

“When someone shows you who they are – believe them.”

Heather S.

When I finally decided to get a divorce, after months, even years of agonizing about it, I found myself swimming in a sea of anxiety, disappointment and sadness – and at last, relief and hope. However, unlike my usual boot-strap dogged determination to “handle this,” I quickly understood I needed expert assistance.

I knew I was likely in for a fight from my spouse. Ours had been his third marriage, and in his mind, the two before had not ended particularly well for him. He had been “unjustly victimized” by both, he’d told me many times over the years. I expected that this time around, he had no intention of falling “victim” to a departing wife again. I simply wanted a fair settlement, but his sense of “fairness” had always been far from mine. More than a decade of marriage had taught me a lot about how this guy viewed the world and battled with his adversaries. So, I put my energies into getting smart about this divorce and preparing for the worse he could throw at me.

In some ways, it was how I had learned to deal with him in our relationship. It seemed sometimes like I was always getting ready for what came next: an almost a continual flow of negative digs which he claimed were mostly teases -- disdain for something I liked, veiled criticism for not doing something he thought I should do, scowls or glares when I said something he disapproved of . I found myself feeling off balance a lot of the time.

My first step was to secure an experienced, board certified divorce attorney. I knew little about divorce law and would need to rely heavily on a pro who could stand up to his potential antics. Trey Yates was personally referred to me by a friend and came with other recommendations. He listened intently to me with concern and empathy. I immediately felt reassured that I was in good hands. He advised me to begin pulling all my financial records together as he gave me a detailed introductory packet of forms and materials on the divorce process.

I soon learned that while I had secured expert legal advice, it would be important for me to get fully engaged with my team. I was the one most intimately acquainted with all the details of our finances. It made sense – both financially and practically – for me to do my homework and get Trey’s team everything they needed to protect me and secure a fair settlement. This was no time to melt into a puddle of emotions. I needed to be fully present, as if my life depended on it. And quite literally, it did, at least financially. I also had my own business to run. I decided to set aside time for my emotional response to the divorce – take a few minutes here and there to allow myself to fully feel the impact of this life change and to grieve the loss. I also turned to God and renewed my spiritual commitment to listen to that small still voice within that I had been ignoring for many years. Learning to embrace the relief, sense of hope and my inner happiness was also part of this transition.

I spent many hours journaling my thoughts, and releasing my frustration and anger over a failed relationship. “How did I get to this place after such a seemingly good beginning,” I asked myself. Yet, as I looked back, I recalled many red flags along the way signaling trouble ahead. Twice I broke up with him before we married. But, he would make excuses for his behavior and I let

myself believe him. Despite the red flags, he had a number of good qualities I admired. At the time, I chose to focus on those attributes and not the serious shortcomings that eventually proved to be insurmountable. Those shortcomings bubbled up more and more frequently as the years went by. I worked hard to ignore or rationalize them away all in the name of “accommodating, compromising and going along for the sake of the marriage,” as I am sure many other wives do.

I’ve always considered myself a pretty strong and independent woman. I think most of my friends see me the same way. Yet, gradually over the years, I had relinquished much of my voice in this marriage, deferring to his, to keep the peace, avoid confrontation and often because he had very strong feelings about things and I didn’t. Often, he was passive aggressive, seemingly agreeing with me only to thwart the outcome using some indirect way to prove me wrong, or find an excuse not to do something. When I did take a stand on something, there was usually hell to pay. This interaction progressively beat me down to the point where I found myself striving to avoid any confrontation with him whatsoever. I began to proactively take steps to make sure I didn’t piss him off or set off a nasty response, patronizing comment or his relentless stonewalling that seemed to be going my way but ultimately led nowhere.

This was my second marriage and I did not want to “fail” again. I really wanted to make it work. Yet ultimately, I discovered I was doing all the compromising – sacrificing my wants and needs for his, time and time again.

I finally got fed up. I’d reaching a tipping point of frustration with his constant bullying and intimidation posturing to control. (I read a few good books on *narcissism* during this time and it was like a light went off in my head. Suddenly I understood, but could no longer excuse, that much of his behavior was based in his tumultuous childhood and his lack of self esteem.) I woke up to the fact that this was a form of spousal abuse. This was not love. This was not a healthy marriage relationship. It was never going to work for me, no matter how hard I tried, and I wanted out.

A key life lesson for me in all this comes from one of Oprah’s mentors, author and poet, Mayou Angelo who told her once, “When someone shows you who they are – believe them.”

I also discovered that when a woman, or a man for that matter, is experiencing something as emotional, important and life-changing as divorce, even the strongest among us needs support. Thank God Trey and his team was there for me making sure the legal side of my divorce was handled well. Trey even suggested I consider consulting a certified divorce financial analyst to answer my questions regarding the financial aspects of my divorce. At his recommendation, I engaged Patricia Barrett, CDFA, which turned out to be extremely helpful to me in structuring my final divorce settlement. She accompanied Trey and myself in mediation and helped us evaluate the short- and long-term impact of each settlement proposal in real time, using a spreadsheet process. Seeing that bottom-line figure with each offer helped me make informed choices about my financial future during a very emotional and exhausting time. Looking back, I can only imagine how difficult it would have been without their help.