

Wealthy women are outsourcing divorce stress to 'concierges'

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Gundula Brattke was devastated when her husband had an affair with her friend. but divorcée social group UNTied has introduced her to better people — and helped her heal.

Annie Wermiel/NY Post

After a heartbreaking divorce, every molehill feels like a mountain. Luckily, you can outsource much of the hiking.

For Lori Bookstein, 58, personal finances were a nightmare after her split from her husband of 32 years.

“I needed to get my own credit card,” Bookstein tells *The Post*. At the bank, the art gallerist says, “I couldn’t get one because I didn’t have any debt or history of borrowing. I felt like I was in some alternate universe.”

For Gundula Brattke, 58, the goal was to stop being “bitter” after she caught her husband of 12 years having an affair with her best friend.

“I had already been through the trenches,” says Brattke, who moved from her home in the Berkshires to Park Slope. “[But] the struggle doesn’t end with the divorce.”

So the women did what any sane New Yorker with the means to would do: They found pros to help them vanish the pains of divorce away.

For divorcés, there’s no shortage of local resources aimed at untangling the various knots that crop up in the aftermath of a dissolved marriage. There’s Onward, a new concierge service that, for \$150 up, will help the newly single deal with the mundane logistics of breakups, from finding a new rental fast to getting your name off your ex’s utilities. There’s also Worthy, a New York-based digital-friendly gem auctioneer which promises divorcing women fair prices for their engagement diamonds without the sketch factor of 47th Street.

Google results show about a dozen divorce coaches and concierges (with offices in Manhattan) that help clients with everything from packing up their apartments to unpacking their emotional baggage.

Bookstein, who describes herself as “clueless” about money, turned to Karen Bigman, a.k.a. the “Divorcierge,” a Columbia Business School graduate who’s put her finance and management savvy to work for men and women going through divorce.

“A lot of women make the same deal: ‘I’ll take care of the house and the kids and you take care of the money,’ never imagining that they will get divorced,” says Bigman. So she walks Bookstein and her other clients through everything from paying bills to divvying up their investment portfolios. Her help doesn’t come cheap: Her fees start at \$15,000 for six months of service. But Bigman says it evens out in the grand scheme, and besides, her clients really need it: Lots of the people she works with, she says, “have no clue how to sign into their bank account.”

‘I’m part shrink, part coach, part surrogate spouse, part anything you want me to be.’

Her fellow divorce pros are equally willing to hold their clients’ hands.

“I’m part shrink, part coach, part surrogate spouse, part anything you want me to be,” says Betsy Cox, 55, the divorce concierge behind Blackbook Divorce. For \$350 an hour, Cox — who also has a scripted TV show in the works — spends her days doing whatever her high-net-worth clients need, be that laundry or setting up a date with another divorcé from her ritzy Rolodex, compiled during a stint in client relations at an Arab bank.

“I had a client who would say, ‘Come and meet me at this bar at 8 a.m.,’” says Cox. “He’d start having drinks and I’d have to act like I didn’t realize he was an alcoholic. From there, we would go looking for an apartment. Then we would need to furnish it . . . I basically became his wife.”

Another client had her play housemaid at his posh Soho apartment while he wined and dined a new squeeze. She “played housekeeper,” and cooked pasta and filet mignon while the couple flirted.

Aside from acting as a sort of matchmaking TaskRabbit, Cox helps clients navigate the legal, financial and emotional web of divorce. She teaches her female clients “who have spent the last 20 years having lunch” about how to start their careers during life’s second act. “Most of them become real-estate brokers,” she says, noting that she also specializes in finding her clients off-market apartments after their splits.

Of course, there’s more to the aftermath of a divorce than logistical complications and bureaucracy — there’s the emotional stuff, too.

“It’s a true life crisis,” says Liza Caldwell, a divorce coach who runs a breakup counseling service called SAS for Women.

Jamie Dillard, 37, found Caldwell — whose fees range from \$300-plus per hour for private coaching to \$1,000 for three months of virtual consultation — after her husband of 10 years left suddenly.

“I didn’t know how to be alone,” she says. “I had never lived alone in my life. My identity was so wrapped up in the marriage.”

Dillard says that Caldwell addressed her divorce holistically, and helped her break down this “life challenge” into a pie chart with each slice representing a part of her identity that was affected.



The divorce force: Liza Caldwell (from left), Karen Bigman and Elsie Pettus are the fixers helping NYC divorcées navigate life after marriage. Brian Zak/NY Post

“She asked me to take some deep breaths and get in touch with what was going on in my body,” says Dillard. “She asked what I felt and where that feeling was in my body. She asked about its texture and what its color was. And she asked, ‘What is its name?’ I immediately started crying, because I realized you carry a sense of shame, guilt and trauma like a piece of luggage.”

Dillard says Caldwell’s practical and emotionally supportive coaching allowed her to look inward and shed “the trauma of emotional and spiritual abuse” instead of panicking over lawyers or money.

“I started taking guitar lessons again,” she says. “I threw myself more into my career. I moved firms and got a promotion. I was bright, bright blonde for 15 years and I dyed my hair brunette. I purged everything in the house. Everything that was colorful, I changed to white. I want my surroundings to feel clean and different. Suddenly, I am running in Central Park and I am going to SoulCycle. I became a ‘yes’ person.”



SAS for Women client Jamie Dillard fills her post-divorce life with workouts and guitar lessons. Tamara Beckwith/NY Post

For some women, healing is as simple as finding a network of new friends — a well-curated one, ideally.

To move past the pain from her split, Brattke joined UNTied, a membership-based organization based out of founder Elise Pettus’ posh Brooklyn Heights townhouse. Sort of like the Wing for divorced women, UNTied — on the cheap end of the services for divorced ladies, at \$35 per month — hosts wine and cheese nights, workshops and expert-led panel discussions on such topics as how to hire a lawyer, parenting difficult teens and sex in midlife.

Having friends, it turns out, was all that Brattke really needed to get her groove back. She joined Bumble with the help of UNTied experts, and is now happily in a relationship. She’s even founded her own company: Ski Souls, a travel company that hosts luxury group ski and snowboard trips for solo travelers.

“Meeting other women in the same situation I was in opened my eyes to the fact that I didn’t have to be in misery by myself,” says Brattke. “It was life-changing.”