

MAGAZINE

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Gail

Steve

Gail's mum

Gail's dad

Son Jamie



How DIVORCE shatters the whole FAMILY

GAIL Church and Steve Waddup divorced in 2006 after seven years' marriage. In this fascinating testimony, they, their ten-year-old son Jamie and Gail's parents explain the effect it's had. First to speak is Gail, 40, a will writer from Bicester, Oxfordshire. She lives with her second husband, John, 40, a marine engineer, and her son, Jamie.

STEVE and I met at school in Bicester, and he asked me out when I was 18 and he was 21. He was funny, friendly and outgoing. I was serious, studious and ambitious. Our personalities seemed to complement each other perfectly and we fell in love. A few months later we moved in together, and in 1998 we had a lovely church wedding. Three years later we were thrilled when I fell pregnant; Jamie was born in December 2001. But, sadly, parenthood changed our marriage almost instantly. Steve was reluctant to change nappies or do bath-times, and within weeks I grew resentful. But I was too exhausted to confront him. I was the breadwinner, working as a financial advisor and earning £50,000 a year. Steve had a gardening business and earned around £10,000. He felt undermined

So mum and dad split – but what about the others caught in the emotional fall-out?

by my success, and thought I was controlling. I felt I was pulling him along like a bolshy little boy. We never argued: instead we just stopped communicating. In turn, the physical side of our relationship broke down, and Steve started going out alone. I was angry, but I didn't confront him because I had enough on my plate. Within a couple of years I'd fallen out of love with Steve but I remained in denial. It was easier to ignore my feelings than deal with them. We were in the garden one afternoon in the summer of 2005 when Steve told me the marriage wasn't working – his words were, at once, expected and shocking. He thought we should call it a day, that it was time to divorce. I was so stunned I could barely speak. Jamie and I had become a unit, and I couldn't stand the thought of putting his future in jeopardy. But at the back of my mind I knew that if we were to split it would be better we did it now, while he was only four, than in a few years time when he was old enough to understand more. Still, at this stage, these thoughts were too new to tell Steve, especially given my state of shock. I drove to my parents and Steve moved out that weekend while I was away. We didn't talk much at all for a few weeks. We both needed time for our decision to sink in. Then, about a month later, Steve was back at our kitchen table and we were hammering out custody arrangements. Steve said his working hours meant he couldn't look after Jamie during the week – it was a struggle to get him to commit to more than one weekend night a week. 'Well,

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f that's the best you can do then so be it,' I eventually snapped. Jamie would also spend one evening at Steve's parents'. The conversation was terse and slightly surreal. We didn't go to court though: it was still relatively amicable.

But six months later, my emotions kicked in, and I became very angry, constantly analysing what went wrong and driving myself mad with what ifs'. Yet Steve and I were long past the stage of being able to discuss our problems.

For a few months after the split Jamie was a bit clingier too. He would hold on to my leg when I dropped him at nursery before work and wail 'Don't go, Mummy'.

We filed for divorce in August 2006. I cited irreconcilable differences and Steve's unreasonable behaviour, for distancing himself from the family, and I bought Steve out of the house.

Things were frosty when Steve came to collect Jamie — especially in the months he was waiting for his share of the house money. We often used his mum's as a pick-up point to limit contact, so Jamie wouldn't witness any arguments.

Steve had rented a room in a shared house nearby and I tried to make the experience seem like an adventure. But Jamie would still say he didn't want to go.

Meanwhile, I was missing companionship and practical help, like someone to take out the bins. Being on the dating scene was hard, so I was incredibly lucky to find love again with John. We'd been childhood sweethearts since meeting at youth club at 15. We made contact again in 2007 through Friends Reunited.

I grew very fond of John, so two months later I introduced him to Jamie as 'Mummy's Special Friend.' Jamie seemed to adapt easily which was a relief. I would have hated the divorce to destroy his earliest memories.

But Steve seemed jealous. He said something about it happening too soon. John moved in with me, and we had a register office wedding in July 2007 six months after we had met again.

This time I have learned the importance of keeping romance alive in a marriage, and we talk more. Luckily, John is devoted to Jamie, who adores him.

Steve has remarried too, and he's become a really good father. He's started seeing Jamie twice a week, and seems to find parenting more rewarding now.

It's ironic that by remarrying a woman who earns more and has a son of her own, he has recreated the scenario he was trying to escape. But I wish him well.

Divorce is tough on all concerned, which is why I co-founded Divorce Buddy last year, an organisation that provides support during and after marriage breakdown.

THE HUSBAND

STEVE WADDUP, 43, from Bicester, owns a furniture shop. He lives with his second wife, Michaela, 40, a management consultant, and her ten-year-old son, Reece.

I TOOK my wedding vows seriously, but as time passed there was nothing to aspire to, no need to impress, and I came to see Gail more as a roommate than my wife.

Gail was happy to stay in and watch television, but I felt we'd settled down too young and I wanted to have the fun I'd missed out on.

I was surprised by how difficult I found being a father.

When the initial euphoria subsided, I felt overwhelmed. I'm a bit of an attention-seeker, and it was hard to feel the limelight had been taken away from me. But I didn't tell Gail: I felt she had enough stress already, I think Gail thought I resented her earning more but I didn't. If anything, I was happy not to be put under that sort of pressure.

The balance of power worked well before Jamie came along but afterwards, Gail seemed increasingly harassed.

We had a great lifestyle, with two European holidays a year and two cars. But by the time Jamie was two, the spark had gone, and our shared love of music and Indian food wasn't enough any more. I started going out on my own — with friends, not with



Wedding day: Steve and Gail with her parents Alun and Lillian

'I was so angry with Steve. He'd had a son with my daughter when inside he was still a child himself'

other women. Inside, I knew the marriage was over, but I was too frightened to admit it. That day in the garden in July 2005, I blurted out: 'We're not happy. We should call it a day. Gail nodded. Neither of us suggested counselling: it had gone beyond that.'

Although I had my failings as a father, I couldn't stand to think of Jamie suffering because of our actions — so much so, that in the immediate aftermath I blocked it out of my mind.

Four weeks later we talked about custody. I felt relief and sadness as I moved into a rented room nearby. I told my mother and father, who were both retired, that I'd decided to end our marriage.

They were upset, and not as supportive as I'd hoped. I felt guilt-ridden. They've been married 45 years: their generation didn't 'do' divorce.

It was only several months later that it hit me that much of my son's upbringing would be spent without me. After Gail met John, it was even harder.

I found it difficult to deal with another man looking after Jamie, and I think I always will. If Jamie is poorly or I've told him off, I'll hear him in his bedroom crying 'Mummy'.

It hurts, but I understand.

I try to make the most of the time I have with my son. We go swimming and to the cinema. Last week we went to the cinema to watch Arthur Christmas. Before Christmas we made paper chains and Christmas cards together, which is something he told me, he'd never have done with his mum.

Luckily Jamie gets on well with Michaela. She and I met on the internet in February 2009. Four months later I introduced her to Jamie — first as a friend, then my girlfriend. He warmed to her immediately, and his relationship with Reece is like that of any sibling

— sometimes they squabble, often they play. I think it was easier for him as his mum had met someone new. When Michaela and I married in April 2010, I moved into her four-bedroom, semi-detached house. We agree that the children come first and we operate well as a family, but we still go out as a couple too.

We have more in common than Gail and I did, and Michaela likes to have fun. Gail and I get on with each other's spouses, and Jamie has four parents who love him.

I felt so guilty about the effect divorce would have on my son. After five years and a lot of adjustments, I'm happy again. I hope Jamie is too.

THE GRANDMOTHER

LILLIAN CLEVERLEY, 70, and her husband Alun, 72, a retired services manager in the Forces, live in Nettleham, Lincolnshire. They have three children: Gillian, 51, an administrator, Graham, 50, a distribution manager, and Gail.

I'D FOUND Steve's happy-go-lucky personality endearing ever since Gail brought him home to meet us. Until five years into their marriage, I thought they were happy.

But when Jamie turned two, I'd call round in the evenings and Steve would be out. I worried about Gail being alone. I didn't discuss it with her — I didn't want her to think I was a fussy mother. Instead, I asked one of her friends to keep an eye out for me.

Then, seemingly out of the blue, Gail turned up on our doorstep with Jamie in July 2005, having driven 127 miles to get here, and announced that she and Steve had separated.

Despite my earlier concerns, I was surprised. In my day, divorce was a dirty word. Alun and I have been married 52 years. I put up with a lot when Alun was in the Forces overseas,

and didn't see him for three months at a time. I often joke to Alun that if we were married in this day and age, we might have divorced. Nowadays, people don't try hard enough. Having said that, Gail made an effort and nobody should stay in an unhappy marriage.

I didn't try to talk her out of it. She would have done her own thing anyway.

It felt as if my world had crumbled. Gail was the first in our family to divorce. Our son Graham did the same soon afterwards. I just wanted to know my children would be happy and settled if anything should happen to Alun and I, but suddenly, they weren't.

We discussed Jamie's welfare but Gail had been the one to look after him anyway, so I didn't think he'd suffer. It's not as if Steve got up when he cried in the night.

Alun and I continued to see Jamie every four to six weeks, when we visited Gail's home, picking him up from school and giving him his tea.

For years I felt angry with Steve. But, like Gail, I'm not one for confrontation. Instead I ignored him. Somehow, the ordeal brought Gail and me closer. We see each other at least every six weeks, and talk on the phone all the time.

I've made an effort to keep in touch with Steve's parents. It's important our family life stays as 'normal' as possible for Jamie's sake, and I think the grandparents on the father's side often suffer more.

I'm happy that Gail has married again. I didn't want her to be alone. She and John are right together, and John is wonderfully supportive of Jamie.

Last year I started talking to Steve again. Before, I went to great lengths to avoid being around when he'd pick Jamie up. For several years, I as good as ignored him. But now, whenever I drop Jamie off at his house, we have a chat. Michaela has a harder attitude than Gail but she's still another big earner while Steve's just plodding along.

But time put paid to our differences, and I decided Steve had suffered enough. Jamie loves his dad, and we love Jamie.

THE GRANDFATHER

ALUN, 72, says:

STEVE didn't ask me for Gail's hand in marriage — it would have been nice, but this generation are different. Walking Gail down the aisle in 1998 was a proud moment: I felt a fatherly urge to see her secure and protected.

Lillian and I are joined at the hip. We go everywhere together, so we found it strange when Steve and Gail started spending time apart. It didn't seem right that she was at home looking after their son alone, but I didn't feel it was my place to interfere.

When Gail and Jamie stayed with us without Steve shortly before they split, we knew there was something wrong. I was worried, but I don't discuss emotions easily, so I tried to help with the practicalities instead.

Lillian and I provided financial support when Gail announced her separation, and we helped her buy Steve's half of their house. But we lost sleep worrying about how she would cope with the unknown chapter in her life.

My instinct was to confront Steve, but I didn't. I didn't like him for what he'd done to her. The worst thing he did — other than leaving Gail — was to have a child when he was still emotionally a child himself and wasn't ready for the responsibility.

A cursory hello when we picked Jamie up from Steve's house was as much as I could manage, but we would never have been rude or belittled him in front of Jamie.

A couple of years later, when Gail had met John and seemed happy again, I told Lillian it was time to forgive Steve. Life's too short to harbour grudges.

THE SON

JAMIE WADDUP, ten, says:

I DON'T remember much about Mum and Dad splitting up. I was five when Mum explained what divorce meant — she said it's what happens when people don't get on any more, and they have to move away from each other.

A few months after they split, Dad found a new girlfriend. Mum was still alone. She explained that Daddy didn't want to stay with Mum because Daddy prefers to stay with someone he met in the pub.

Sometimes it made me sad and I would cry. Sometimes Mum got upset too. I tried to make her feel better by giving her lots of cuddles. Or we watched funny programmes together. We watched a comedy show called Even Stevens. When the man bumped his head on the wall, we both laughed.

Mum's never said anything nasty about Dad to me, but sometimes I think maybe she just wouldn't in case I get upset. I like John. He's not like my dad, but he helps me with homework and reads my Beast Squared book with me.

Dad doesn't say anything about Mum but I think he would like to see me more. Sometimes when my friends are around he lets me stay up until one o'clock in the morning playing computer games. At Mum's house I go to bed at eight o'clock.

I have different toys at Mum and Dad's house and get to do different things with them both. I keep my Scooby Doo truck at my dad's, and I trade computer games with Reece. It's fun having a new brother. We watch Cars together and it feels good having someone my age to talk to — especially because Reece's mum and dad aren't together either so he knows how I feel.

I get away with more at Mum's and told off at my dad's, but only for little things like if I don't shut the door and let the cold in.

I have told my friends, but most of their parents are still together. Sometimes I wish my mum and dad were still together so I could see my dad more.

I like John and Michaela and both my grandmas, who I call Nanny Lincoln and Nanny Oops. I got the name because I call Grandad Grumps, because we joke that he's grumpy, and it sounds almost the same. In lots of ways I'm lucky but I'm not sure if I'll get married myself.

Who knew?

Four in ten children have parents who are divorced or separated, recent figures reveal

IF YOU HAVE ONLY ... 5 MINUTES

Give your skin a boost for New Year's Eve. Mix liquid bronzer with body cream and massage around the arms and décolletage. It will smooth skin, give it an instant glow and won't smell like fake tan!