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Margot Swann: A Different Approach to Divorce



It's been 18 years since Margot Swann's life was turned upside down. It was the day after Thanksgiving, and her husband of 20 years came to her and told her that he did not want to be married anymore. However, for the sake of the children, he would not move out of the house until the day after Christmas. From that moment on, she experienced every expected emotion—shock, anger, confusion and fear. And even though she couldn't see it then, she recognizes something now.

"He actually handled everything in a mature way, and he was very kind in those initial stages," she says. "In the time before he left, he allowed me to have what I now call 'the exit interviews.' He allowed us to have a conversation about what happened, and he listened

to me very respectfully. But we were not good for each other anymore, and it was becoming toxic. So he made the decision to leave."

Since Margot had never been through a divorce before, she had no idea how to handle the legal side of the situation. She had not worked outside of the house for many years, as she helped raise her stepdaughter and the son she and her husband had together. And her concern was that, as a lawyer, her now-ex could make the process very difficult for her financially, especially since her first lawyer mishandled the negotiations and she simply did not understand all of the numbers. Fortunately, she found people to turn to for legal and financial advice. In addition, she observes, "[My husband] could have taken a very adversarial stance and just crushed me. But he's an honorable man and he did the honorable thing—he took the high road." It took more than three years to finalize the divorce, but in the end, the former couple came to a very amicable deal that involved an innovative approach to handling their assets. And Margot followed her former husband's lead in how she dealt with the circumstances of their separation.

"I got a good support system put up around me, and I found outlets that would allow me to get the fear and anger out so I wouldn't direct it at him," she explains. "I saw a therapist and joined a support group that met on Friday nights at church. I screamed in the shower. My brother, who is a businessman, let me wail to him, and it helped that he really listened to me instead of just telling me what to do. I realized that directing the anger at my former husband was not going to do me any good. I had to learn to separate my emotions from the business side of the situation—they were two different things, and they needed to be tended to separately. It took several months, but I was able to be respectful of him as well."

And with their children in mind, they managed to form a unique post-divorce bond.

"We've worked hard to approach the situation with integrity and think about the children. When it came to our son, I realized that my former husband was the only other

person in the world who loves him as much as I do, and we could talk about that. And it's wonderful that we can do that."

"You always have to do the next right thing, and you can never badmouth the other parent," she continues. "And when you do the next right thing for yourself and the people around you, you will reap the benefits over the years." That perspective has paved the way to spending time together as a family, including holidays and special occasions.

In fact, Margot's divorce opened the door to many opportunities that she never expected. Because of lessons learned through her divorce, she founded Visions Anew: The Divorce Resource for Women, which offers a wide array of support to divorcing or newly divorced women, including retreats, educational materials about all of the legal issues involved in a divorce and more. And because Margot is friendly with her former husband, his now-wife talks to people about the organization and the great work it's doing.

What's more, after a lot of soul searching and healing, Margot found love again and has been happily married for 10 years. And when she and her current husband are in the same room with her former husband and his wife, it's very pleasant and drama-free. "I realized that we love the same people, so we should be comfortable with each other," Margot says. It may sound like an unusual approach to marriage and divorce, but Margot would not have it any other way. "In many ways, I was fortunate," she reveals. "I became more mature through this experience."