

inHoudsoPgavE

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inTro

The while I am writing in my study, my gaze wanders outside. To the garden of the house where I live with my two daughters, and with their father Daan. He and I haven't been lovers for years, but as a family we make a nice little club. Our house consists of three layers. My apartment, the mom house, is on the first floor. On the second floor is the club house, and on the second floor is the dad house. My kitchen in the mom house is full of thrift store junk. Daan's in the dad house is sleek and green, not a fingerprint to be seen on his cabinet doors. In our three-in-one house, we can do anything we want together, but we don't have to. And it turns out: we often have such a good time that we have dinner together or that at the end of the day, Daan and I are still stopping in for a drink together.

For us, this works well. It did take blood, sweat and tears before we arrived at this fine solution. A relationship therapist once pityingly said to me that I chose the black slope because I wanted to reshape the love between Daan and me. True, it's not easy. If anyone knows the way to the blue slope, I'd love to hear it. But a classic divorce isn't easy either, and staying in a relationship that doesn't make you happy certainly isn't. And between you and me: the black slope experience is more intense, the view is more beautiful and the snow is better.


There are a hundred other ways you can transform your relationship into a new form that you are happy with again. I believe in "keep the good, ditch the bad. That's what this book is about. I begrudge you an easier road, which is why I'm sharing with you what helped me so you don't have to reinvent the wheel.

DIVIDE OR STAY, OR ANOTHER WAY

This book is for you if you find that your relationship is no longer working in its current form, despite the love or friendship that remains. But you don't want to separate, nor do you want to stay. There's a lot of good too, and it's never going to be perfect, you know that. You wish your children a solid home base. The responsibility you entered into together weighs heavily on you. You see around you that divorces rarely work out well for everyone involved, and you don't want that. Because you do not only want the best solution for yourself, but also for your children and partner. Some people around you struggle on in a difficult marriage, without ever getting better. You don't want that at all. But what then?

Kurt Vonnegut wrote that we expect things from a partner for which we used to need a whole village. With one you can talk, with another you can laugh, with yet another you have insane sex, then there is someone you can always count on, and yet another is good with children. In any case, I think it is a great achievement that you have children and are a solid home base together. *Never change a winning team.* You have a lot to offer each other, and it is normal that it is not enough (anymore).

There is more than divorce or stay: you can transform your relationship in your own way. *Keep the good, ditch the bad.* Together you can find a solution for the things you can't give to each other (anymore). That's what this book is about: how to find a new form for your relationship that is good for all of you.



*Keep the good, ditch the bad, and find
a solution for what you are missing.*

NO STANDARD SOLUTION

I don't have a standard solution for you; after all, we are all different. So I'm not going to tell you what the best form of relationship is for you. But I will give you examples of what works for me and for others. I share psychological insights with you and ask you questions that will help you along the way. While reading this book you will form a vision of how you want your relationship to be. Your relationship changes over time and you adapt it to developments in your life. When your children are older and out of the house, things will be different again. No one can predict the future. Once you may have thought that you would grow old and happy together, and yet things turned out differently. Life is not fixable. But the part of your life that you do have influence over, you can shape as well as you can.

I do not hold the truth. I wrote this book because I needed it myself, and because I am not the only one. So don't expect absolute truths from me. Nor am I an enlightened being. I share with you what I have to share, and you take from it what works for you. Agreed?

OPBOUW

For hours I puzzled with post-its on my study door. How do I get this story to make sense in a book? Because in your life it's all mixed up. Love doesn't fit into a rigid structure. You and I know that love is one big tangle of hopes, dreams, old patterns and misunderstandings. So your process does not parallel this book, and that's okay. I do hope the structure helps you untangle your thoughts and take steps toward a new relationship that fits.

This intro is followed by eight more chapters, each with its own theme. We begin in Chapter 1 with the expectations you have about relationships, and how they can get in your way. In Chapter 2, you do a relationship assessment. How bad are things really? Is it worth reshaping your relationship or would you be better off getting out of there? Chapter 3 is about saying goodbye, time to ditch some things (or your entire relationship). When I write it down like this, it sounds a lot less painful than it is. We talk about sadness, anger, fear, and also a little bit of hope. Hope that things will get better, and rightfully so. In the meantime, you have gotten a picture of what you want to quit and what you will continue with. But before you are ready for a new start, it is important that you close the old one properly. We talk about that in Chapter 4. Only then is it really time for a new start, in chapter 5. Chapter 6 is about how you can be a good partner. A better relationship starts with yourself: just because you can't change someone else. In chapter 7, you determine how you will treat each other from now on. Your relationship has changed, so has the way you relate to each other. I give you some tips along the way. And then you'll have finished the book. I don't leave you empty-handed, in the last chapter I think with you about your next steps. You don't have to do it alone, I walk with you.

That is the main thrust of the book. Furthermore, each chapter consists of three parts: personal stories and interviews, concrete applicable advice and finally practical things you can do to transform your relationship. To create this book, I spoke with several people about their experiences. Their names are -for privacy reasons- fictitious.

what do you do with this book

Insight is nice, but worthless without action. Your life will be so much more beautiful if you get serious about this book, and I grant you that. So I ask you: what will you do with what you read? How will you actually make your relationship more fitting? And when are you going to do that? I hope you will work step by step towards a relationship where you feel: this is good, we all feel better. A relation in which you are given space and in which you can continue to grow together in harmony. Chances are that your story will end differently than the Disney fairytale you might have hoped for. Whatever it will be: we go for a good and happy ending, in a relation that you can live with happily ever after.

In conclusion. As far as I'm concerned, this is more of a do-book than a read-book, so grab a notebook and your calendar. Can you plan concrete actions right away. Put it on!