another part looked forward to my individual growth, facing the challenge of being single, on my own, making my own decisions. I had married at a very young age. My husband was the head of the household. Now I found I didn’t have to compromise, talk it over with a husband when I decided to trade in the old Ford station wagon for a silver Camaro -- the new family car!

Of course, it would have been nice to have had a resident mechanic available to do maintenance on the cars when my teenage daughters began driving. Yes, there were days that I wished somehow my ex-husband and I could have worked through our issues and that I did not have to

mark the marital box “single”. Had I read the following quote those many years ago, I would have gone with my latter thinking: forward only, no looking back.

The quote comes from a book authored by Mary Alice Monroe, “Last Light Over Carolina”. One of the characters in the book, an elderly long time resident of the community observes the sadness, turmoil in the life of a young divorced mother. As she shares with him her unhappiness, uncertainly in the decisions she has made, in his infinite mature wisdom, he admonishes her, “Sometimes change is nothing more than a second chance.”

Wow, I thought, as I read and reread those words. The realization of a second chance did not occur to me all those years ago, holding that paper in my hands ending my fifteen years of marriage. I was only seeing the end rather than a beginning. Change is difficult, but it can also provide us the opportunity to be stronger, wiser, meeting new challenges and succeeding in the new experiences to come.

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