

How we survived *DIVORCE* *AFTER 40*

More and more midlife women are filing for divorce, and for many, it's the best decision they ever made

People in their 40s are the most likely to divorce, according to research. The impact of children, the influence of peers and a change in expectations are just a few of the reasons so many of us find ourselves at a marital crossroads.

And while divorce can be upsetting for everyone, it can sometimes be the start of an exciting new chapter and a journey to finding true happiness. We meet three women who say they have no regrets after throwing all of their post-divorce energy into a new venture...



Brigitte has a pioneering business

'BEING SINGLE AGAIN WAS A HUGE ADJUSTMENT'

Brigitte Bard, 50, is the CEO of BioSure Global.

Like everyone who gets married, when my husband and I wed in August 1994, I thought we'd be together forever. We spent many happy years as a couple and had our three children, now 27, 24 and 22. But as the children got older, my husband and I started to go through spells of not speaking with one another. When our eldest left home for

university, I felt a massive shift in my emotions. I suddenly felt incredibly lonely, despite still having my husband and other two children at home. I realised then that I'd been unhappy for years, but the children had distracted me from my own emotions. I'd become detached from my marriage, and in 2016 I filed for divorce.

Gaining confidence

Around this time, I was growing my own business, BioSure Global, a diagnostic company that had just launched the world's first approved HIV self-test. So I started to put all of my time and energy into that. Soon I realised that for years I'd been living two lives. One where, at work, I was driven and motivated. And another where, at home, I was miserable and no longer laughing.

The day I moved into my new home, a rented four-bedroom house, my first-ever place on my own, I felt liberated. Over the next couple of years my business grew and I also gained so much more confidence doing things outside of my comfort zone, like travelling to developing countries and meeting with heads of states.

Then, while at a rave with friends in March 2017, I met my new partner. And from the start of our relationship, we've been nothing but honest with each other.

When I think about my divorce, I don't have any regrets. Seven years on, BioSure Global remains as groundbreaking as ever, having just launched a unique nasal spray that helps block colds, flu and COVID-19. I'm so much more fulfilled now and that is the most important thing.

* biosure.co.uk





'IT ISN'T SOMETHING TO BE ASHAMED OF'

Amanda Stecker, 55, is the founder of Unique Cotswold Cottages and Holiday Letology.

It wasn't a decision either of us took lightly. My husband and I had been married for 13 years and had three children together, then 10, eight and seven. But in 2015, we knew we were better off apart and we decided to divorce. Having three children so close in age had put a strain on our relationship. He worked long hours to support us and I felt lonely and stressed, juggling the kids with my part-time job as a marketing consultant. We spent little time together as a couple, had very different parenting styles, and felt

'I took time to think about what I wanted'



Amanda has become a pro at property

that it was better if we separated.

Once the divorce was finalised, I took time to think about what I wanted to do. I needed a decent income for me and my children, but I also wanted flexibility so I'd be around for them, so working for myself felt like an ideal solution. I'd always had an interest in property so, with some equity from a flat I'd bought in my 20s, I invested in property in the Cotswolds. In 2018, I bought The Loft, a unique, romantic apartment in Stow-on-the-Wold, followed by the charming Little Gem Cottage in Bourton-on-the-Water. Within five years, I'd bought and refurbished five luxury holiday cottages.

Empowering achievement

I was amazed at how everything took off so quickly and, with my confidence growing, in 2020 I set up another business, coaching other property investors on how to create a successful short-term rental business. In 2021, Unique Cotswold Cottages won a prestigious award as the Best Rural Start Up Business for the South West Region.

Creating a comfortable financial future has been hard work, but empowering. I wouldn't wish divorce on anyone, but if your marriage isn't salvageable, it's nothing to feel ashamed of. In fact, it really can be the making of you. I'm living proof of that.

* uniquecotswoldcottages.co.uk and holidayletology.com



'IT WAS THE PERFECT TIME TO DO SOMETHING FOR MYSELF'

Catherine Harrison, 51, is the founder of Bee-Assisted.

The day my divorce was finalised, in August 2017, I felt a mixture of emotions. I was relieved and excited that I could finally begin a new chapter of my life, but a huge part of me felt scared, too, that I was starting this chapter alone. I'd already moved out of the home I shared with my husband and into my own, smaller house with our two sons, then 15 and 13, and I'd just started a new job as a personal assistant.

My husband and I had been married for 17 years, so there were so many big changes to get used to, it was all a bit overwhelming.

Taking a chance

Then, in 2020, I was made redundant because of the pandemic. I decided to take the opportunity to do something that I never would have had the confidence to do years ago. I set up my own virtual PA business called Bee-Assisted. I had no money, just a laptop and an idea, but I created my own website and began advertising my services online. I was determined to make it a success. By now my boys were 18 and 16, so they no longer needed me as much. This was the perfect time to do something for myself.

Slowly, I began taking on more and more clients



'Seeing the business grow made me so happy'

and Bee-Assisted really took off. I found myself enjoying my work, too, and seeing the business grow made me so happy. Now, three years on, I have a team of associates and a full client list, and I recently won an award for the Best VA Company in the Central Region, as well as being nominated for two awards in next year's PA Forum UK Awards. I couldn't be more proud of what I've achieved.

I'm even in a new relationship now, having met my partner through a Facebook support group I set up for positivity and self-esteem. Through that group I've also met lots of women going through divorces. Some people seem to lose themselves in their marriages and it isn't until they are on the other side that they really start to shine. I know, in my case, that's certainly true.

* bee-assisted.com

Catherine created a buzz

