

Why I Wrote

Co-Parenting from the Inside Out: Voices of Moms and Dads

Picture this: you just separated from the other parent of your children. The foundation of your life has crumbled, and you face a lifetime still connected to the person associated with the most intense sadness, hurt, and anger you have ever felt. That's how co-parenting starts for many. That's how it started for me.

Creating a new life which supported my children and me while surviving tidal waves of emotion was hard and lonely.

I only realized how alone I felt after stumbling on three pages in a book which told of a mother's experience helping her sons take part in their dad's remarriage ceremony. Reassured and comforted, I knew I was not alone.

I read and reread those pages, savouring the nuances of messiness and bittersweet feelings described. It reminded me of our Christmas mornings, when the boys' dad would come to my home so we could all four open gifts by the tree. After presents and breakfast, John and the boys would head off to join his family for Christmas dinner. I was grateful that we could share the ritual of morning gifts, and I knew the boys would have a great time with John's family later. My heart always twisted as I stood waving at the door, "Good-bye – Merry Christmas!"

Getting concrete acknowledgement – proof that others felt as I did – softened something tight and fearful inside me. It helped me accept my situation and feel more optimistic.

I urgently wanted more stories, This was only a taste of others' experiences. What happened inside parents as they navigated this difficult passage? How did they

think, feel, and make decisions? I decided it would be my job to find those stories and record them to support other co-parents.

Armed with a set of interview questions gleaned from my own social psychology training and help from a psychologist, I put the word out that I was seeking co-parents to talk to.

Each interview was a revelation. I had found my own experience difficult; listening deeply to what others had encountered made my heart ache. Co-parents whose children had special needs and those in protracted high-conflict divorces often faced daunting long-term struggles. Yet they persisted and grew, and brought about better outcomes for their families than might otherwise have happened.

A few interviews left me lighter. These co-parents' early acceptance of what was happening helped them find alternatives which satisfied both them and their exes.

Growth was the thread that offered hope as I listened to the forty-two moms and dads. Over and over, through turbulence, courage, and grief I heard, I'm a stronger, more compassionate person than before and that makes me a better parent.

Those words would have sustained me as an anxious co-parent; I hope my book will support those doing that same important work.