



Getting

Over It!

Wisdom
for
Divorced
Parents

Len Stauffenger

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GETTING OVER IT



Chapter 1

My Story

“When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us.”

~ Helen Keller

About fifteen years ago, my little family hit a bump in the road. A big bump. You could say one of the wheels fell off. Without warning, my wife wanted out of our marriage.

That period of time was precarious for my children and me. I was soon to become a single dad raising two young girls on my own. Our world had been turned upside down, and the future looked pretty scary.

Fortunately, the system I began to use from what I learned during those long, dark days in the beginning

worked out great for my kids and me. Now, I want to tell you how it can work for you, too.

Raising my daughters was the most important job I'll ever have. They are now young adults and my job is more that of a consultant. I've got everything I need. My kids are happy and healthy, and they are everything I had hoped for. I have enough money and things. So what's next in my life?

Did you ever do anything good for someone else? It makes you feel good, doesn't it? Well, that's why I'm writing this book. This story of how I became free has been in my head for ten years or more because I knew I had a formula that worked. It will help you and your children, even though I don't know you. My hope is that you learn what I learned, only much faster.

Looking back, I can see that I made some good choices. I made mistakes, but I also did some things right. Although raising my children was the hardest job I'll ever have, it was also the most rewarding. It was all worth it many times over. I want to share with you what worked. So here is my story.

The Initial Shock

This is the story of how I became free. It was the summer of 1992, and I was planning to take my wife out to the nicest restaurant in town to celebrate our tenth anniversary. We had two beautiful daughters, who at the time were about six and eight years old. It was one of those hot, summer days when life feels hectic and stressful. We had no air conditioning – just a bunch of crazy little kids running through the house.

But I've always been an optimist, and I think a day filled with laughing kids is normal. I was thinking about making dinner reservations at the expensive restaurant that I really couldn't afford, when my wife said, "Sit down. We have to talk."

I could see from the look on her face that this was something serious. She looked me in the eye and asked, "Are you happy?"

No one ever accused me of being a genius, but I knew this wasn't good. I told her, "I'd like to be a millionaire and have my own harem; but all things considered, this is about what I expect out of life at this stage of the game."

Then it got more stressful. She said, “I’m not happy.”

To be honest, I wasn’t really surprised. I knew she wasn’t happy. I knew she hadn’t been happy. I just didn’t know for how long. I asked her if she wanted a divorce and she said, “Absolutely not. You’re the only person in the whole world who has ever loved me, including my parents.”

Now, I’m going to shorten the story up for you because for the next six months or so she continued to be not happy, but did not want a divorce. There was never an explanation about what she was not happy about. However, when I would press her, she would only say, “You’re a good husband and a great father. I’m just not happy.”

The problem was, there was never anything I could fix. Nothing like, “You drink too much,” or “You play too much golf.” That was hard for me because I’m a fixer. I was brought up that way. Identify the problem and then go after it and solve it. But, in this case, there was no way to identify the problem. There was nothing to fix. How you do make someone happy?

Looking For A Pattern

In hindsight, I don't think she was ever happy. I missed seeing that because I met her in college, and let's face it, in college there are no jobs, no dirty diapers, no bills to pay; in short, there's no stress beyond getting good grades.

Her unhappiness was not a surprise because for years she hadn't been happy. But her unhappiness had always been focused on other people – she didn't have any friends, or she hated her friends, or she was mad at her parents, or she hated her sister, or she hated her part-time job, etc. I was always the one good thing in her life.

But I'm not completely stupid, and eventually I saw the pattern. In short, nothing ever met her expectations, and I started to wonder when I would be in that category, too. I suppose I should have seen it coming. I suppose I did see it coming, but denied it. It's awfully hard to admit to painful issues when you have two little kids who might be affected. My approach was to always make it better. Just keep beating your head against the wall, and one day you'll knock the wall down.

Change of Plans

For those six months, life was hell. She didn't want a divorce, but she wasn't happy. Eventually, I realized that I really wouldn't mind being free from her. In fact, I eventually saw how great that would be! But I was terrified for my children. What would happen to my little girls? At six and eight years old, you're pretty damn vulnerable. What harm might come to them if we split up?

By this time, in my mind, it was about *when* we split not *if*, and my imagination was running wild. What if she remarries and tries to take them to another state and I only see them twice a year? I didn't think I could survive that. Or worse, what would it do to them? I was a very hands-on dad. When I came home from work, I took over. I played games with them, read them bedtime stories, and tucked them in every night.

Finally, after six months of unhappiness, she said she wanted a divorce. She never did really give me a valid reason. She just stood in our kitchen and screamed at me, "I want out of this marriage now!"

So there you have it. I was 33 years old. I was the father of two beautiful, healthy kids. I owned a house in the suburbs, and was looking forward to a bright future. Ooops! Change of plans. Hey, if somebody wants out, they're out! What could I do?

I accepted her decision. I told her she could have all of our things, but I wanted the kids. I had one goal at this point – to raise my two daughters so they would be happy and healthy. I knew that what we decided at that point would have an impact on my girls their entire lives. A pretty heavy thought.

Feeling Like a Failure

Before I finish that part of our divorce story, I want to give you a little side note so you know I understand what you're going through. For many months, maybe even a year or two after our divorce, I felt empty. I felt like a complete failure. My parents have been married for over 50 years and theirs is a happy marriage. They really do like, as well as love, each other. I have two brothers who are both happily married to terrific women. In a sense, you could say their marriages mirror my parent's union – they like and love each other and have

happy home lives. I also have relatives who are happily married.

Some of the people in my family refer to me as “The Smart One” because I was the first member of the family to go to college. So here I was, “The Smart One,” a complete and utter failure at the most important job of my life. At least, that’s the way I thought about myself at the time.

At the age of 33, I gave my wife my house and everything in it and I moved into a small, two-bedroom apartment. I bought some cheap furniture; I was driving a leased Pontiac Grand-Am; I had no bank accounts or assets. I had \$18,000 in debt (credit card bills of \$8,000 and my student loan of \$10,000). And yet, I was full of joy, because I no longer had to live with an unhappy person, and I knew the kids were going to be in my life.

Setting Us Free

We got our divorce and agreed that the kids would live with each of us a month at a time, alternating back and forth between her house and my apartment. That agreement lasted for about a year, when the girls said they wanted to live with me all summer and just go

back and forth during the school year. My ex didn't like that, but she went along with it.

The next year, the girls said they wanted to live with Dad all spring and all summer and that they'd go back and forth in the winter. The ex really didn't like that.

We never went to court and battled over it, but she put a lot of pressure on the kids and told them she would disown them. That's a terrible thing to say to your ten-year-old.

I'm not going to tell you my ex and I are friends. We're not. I'm grateful to her for having given me two wonderful children who will be a part of me for eternity. I hold no animosity toward her, any hatred or anger. I just set her free. And that set me free. I believe it also set our daughters free. Freedom is the starting point.