

One day after four years of marriage in Upstate NY, my husband got a call from his best friend that their friend from high school was dying of lymphoma. I had never met the friend. In our entire marriage all I knew about this friend was that he had sent Jon a dead skunk in college as a prank. Since we would be visiting there for the weekend, I thought we might take the time to visit a nearby well known art museum. I couldn't imagine sitting in the hospital waiting room for days on end without a break. Jon was disgusted and very angry with me, saying I was shallow, unfeeling, and self absorbed for wanting to visit the art museum to amuse myself when his friend was dying. Furious, he threw some stuff in a bag and travelled the five hour drive alone in our shared car. I was distraught and felt abandoned and very worried. He had made me feel guilty again. I spent the evening crying. I didn't realize how much that even would color the rest of our marriage, Jon's failure to understand my point of view and reluctance to handle life's hard times together ultimately led him to walk out on me when we moved so that I could take my first job in Atlanta after three years of substitute teaching in NY. He stayed behind in Syracuse, insisting "unlike me, I need to disconnect from NY and say good-bye to friends a family". He actually grew more and more distant to me and more intimate with the group of old friends from high school (happily, his skunk-mailing friend had lived and against all odds was living a normal life in remission). He returned to life just as jaunty as ever, daring Jon on his last day in Syracuse before his move to Atlanta to streak naked down a city residential street past a college house party wearing only a cape to hide his shame. Though like the dead skunk prank, it could be construed as "funny", as an elementary level teacher, I was absolutely flabbergasted that he would risk being arrested for indecent exposure when I had just started my first job. More to the point, he

did not understand my disapproval and saw it as control and thus abuse. He visited Atlanta for Labor Day weekend, prolonging his move to Atlanta for as long as possible. At the end of September, two months into my new job teaching K-5 Art in Title I schools on the southside of Atlanta, he finally he joined me with my family's financial and actual moving assistance.

We fought daily and he was not communicative. He withdrew from me physically. I knew something was up when he cancelled a trip we had planned to take for our anniversary and went alone, saying it was too expensive for us to bother. One day I took a love poem to his desk as a gift, hoping for an emotional connection. Instead, I found a moving van receipt sitting on the top shelf near his desk, where he literally spent most of his time. Confronted later, Jon confessed that he wanted to leave me. By the next day he confessed he actually wanted a divorce. I was devastated. I would've done anything to change his mind, to make him stay.

Jon left me two weeks later with \$1000 a month rent to pay for our two bedroom apartment. He did not contact me again and has not since. In agony, I searched for legal counsel. One road led down another. At the free legal aid center in downtown, I found a Visions Anew flyer. A Divorce Retreat sounded like just the thing but expensive to someone paying the bills of a two income family on a beginning teacher's salary. I called the number on the flyer, and talked to Margot herself for about an hour. I was stunned that a CEO of Visions Anew would spend her time with me on the phone and she really seemed to care, gave me some ideas and strategies and gave me hope that no one else had been able to do since the day I knew my marriage was over! It was powerful, and it was just the beginning!

A few weeks later, I was contacted with news that a scholarship had been found for me to attend Visions Anew Divorce Retreat for Valentine's Day weekend. It was just what the doctor ordered. My illusions of what it meant to be a divorced woman were shattered. The women in the room were all gorgeous babes! Every single one understood how I felt even when there was a dramatic age difference. When no one else could, here in this new city with this new job amongst all these strangers, I found big sisters! During that weekend, I was able to find a sense of humor for the first time in three months, and made connections that remain strong today. For the first time I could talk to someone about what was going on, this horrible anxiety and loss and it wasn't a "downer" or a social "don't go there". After weeks of neuroticism and tears, I was cracking up in laughter and making art for the first time since he left. I made friends with the other women there, learned about the divorce process and was surprised at how much useful information emotional and legal support was provided even though my husband had filed for divorce in NY.

Six months later, I told my lawyer exactly what I wanted. Visions Anew has helped me realize how lucky I am to have my health, a new, free, and happier life ahead of me, the freedom to be who I really am and can take control of my own life spiritually, emotionally, and financially. At this point, I am expecting my divorce to be final in a week or two. I feel the most sadness I've ever felt in my life, while at the same time I feel relieved and cautiously hopeful, a profound sense of loss, bitterness and forgiveness, confusion and peace. Visions Anew is a guide through the wilderness that is divorce.