



I'm a twentysomething divorcée

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I am a 29-year-old divorcée. The first in my family's up-and-coming generation to experience the painful reality of marital breakdown.

Wed at the age of 27, I had not planned on being counted among those who experience the cold, hard reality of marriage dissolving into nothingness.

But that's exactly what happened. Less than nine months after wedded bliss, I found myself in a vacant apartment with nothing but a suitcase, a leaky air mattress and an itchy ring finger. While I was the one to move out of our apartment, it was my husband who wanted out of our marriage.

It wasn't supposed to end this way. It wasn't supposed to end at all. Divorce was something that happened to other people. Older people. They may not have gotten it right, but we were in love! We were different! Or so I had hoped.

But there I was, standing alone on the courthouse steps, holding a document declaring my failed marriage to the world on the date of our second anniversary. Unlike being single, divorced was a label I could never shake.

In the beginning, I reviled the word. It turned my stomach and my appetite. Its dark cloud hung over me on first dates and family holidays. It took everything I had to force out a sound – any sound – when someone politely asked after my husband.

I tried but failed to find myself reflected in the scores of self-help books and recovery groups. It was a fruitless search that made me feel even more isolated, an anomaly on a landscape dotted by forty- and fiftysomething women and men.

Finding no suitable guide on this journey, I became my own. I appointed myself the ambassador of young divorce. I talked to any person who would listen, and it was through talking about my experience that everything changed.

I was at a nightclub watching a live band when a friend caught sight of me from across the room. Only weeks earlier, I had shared the details of my then-pending divorce with her.

An unfamiliar woman shadowed her approach. As we made our introductions, it became clear we shared common ground – this young woman was divorcing, too.

We connected immediately, exchanging stories about DIY divorce, an option for those with fewer complications – no kids, no property, no contest – and less money. And we resolved to keep in touch, to maintain that connection.

As time went on I made similar discoveries, uncovering what seemed like an insiders' club of young and divorced women and men.

We exchanged stories of best-laid plans and solemn promises that were, for better or worse, abandoned. Stories that remained untold until our shared experience was established.

It made me realize that no matter how common it may be for young or old, divorce is not frequently or openly discussed.

Weddings are all gilded invitations and grand pronouncements. Divorces are whispers behind closed doors and silent, sympathetic looks.

As young people, we shouldn't be afraid to admit we were once married. It doesn't hold us back. It isn't baggage, nor should it be.

It's an affirmation of our courage to love fiercely and without condition. To commit to another person in a world where so many have been unwilling or unable. Or to admit you made a mistake.

Divorce is something that happens to the best of us. There is no simple answer as to why things don't work out. All you can do is move forward.

My wedding ring still sits in a box on my dresser, as bright and shiny as the promise it once held in my life. As bittersweet as the memory might be, there's something pure about keeping it.

Now, when I put it on my finger, it feels different. Because I'm different.

I lived through what is probably one of the most painful experiences of my young life: the realization that I was wrong about "forever."

There have been bad times: Waking up and forgetting things are different, only to have the moment of realization descend like an iron curtain.

But there have also been great times: The rebirth of dreams of living and working overseas. The recovery of purpose and identity. The realization that I can reinvent myself any way I want as I find my place in the world.

These moments have been so precious, I would experience the joy, the hardship and the pain all over again.

I am divorced. I am no longer afraid of that label. In fact, I'm proud of myself, of who I've become and how far I've come. I'm so much stronger now.

My cousin is getting married this summer. I can't wait for her wedding. I welcome their happiness, their promise of a long and happy life together, with open arms.

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