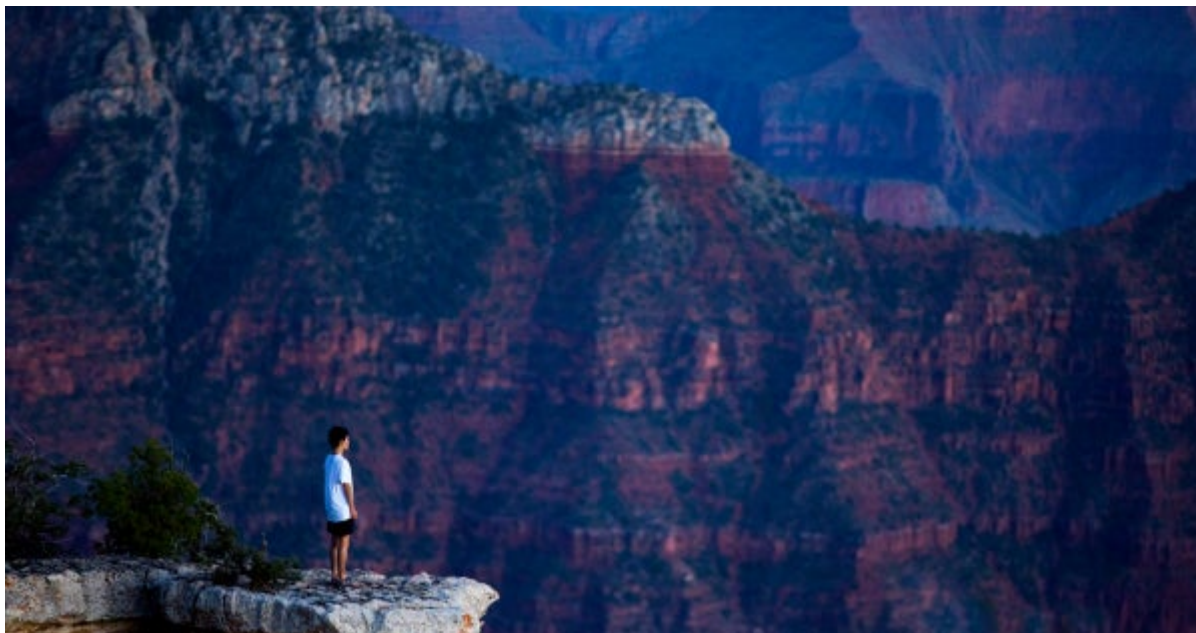


The Relief, Sadness, and Shock of Filing For Divorce

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Filing for divorce comes with a lot of unknowns. One Certainty? You'll feel a lot of mixed emotions.

By [Matt Christensen](#) Aug 09 2019, 6:01 PM



All divorces have to start somewhere. And not just in terms of that first painful discussion, last straw argument, or moment when you and your spouse pass the point of no return. In most cases – almost 70 percent, to be exact — women take the first legal step in filing for divorce. So whether a husband knows it's coming, or is about to be blindsided, chances are he'll be left catching up in terms of emotionally processing such a monumental, life change. The moment the paperwork starts and the process becomes official, a lot of feelings hit.

So after telling your spouse you want a divorce, what does filing for divorce actually feel like? As these 12 ex-husbands and fathers explain, the feelings can shoot the emotional gamut, and bring everything from unimaginable pain to life-altering relief. One thing's for certain: the process comes with a lot of emotions.

I Had A Lot of Regrets

“The divorce papers may as well have been a white surrender flag. That’s what it felt like. My ex-wife and I did everything we could to try and keep things together. But, we just ended up driving ourselves further apart. I guess my regret came from feeling like we – or I – had given up. Like maybe there was just one more thing I could’ve done to save us. Some ‘magic’ thing I missed. And filing for divorce was just a reminder that everything we tried just wasn’t good enough. We had to give up.” – Ken, 42, Oregon

I Was Relieved

“It was a long time coming. So, when I actually filed the papers, it was a big breath of relief. Even though there was more – much more – paperwork and legal stuff ahead, that first step was huge. I think she felt that way, too. It was just this weight of bad, unfortunate decisions that was lifted and put into the past, and would let us move forward as better people, and better parents. That was a huge part of us getting divorced – being able to function better for our kids. It’s been a little while since my divorce, but I’ll never forget that feeling.” – Andy, 37, Illinois

I Felt So Guilty

“My wife divorced me because I had an affair, so I don’t think it’s any surprise that I felt incredibly guilty once it all came out in black and white. The situation was complicated. There were a lot of emotions involved. Somehow, seeing your entire marriage broken down into pages and pages of legal paperwork just wipes all of those emotions away. And, for me, what filled that emptiness was guilt and shame. I wasn’t the only one who made mistakes. But, during that stage of our divorce it felt like I was.” – Gary, 36, California

I Was Shocked

“I was in shock from the second my ex-wife said she wanted a divorce. Honestly, I don’t even remember filling out most of the paperwork through the whole thing. Except the checks. I had no idea she was as unhappy as she was. We had what seemed like a great life, with wonderful children and loads of other blessings. The rug was completely pulled out from under me. The kids, too. Not one of us had any idea it was coming. It was a lot of sad, awkward conversations with them about why mommy wanted to leave, and I remember just feeling shocked the whole time words were coming out of my mouth.” – Mike, 40, Ohio

I Felt Stupid

“I actually had to Google ‘How To File A Divorce’. I had no idea. I really didn’t. And I didn’t know any lawyers, or anyone I was close with who had actually been divorced. For the most part, my ex-wife and I were on the same page about splitting up. Our kids were suffering because of our marital problems. But I’ve never felt stupider than when I cold-called a lawyer and was like, ‘Uh, Hi. I’d like to file for a divorce...?’ You don’t learn how to do that in school. Even if you know people who are divorced, you never get to see the inner workings of what it feels like. And it felt really embarrassing.” – Doug, 38, California

I Felt Angry. Very Angry

“My ex-wife filed our paperwork. She was the one who wanted the divorce. When I got to see everything, I was blown away by all the reasons she listed for wanting to dissolve our marriage. She wrote down that I was neglectful, hurtful, unreasonable...just all these ridiculous claims that I’m guessing her lawyer told her to say. None of it was true. And I remember sitting there, reading it all, thinking about our kids and what a great father I thought I was, and just seething with anger. It felt like someone starting a rumor about me back in high school. I just couldn’t believe it.” – Christopher, 39, Maryland

I Was Proud

“I gave my ex way too many chances, for way too many reasons. Everyone I knew pushed me toward divorce, and they were absolutely right. So, when I actually filed the first bits of paperwork, it was like taking charge of a situation I’d let get way out of hand. It was a pat on my own back that I really needed, after the borderline abusive relationship I’d been in. It was me standing up for myself, which wasn’t something I was used to doing. To be honest, I think my divorce helped shaped the confidence I have today. If you knew me before, you’d know how grateful I am for that.” – Jimmy, 38, Virginia

I Felt a lot of Different Emotions.

“Throughout the whole divorce, I was constantly up one minute, and down the next. First, I’d think it was the right thing to do. Then my mind would flip-flop and I’d start thinking about all the things I’d miss. The bigger things were obvious — the house, the relationship with my kids, and stuff like that. But there was also a lot of weird, little stuff, like playing fantasy football with her uncle and cousin, that I realized I’d never be able to do that again. At least not without it being super awkward. The start of a divorce is this weird ‘whole marriage flashing before your eyes’ kind of thing. And it definitely gave me a chance to reflect on the gravity of my situation.” – Drew, 41, Pennsylvania

I Felt Very Conflicted

“A lot of people will congratulate you on surviving a divorce. On one hand, you’re like, ‘Yeah. Thanks. I’m glad it’s over.’ On the other hand, it feels really icky to be congratulated about something so terrible. I’d tell people we filed the paperwork, and they’d give me an ‘atta boy’, or whatever. It didn’t feel right, at all. I’ve always thought it was weird how hunters congratulate each other for killing something, and it kinda felt like that. A lot of these people were at our wedding, and now they’re congratulating me on helping kill our marriage? It was a weird, unsettling feeling, that’s for sure.” – Anthony, 34, Tennessee

I Was Heartbroken

“I loved my ex-wife very much. She fell out of love with me, and that was just a completely devastating ordeal. The start of the paperwork was just brutal. It was just a cold reminder of what

off, probably just out of hope. I dragged it out as long as I could. Not out of spite, but because I was genuinely hoping for a miracle. Divorces are a special kind of trauma, and mine was no different.” – Josh, 35, Washington, D.C.

I Was Bitter

“When we got married, my ex-wife didn’t have much. It was my house, my car, and most of my money. Financially, it definitely wasn’t an equal partnership. I started to get really hostile toward the end, but there was nothing I could do. I just had to bend over and take it. The only thing that calmed me down was knowing that our kids would benefit from the arrangement. Maybe not benefit, but at least be taken care of financially. I didn’t think of it that way when I read her list of conditions, though. I just saw pure red.” – Gabriel, 43, Ohio

I Felt Guarded

“I didn’t want people to know. Part of it was shame, I think, but part of it was also me trying to protect myself from more pain. My trust was completely shattered leading up to our divorce, and I think that spilled over into my relationships with other people. I just didn’t know who I could count on. It felt like everyone was out to get me when, really, nothing was further from the truth. I had a lot of people wanting to help and support me, but my emotions were completely clouding my judgement. I’m so lucky they stuck by me through it all, because I was hard to deal with for those months while everything got sorted out.” – Steven, 36, Florida