

And Then She Was Happy
A Book About Divorce

A Chat with Kristi Skordahl

1. What prompted you to write this book?

In 2007, and after many years as a family law attorney, I found myself facing my own divorce. Despite all of my experience as a divorce attorney, when my own marriage broke up I had no idea how to move forward. Every bit of legal knowledge and experience I had felt entirely irrelevant to what I was going through.

It was a difficult process, but I learned a lot about managing the stressors of divorce. And when I started to share my ideas with clients they embraced it with enthusiasm. Late one afternoon after a long day talking and working with clients, my voice was pretty much shot. I remember thinking that I wished I had a book I could give my clients that contained these ideas because it would save them a lot of money and me a lot of vocal distress. That night, I started writing it.

2. Why is this different from other books on divorce?

There are lots of books about divorce out there, but the books I have read either focus on telling readers what they “should” do or they are filled with a bunch of statistics that I think are of limited interest to people in crisis. My book focuses on themes like trusting your gut, taking one step at a time, and making good long-term choices for yourself and the people you care about. I also address my own personal struggle with divorce.

3. In the first part of *And Then She Was Happy*, you are startlingly honest about your own marriage and divorce. Was that difficult for you to write?

It was very difficult, but it was also tremendously healing because it helped me more fully process all that had happened. In writing this book I tried to be very careful about what I revealed about my marriage and what I did not reveal. I wanted to be respectful to the people involved, but I was also fully committed to telling the truth. People in oppressive and abusive relationships are so afraid to tell the truth and I think this is what keeps them isolated and paralyzed.

4. What will readers learn from reading this book?

My book contains a lot of practical information about getting through the process. But my biggest hope for the book is that it will inspire readers to tap the vast resources of strength that lie within them and that they will get a clearer understanding of what true strength is. In the process of divorce, strength is not about fighting or being obstructionist or taking rigid positions. Strength is about respecting yourself and the people you care about during challenging circumstances. It is also about making well-considered grown-up choices at a time when you are tempted a thousand times a day to be angry and vindictive and punishing to those who have hurt you. I want this book to inspire people to embrace the very best that is in them and to leverage that into a future of peace and happiness.

5. Having the word “happy” in the title of a book about divorce seems strange. Are you saying that divorce can be a happy experience?

I can tell you that my divorce was not a happy experience, but I am grateful for having gone through it because of the happiness I found on the other side. The title refers to a particular story in the book, when after separating from my husband I found myself sitting on the floor of an empty apartment with little more in my possession than a knife, a fork and a spoon. At a time when

everything I knew about my life had fallen apart, I sat back, took a deep breath and unexpectedly realized that I was happy for the first time in a very long time. It was one of the most extraordinary experiences of my life and that is what inspired the title of this book, and the book itself.

6. What advice do you find yourself offering your clients most often?

The one thing I find myself offering clients again and again is to take one step at a time. This is often difficult for clients to hear because their lives feel so chaotic. Many people try to manage this uncertainty by trying to exert control over everything around them. This may be natural, but it is a huge waste of energy because there are so many things that cannot be controlled and this energy is much better invested in tending to self-care. All that any of us can do is the best we can do with what is before us. If we don't learn how to let go of worry and the compulsion to control the chaos around us, we will crumble.

7. Probably easier said than done, but I can see how important that is. What are some of the other common challenges your clients face?

Clients have to manage the information that is thrown at them because everyone who learns about their transition is going to want to offer them advice. I refer to this as their Greek Chorus. Although this advice is almost universally well-meaning, most of it falls into the category of "unhelpful." When I was going through my own divorce, everyone - including the guy who mowed my lawn - was giving me advice and it was making me crazy. I could not manage all the information that was offered to me, but over time, I learned to simply say, "Thank you for your concern, but all I really need from you right now is support." The people who really cared about me (which included the lawn guy) appreciated this. They wanted to help, but they didn't know how to do this until I told them.

8. When it comes to choosing an attorney, what are the first steps clients should take?

There are many options out there with respect to the process itself. These include collaborative divorce, cooperative divorce, mediation, traditional litigation or a combination of these. I don't believe there is any "one size fits all" process. Every divorce is different and every divorce requires a customized approach. It is worthwhile to investigate the available options and determine the best fit for the unique needs of your family.

9. Which modalities do you practice?

I feel comfortable practicing all the modalities I mentioned. Some attorneys only practice one or two modalities and this is often a legitimate professional preference. Problems arise, however, when attorneys think their way is the only way and they become intent on selling their point of view to everyone who walks through their doorway. Clients have to sift through the bravado and evangelism some attorneys bring to their practice. Basically it comes down to doing your homework and trusting your gut. Interview attorneys; ask questions; tell them what you need and carefully consider whether you believe they can offer this to you.

Your personal story is truly compelling and it would make a fantastic movie. If your book was made into a movie, who would you choose to play the role of Kristi Skordahl?

10. Ha. Ha. Oh yes, I have spent LOTS of time thinking about this. I suppose the OBVIOUS choice would be someone like Charlize Theron or Uma Thurman. But, really, do you think they are pretty enough to play ME? Seriously, it is flattering that anyone would think this book would make a good movie. I guess we'll just have to see how it goes. I just hope Betty White doesn't retire before that happens. I think she could nail it.

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And Then She Was Happy: A Book About Divorce by Kristi Skordahl

Beaver's Pond Press, 152 pages, paper

ISBN 978-1-59298-567-8, 2013, \$14.95

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