

No one wants their parents to get divorced.

A personal statement

I was 7 when it happened, and unlike my younger sisters who were 5 and 2, I can recall it all. I still have a vivid memory from Christmas 1990, when the phone rang in the hall and my mother answered it, and after a few seconds collapsed in a pile of tears, begging my father to change his mind. It was only after she got off the phone that I got the full picture of what had happened. He had gone to stay at his parents under the auspices of helping them fit a new kitchen. He phoned to tell my mother that he wanted to get divorced, and wasn't really willing to discuss the issue. He had been for counselling, and made his decision. I suppose my mother begged him to reconsider because to her it seemed the only option – to degrade herself in that way to get across just how desperate his decision was for the family. However, from an onlookers point of view, I'm sure it did more to weaken, rather than strengthen her position.

I remember we cried for a week. My younger sisters couldn't grasp exactly how much their lives would be changed by that phone call, at least not for a few years. For my mother and I, it marked the start of a new order, whereby she became head of the house and I became number 2, at the age of 7. She expected me to help with the chores, to help with dinner. She couldn't drive and she didn't have a job, so she walked us to school – a 45 minute walk there and back twice a day. I can remember looking at my mother as a failure. She should have been a better wife, kept hold of my father by making an effort with her appearance, cooking him nice meals, keeping the home lovely. In truth, she wasn't great at any of these things, and is much better suited to going out to work and earning the crust, as she does now.

My parents decision on both sides to remarry, was no more welcome than their divorce was painful. I attended both weddings, at the ages of 11 and 13. My mother's was a miserable registry office affair, with 2 witnesses and a meal at the befeater afterwards. My father's however, was a big Church of England white wedding with all the frills. I could tell he felt uncomfortable making his three daughters sit through it, but having left christadelphia and the expectations of all its members, his young new bride wasn't going to have her special day dulled down by a cranky, disapproving sect. In fact, she wanted us three girls to be bridesmaids, and couldn't see why my mother should have a problem with that. My mother's response, aimed at my father, was: 'I didn't give birth to those 3 girls so that they could walk up the aisle behind another woman.' At the time I didn't really understand how hurtful and rude my step-mother's request was, but now I'm older, it makes my blood boil to think of it. It also gives me a new-found respect for my mother for having the courage to come up with such a pithy retort. To leave your wife and 3 children is one thing, but to then expect those 3 children to don pretty dresses in a trinitarian service and pretend they were delighted to see their father marry a woman 10 years his junior, is quite another.

My mother's decision to remarry affected me most in day-to-day life. Both the person she chose and the circumstances around which they formed a relationship were inappropriate and hurtful. But then she had been badly hurt herself, and it was only when I became an adult that I understood how lonely she had been raising 3 children under 10, and how healing it was to

have another adult for company and support. It took me many years to become reconciled to all of this, and it was not an easy ride.

It's 13 years since my father's remarriage, and 15 since my mother's, meaning they have both been married to their new spouses for longer than they were to each other. I suppose the situation is relatively amicable, but the repercussions of divorce are still being felt all these years on. I didn't want my father to give a speech at my wedding, as I honestly didn't feel he was qualified on account of the fact that he was no longer a practising Christian (my husband and I are both Christadelphians) and because I hadn't lived in the same house as him for over a decade. As a compromise, he introduced my granddad, who gave the actual speech. But to show my dad that I had forgiven him, I asked him to give me away, which he did.

To those of you who are married to your first spouse, I would urge you to tend and nurture it through the hard times and the good. Don't let yourselves grow apart, don't take each other for granted, and never stop talking to each other or to God. If you can't make your marriage work, it won't just be your lives which are affected, but everyone around you's lives too. A divorce sends massive shockwaves rippling through the lives of family and friends, and in Christian communities which live as closely-knit as we do, everyone is left hurt and reeling.

To those of you who are considering remarrying, ask yourself if the person you have feelings for truly cares about the welfare of your children. Will they love them, care for them, respect them and be patient with them, as if they were their own? You are inviting them to take the place of your children's real mother or father. Are they up to the task?

To those of you who have got remarried, I would ask you to think about your children. They didn't ask for any of this and they probably weren't the cause either. It won't be until they are adults that they appreciate the need for fellow adult company when bringing up children. They may be wondering why they weren't enough for you – why you felt the need to introduce someone else to the family – someone who is not their father or mother, but who takes up your valuable time and attention and also has the power to tell them off. If you are blessed enough to have your children's support, then you are truly the exception to the rule, and you should thank them for their love and humility. In 9 cases out of 10, it can/will not have been easy for them to be happy for you.

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