

## **And They Lived Happily Ever After...NOT!**

*A true story...*

So, I am a romantic and programmed by my family and generation to travel the journey of the family business plan: obtaining that education, true love, children (who will continue the cycle) and live happily ever after. I would meet my true soul mate, fall in love and get married. Then, we would have children and create our family nirvana. The walls of our home, the safe haven for my family from the harsh realities of the world—our fortress. We would grow into an even larger family unit, husband and wife and children (and eventually their spouses) and their children, and so on, building a legacy of love and inspiration... and we would live happily ever after...ummmm...

It has been five years now since the breakdown of my union. The vulnerability of the situation left me horrified and nauseated. My brain and body literally shut down. Any efforts made to save it failed, mainly because of the continuous, never ending lies from the nether regions of the mind of the ex...but I digress. It made me sick to know that my children will, AND HAVE, experienced great pain and the greatest tolls as a result of a family breakdown.

There is no way to justify the destruction of my family but one can minimize the collateral damage resulting therefrom. As an old saying goes, "you can't begin again; but you can make a new beginning", but how?

I wish I had known about the Collaborative Family Law process when this happened to me. The process was still evolving in Victoria and was not as well-known as a viable option in dealing with family breakdown. The new Family Law Act in British Columbia, which came into effect on March 18, 2013 specifically recognizes this process which is a considerate, supportive process, that allows spouses to retain self-respect and control, and minimize the hurt to families, with or without children.

The Collaborative Law Process involves lawyers who are specially trained in this area along with other helping professionals, such as coaches, child specialists and financial specialists. I would have found this process extremely helpful because, at the time, I surfed the internet for these various people to obtain necessary information, searching for people who would and could support me during this transition in my life. It was, to say the least, a frustrating and arduous task. The most hurtful thing about this journey was having to tell my story over and over again and then feeling like I was reliving it all over again. It made me lose my motivation to resolve the issues I needed to resolve before it was too late.

If I had used the Collaborative process, I would have had a much better chance to minimize the emotional damage to my children, to preserve their respect, their development and resulting choices and to maintain my own self-dignity. - MJW