

PERSONALLY

# A different divorce hits home

- Challenges to work and live with dignity loom equally large for a reporter swept personally into a cultural sea change.

By GAIL ROSENBLUM • grosenblum@startribune.com

In the end, "the Davis matter," as it was called, ended quietly on the sixth floor of the Hennepin County Courthouse in Family Court.

The Honorable Judge commended the couple, represented by the wife, on their efforts to divide up a long marriage with fairness and a focus on their children. The attorney, hired at the final hour to review a sizable divorce plan crafted by the couple together, wished the woman well and offered her the name of a good massage therapist.

Then I stepped into the winter sun and did the only thing I could think to do: Called the man formerly known as my husband and asked if he might pick up a few things for me at Costco.

It was, I imagine, one of the odder endings to a 21-year marriage, but blessedly far removed from the drama of other grand finales, such as the divorcing New York couple recently ordered by an exasperated judge to build a wall down the middle of their three-story house, because neither would move out.

That article's headline was "House Divided," a perfect but ugly reminder of what we easily could have become, almost became, and continue to struggle daily not to become. And while I get plenty of looks and a few laughs when I tell people that I write about relationships — Me! Divorced! — I know the truth. My job was a very lucky break for my family. **Divorce continues on E3 ►**

More than 100 readers wrote in response to the three-part Source series, "A Different Divorce." Read a sampling of those comments on E3. To read the series and see more comments, go to [www.startribune.com/lifestyle](http://www.startribune.com/lifestyle).

# A different divorce

## ◀ DIVORCE FROM E1

For years, I've covered the unmistakable churning and changes in the American family — from nuclear to blended, from closed to open to international adoptions, interfaith and intercultural marriage, paternity leave and at-home dads, grandparents raising grandchildren, adult children parenting their parents, GenXers opting out of legal unions, gay couples trying to opt in, and the remarkable reality of 70-, even 80-year wedding anniversaries.

All of it fascinated me. None of it affected me personally, or so I thought. The noise under our own roof began years ago, a low rumble we ignored effectively. Kids keep couples busy. Jobs keep couples busy. Societal and familial pressures keep couples busy, and married, too. But as building-better-marriage books and, later, books about a new kind of divorce calling for collaboration and co-parenting crossed my desk for review, I read them in a different light.

As our children grew older and the rumble grew to a roar, we panicked and leaped into a painful and painstaking search for answers to so many questions. Did we just suffer from lousy communication? Was our struggle acute and temporary, or chronic? As one therapist suggested, "Has the milk been out too long?" With no affairs, abuse or addiction to report, did we expect too much? Yet, how long can two good people run on emotional empty before somebody tries to fill up elsewhere? And what about our precious children?

Those who charge that couples like us take marriage vows too lightly, especially when kids are involved, are dead wrong. The reality of stepping out, of handing back the dream and,

most horribly, destroying our children, threatened to undo us many times. In the end, we decided that staying was riskier than leaving. So we moved slowly forward, always with an eye on our kids.

Knowing what I knew, we hired a mediator, but ultimately, did the lion's share of work ourselves. We also "nested," moving in and out of our house so our kids didn't have to. We did it for nearly a year, until the option ran its course because of new relationships. We learned how to talk to our children, respecting that they would grieve in different ways and at different paces.

As my personal and professional lives collided, I wanted to share what I knew. But my editors, fairly, did eyebrow-raising of their own. Was I reporting responsibly on real trends, or trying to create them to suit my personal needs? Ultimately, though, they let me write. Then you wrote, too. Our three-part "New Divorce" series drew well over 100 emotion-laden e-mails from readers all over the map.

Marriage, therapists like to say, has three truths — his, hers and the one in between. It may take years to know if we made the right choice. Maybe we'll never know. What I know is that I can still count on the man I spent half my life with. We live just blocks apart, and talk and e-mail daily to manage budgets and our children's busy lives. We still laugh together sometimes, and share holidays and occasional meals as a family.

We are also creating essential boundaries so that we may move forward independently. But I am happy to report that we are not a house divided.

SATURDAY, APRIL 14, 2007 • STAR TRIBUNE • SOURCE • E3

# hits home