

TDS S6 E7

[00:00:00] **Intro:** Aurra.....

[00:00:04] **Samantha Baines:** I am joined by Ben Heldfond. and Nikki DeBartolo. Co-authors, divorced couple and founders of Our Happy Divorce. Welcome to The Divorce Social.

[00:00:17] **Nikki DeBartolo:** Thank you.

[00:00:17] **Ben Heldfond:** Thank you for having us. It's a pleasure to be here

[00:00:19] **Samantha Baines:** Now, you are the first couple. First two people we've ever had on the podcast.

[00:00:27] **Nikki DeBartolo:** Wow.

[00:00:27] **Ben Heldfond:** That's err amazing, and there's a lot of pressure involved in that, but I hope we, uh, are good entree appetizer, I guess.

[00:00:37] **Nikki DeBartolo:** I promise we wont argue

[00:00:39] **Samantha Baines:** Well, yeah, don't fuck it up guys. Cause this is, this is now going to be the mold for everyone else. So I, I'm very interested to talk to you. You are founders of our happy divorce. You are happily, amicably, divorced is this correct.

[00:00:53] **Nikki DeBartolo:** We are, we're actually much happier, divorced than we were married.

[00:00:58] **Ben Heldfond:** The book that we wrote [00:01:00] is entitled our happy divorce and the line is how ending our marriage brought us closer together.

[00:01:06] **Ben Heldfond:** And that's, you know, that's the story of, uh, of 14 years. Being divorced and, you know, putting our son first and, you know, somewhere along the line, I think in the beginning, we definitely faked it, uh, and put on our big boy pants and put our ego aside and showed up. And then somewhere along the line, like I said, uh, it crossed into the making it, and it became authentic and genuine.

[00:01:27] **Ben Heldfond:** And, and you know, today she's my best friend.

[00:01:30] **Nikki DeBartolo:** Aw

[00:01:31] **Ben Heldfond:** Sometimes

[00:01:33] **Ben Heldfond:** Most of the days.

[00:01:34] **Samantha Baines:** That's so nice to hear. I think a lot of listeners will be like, really? I don't believe it. How could these two be amicably, divorced and happy about it? Um, so take me back if you will, to that divorce moment. So Ben, how long ago did you get divorced and what was that kind of breakup moment like for you?

[00:01:56] **Ben Heldfond:** I don't know for every couple, I would imagine it'd be a pretty good bet that, [00:02:00] the divorce doesn't that decision doesn't happen because you had a fight one night at a restaurant, or right. It was it's an accumulation of years of, you know, going back and forth to trying to, you know, uh, resurrect something that maybe wasn't even there.

[00:02:15] **Ben Heldfond:** Um, and for, for us, I had moved out a couple of times and moved back down and we're going to give it another shot. So it was that sort of pre divorce, uh, hell loop, right? Yeah, the dance. And I don't know what it was. I think it was, you know, something that happened that you know, I was gonna move back in again.

[00:02:33] **Ben Heldfond:** And I think I came back and Nicki had, you know, gone away again to LA it was just all this like, stuff that brought up stuff for me. Uh, I was done, you know, that done moment for me. And it was a very traumatic, yeah, go ahead, tell.

[00:02:49] **Nikki DeBartolo:** I came home and there was a ripped up photo of us and his ring next to my sink

[00:02:55] **Ben Heldfond:** in the middle of the ripped up photo.

[00:02:57] **Ben Heldfond:** Wasn't my finest moment, Samantha. I mean, if we're honest,

[00:02:59] **Samantha Baines:** [00:03:00] wow.

[00:03:01] **Nikki DeBartolo:** It's probably something I should have done.

[00:03:02] **Ben Heldfond:** Right.

[00:03:03] **Samantha Baines:** It's very visual way of saying I want to break up.

[00:03:07] **Ben Heldfond:** And so I left the house and you know, that. done moment, and. It wasn't a relief because nothing had been processed. It wasn't, um, it was still all Nicki's fault.

[00:03:20] **Ben Heldfond:** And, uh,

[00:03:21] **Nikki DeBartolo:** and for me it was all his fault.

[00:03:22] **Ben Heldfond:** Right. And there was a lot of finger pointing and, and the first call that I made, which I don't recommend to anybody. That's why we wrote this book to sort of, you know, uh, let people know where I went wrong, where we went wrong and where we went. Right. You know, in the first call that I made.

[00:03:37] **Ben Heldfond:** Was to a friend of mine who was a lawyer. And I said, who's the best divorce lawyer in Tampa, where we live. And he gave me the name and I met with this lawyer and told them what I wanted. You know, I wanted to destroy Nikki. I wanted to, you know, uh, whatever it was. Right. And he was sitting there, nodding his head and said, we could do that.

[00:03:54] **Ben Heldfond:** And yes, you can get that. And I think that's another warning sign for people. If you sit with [00:04:00] a lawyer and they're going to tell you that you can get everything you want, run out of that office. Right. So anyway, so he wrote up this game plan and this whole attack mode and exactly what I wanted from. From Nikki.

[00:04:11] **Ben Heldfond:** Um, and, and it just turned out to me,

[00:04:13] **Nikki DeBartolo:** I always tell him, it was just the same plan he writes for everybody else. They just changed names.

[00:04:18] **Ben Heldfond:** Right. And then charged you with the same amount. And, uh, so anyways, I was on a plane one day and I decided to read it and I got three pages into it. And this thing was like 30 pages. And I had for the first time, in a long time, this moment of clarity, this, you know, this where I could no longer continue to buy my own books.

[00:04:37] **Ben Heldfond:** And it was, uh, and it was mixed with some, my experience growing up as a kid with a really high conflict divorce with my parents. Um, and yet I was still with everything going on and everything I had experienced going to put our son through the same mess and, and so I put it away and then I made my, I got home and I called the lawyer and said, thank you.

[00:04:56] **Ben Heldfond:** But no, thank you. And then my second call was to the person [00:05:00] that should have been my first call. And that was to a therapist and a, you know, I, I worked with a therapist and, uh, you know, work through the emotional side of it. Cause there's, you know, divorce is a business deal. One of the biggest business deals probably people will have in their lives.

[00:05:15] **Ben Heldfond:** And then there's the emotional side of it. And I think what happens is, and what was happening for me is I was putting the emotional, I was making the emotional side of it, which is a Petri dish, which is the worst emotions drive my decisions on the business side of it and that's recipe for disaster.

[00:05:31] **Nikki DeBartolo:** And I think for me, it wasn't quite as long drawn out as Ben's, I was, I've always been a fixer. So my idea is just to fix something, to fix the relationship, to fix this, to, you know, let's figure out how to either make us work. How did you know? So I quickly realized that making us work really wasn't on the table for, for many reasons. It just, we weren't meant to be married together.

[00:05:57] **Nikki DeBartolo:** We weren't meant to be married. [00:06:00] Um, My parents are still married 52 years later. So I didn't grow up the way Ben did. So my idea was how can I keep this child's life as close to the way I grew up as possible? So I kind of just found my therapist, you know, worked with my therapist, but my idea was like, you know what?

[00:06:20] **Nikki DeBartolo:** Let's just let him go. Let him, let him do what he needs to do. And hopefully it's something. Go be a rational human being, come back and come back and want to actually sit down and have conversations that we can have. I mean, granted, I didn't like him. I didn't want to be around him. And you know, our, our divorce started off as everybody else.

[00:06:41] **Nikki DeBartolo:** Like, you know, like a normal divorce. If we started by, you know, bringing the child to bring your son to the front door and not speaking to each other, not looking at each other, just saying goodbye to him, turning around, like everything was very, cold.

[00:06:56] **Ben Heldfond:** Yeah. And like every divorce, I think, especially
[00:07:00] ours has the ingredients of a high conflict divorce.

[00:07:03] **Ben Heldfond:** Right. It's not something that I don't think anybody, you know, because, because of the emotional baggage and emotional garbage, that's mixed up in it. So our started off like everybody else's and luckily. You know, somehow we decided to take a different route.

[00:07:19] **Samantha Baines:** Um, I know it's horrible to say, but I am kind of pleased that y'all started badly too. Cause I was like, really,, it was amicable all the way through. So this is, um, this is, it makes me feel better. So, um, before we delve more into this, I want to go back to this ripped up photo and the ring. Because this is one of definitely the most dramatic ways that I've heard. I mean, there's plenty of dramatic ways to split up, but one of the most visually dramatic ways, um, I've ever heard.

[00:07:51] **Samantha Baines:** So before Nikki, I talked to you about what it was like to see that Ben, what was going through your head when you thought
[00:08:00] w was it, did you want to stage this moment?

[00:08:03] **Ben Heldfond:** I think if anything. This is where the emotional side, you know, it gets the best of it is I wanted to make an impact that was going to hurt Nikki, you know, that's that I want, it was vindictive.

[00:08:17] **Ben Heldfond:** It wasn't meant to be, you know, like the dramatic moment it was as far as like, how can I most hurt Nick? To let her know that this thing's over

[00:08:27] **Samantha Baines:** practically. I'm just really interested in this. Like what photo did you look for a particularly lovely photo to rip up? Like where did you lay the photo in the house?

[00:08:37] **Ben Heldfond:** It was right next to her bathroom sink. I, I don't remember. What exact photo was, but, but I, I assure you that I did look through multiple photos and it's fun. It's interesting that you asked me what photo was and I don't remember, but I do remember looking through the photo album to find one that was, uh, gonna, you know, you know, uh, uh, stab her the
[00:09:00] most.

[00:09:00] **Ben Heldfond:** And, you know, I ripped it perfectly in the middle and I,

[00:09:04] **Nikki DeBartolo:** I love photo albums

[00:09:06] **Ben Heldfond:** right, right. Not, not, I didn't have to scroll through my iPhone. Uh, but you know, I ripped it up and I put the ring right in the, my ring right in the middle of,

[00:09:16] **Nikki DeBartolo:** and I, and I think what he did was calculated most likely. And I think it affected me probably more than him, like hanging up the phone and saying, I've done, you know, I walked in the house and it was like one of those gut wrenching moments where you go, wow.

[00:09:33] **Nikki DeBartolo:** Like, oh shit. Like this is real. This is really happening.

[00:09:36] **Ben Heldfond:** Mission accomplished.

[00:09:37] **Nikki DeBartolo:** Yes. Hey, good job or not

[00:09:40] **Samantha Baines:** Nicki, do you remember what the photo was?

[00:09:43] **Nikki DeBartolo:** I actually think it may have been a photo of the three of us.

[00:09:49] **Ben Heldfond:** With Asher

[00:09:49] **Nikki DeBartolo:** As a baby in it. Oh yeah. So I think it was really like one of those moments where he dug that knife in it, like turned and twisted it.

[00:09:57] **Ben Heldfond:** I mean, that would make sense if I'm looking at the photos and [00:10:00] the motive is to hurt you and really like dig into your know that you are a protector and a fixer, and that here you are, you're going to screw up our kit. Cause it's all your fault.

[00:10:10] **Samantha Baines:** Wow. And I'm loving this honesty. So, um, so Nikki, you got, you saw this photo with the ring in the middle, in your bathroom, which I find is a strange choice, but sure.

[00:10:21] **Samantha Baines:** Like where you're washing your face, like, oh yeah, we're getting divorced. So you said it was gut wrenching. What happened

next? Like, did you clean the photo up? Did you sob on the floor? Did you call a friend?

[00:10:34] **Nikki DeBartolo:** I think I probably, I'm pretty sure. I called my sister and I did sob, but I really wasn't sure at that point, I assumed I was sobbing because it was over.

[00:10:45] **Nikki DeBartolo:** But when I'm looking back at it, I was probably sobbing for, because it was over. And the fact that it was really a reality. And I was never one of those people that took getting married lightly and ever [00:11:00] wanted to get divorced. And that wasn't the way I saw my life going. And that wasn't how I wanted to raise my child.

[00:11:07] **Nikki DeBartolo:** So I think, and I was scared to death to be as single mum per se, as whatever that means in this day and age. But not that you weren't going to be around, but it's still being a single mom. And so I think every emotion and every thought went through my head where I was. Shit. Like what the hell do I do now?

[00:11:28] **Nikki DeBartolo:** And I did, and I, and I do think my first reaction would have been to fix it and for us to get back together and try to figure out a way for us to get back together. But in my heart, I knew that that wasn't what should have happened. What should have happened was for us to break up and move forward

[00:11:47] **Ben Heldfond:** yeah. And I think even after that moment, that instinct of fixing it, or, I mean that moment, even though it was as dramatic as I could possibly have made it, uh, and.

[00:11:59] **Ben Heldfond:** There were [00:12:00] still talks of let's work this out. Let's, you know, cause Nikki, you know, would, uh, you know, bite the bullet, uh, for Asher and that speaks to who she is and, and would stay together, even know, you know, now she knows and probably back then she knows that it wasn't meant to be. Um, and that's, you know, I think could be just as detrimental to kids to have two parents who are standing together for their kids.

[00:12:24] **Ben Heldfond:** Uh, the then, uh, you know, non happy divorce in a high conflict divorce.

[00:12:29] **Samantha Baines:** So how do you both go about separately processing these feelings of anger and hurt and then coming together again?

[00:12:38] **Nikki DeBartolo:** Well, I think after Ben had his little come to Jesus time, He scared the hell out of me and called me one afternoon to coffee.

[00:12:46] **Nikki DeBartolo:** And I had no idea why he wants to meet me for coffee. And so it wasn't like we were talking on a daily basis. It wasn't like we were friends. So I was like, oh boy. So I like, I think I called everybody in my family. I'm like, do I do this? Why am I going to, why am I going to go here?
[00:13:00] What am I doing? Like, I don't think I'm ready for this.

[00:13:02] **Nikki DeBartolo:** I don't know what, I don't know what's going to happen here, but I was like, I guess I have to go. And I was scared. I mean, I was scared to death, but when I got to the coffee shop, And I saw him sitting there and he had coffee for me and I was like, oh, that's kind of like a little that's like

[00:13:18] **Ben Heldfond:** disarmament,

[00:13:19] **Nikki DeBartolo:** like, okay.

[00:13:20] **Nikki DeBartolo:** He ordered my coffee, he knows what I like. And I was like, okay, maybe this isn't going to be as bad as I thought it was going to be.

[00:13:27] **Ben Heldfond:** Yeah. And that, that, that moment was an accumulation of some months of work. Um, you know, with this therapist, uh,

[00:13:34] **Nikki DeBartolo:** we agreed to not discuss it. Like we agreed to just kind of take our time and like be separate, But when it came to our child be together, you know, like parent together, but be separate.

[00:13:47] **Ben Heldfond:** And take a break. I mean, that's the one thing that looking back on it and we didn't have a manual for this. So we got lucky in a lot of ways, uh, and you know, did some things, right? And we took some space.
[00:14:00] There's no award for getting divorced the quickest. Right. Except for a lot of suffering and pain,

[00:14:05] **Samantha Baines:** it feels like a race though. Doesn't it? It feels like quick. We got to do it right?

[00:14:09] **Nikki DeBartolo:** Because every day feels like an eternity.

[00:14:11] **Ben Heldfond:** And the ironic thing is probably the races to get this person out of your life. But the quicker you do it, the more that person is going to be in your life, in that black cloud, hanging over your life. Right.

[00:14:22] **Ben Heldfond:** And then that'll go away when you get divorced, they don't disappear.

[00:14:25] **Nikki DeBartolo:** You have a child, they're always there.

[00:14:27] **Ben Heldfond:** Right. And so we took some space and didn't talk about any of the divorce or any of the, the, uh, you know, the business side of it, I guess. And I went to a therapist, um, and I'm also a, uh, uh, I'm sober. And I go to 12 step groups.

[00:14:40] **Ben Heldfond:** I was working with my sponsor and, you know, part of the process of that was to find my part in it, you know, cause on that plane, when I was reading the thing, you know, the other moment of clarity I had is, in a relationship that's not good or it is good. You know, it takes two people, it takes two to make it and it takes two to break it.

[00:14:58] **Ben Heldfond:** And so I, [00:15:00] there's no way humanly possible that it could be all Nikki's fault. So I had to go through the journey of finding what my part was in it. And Nikki did too. And that was, you know, staying on my side of the street. It was a mess. Nicky's was a mess too, and it was very hard to not look over there and tell her that her stuff in the street was a mess, but, you know, to focus on, you know, my side of the street and, and work through some of these things.

[00:15:21] **Ben Heldfond:** And I remember this one time I went into my therapist office and, uh, her name was Barbara. And, uh, I came in, I said, Barbara, I think I got it. I think I'm a narcissist. And she started laughing and I said, Barb, what's so fun. I think we had a major breakthrough here and she goes, let me just tell you a no narcissist would ever come in my office and say that they're narcissist.

[00:15:45] **Ben Heldfond:** two- It might look, it might smell, it might feel like narcissism, but all you are is a hurt and upset and suffering, uh, you know, and mad, angry, man. And that's, you know, and [00:16:00] that's why we're talking. And so, and it was like, I worked through this, I worked with a sponsor and it didn't take that long to realize that I wasn't the man, I wasn't the person, I wasn't the father, I wasn't the husband.

[00:16:12] **Ben Heldfond:** But I had that. I had envisioned myself as

[00:16:15] **Ben Heldfond:** I think we both envisioned

[00:16:16] **Nikki DeBartolo:** ourselves as something that we worked. Like, we both thought we were like these amazing husband and wife and great parents. And I'm like, I think it took, it took, you know, it did take therapy to learn that, you know what? I don't want to be married to me.

[00:16:34] **Nikki DeBartolo:** And I don't want to be married to him. Right.

[00:16:36] **Ben Heldfond:** And I think that, you know, looking back on it, we were unhappy people. So of course, we're going to make an unhappy marriage. And if we didn't do what we did, we were going to be unhappy people still. And we were going to have, make an unhappy divorce and then an unhappy child.

[00:16:50] **Ben Heldfond:** And so after that process, uh, is when I called Nikki because I needed to clean. And make amends to her, not for [00:17:00] anything else, other than, you know, to really put the shining, uh, glean on my side of the street and it, and it wasn't any intentional. It wasn't vindictive. It wasn't any motivation. Except for, just to say, I was sorry for me.

[00:17:13] **Ben Heldfond:** I came clean and I said, I was sorry, it wasn't. You know, a, a long drawn out thing. And, and I just said, I've realized a lot about myself through these past months and, you know, just like I said, I know that I wouldn't want to be married to, to me either. And, and, you know, I forgive you and I hope that you can forgive me.

[00:17:31] **Ben Heldfond:** And then in turn, Something magical happened.

[00:17:33] **Nikki DeBartolo:** I said, I was sorry.

[00:17:35] **Ben Heldfond:** She said I was sorry, back. And then-

[00:17:37] **Nikki DeBartolo:** the first time ever

[00:17:38] **Ben Heldfond:** in 25 years or whatever, know each other, I think that was the first and only time we've ever apologized to each other.

[00:17:43] **Samantha Baines:** And was that a bit of a turning point or was there still work to be done?

[00:17:48] **Nikki DeBartolo:** Definitely a turning point, but it didn't just flip on a switch and go, okay. Everything's great.

[00:17:54] **Ben Heldfond:** The way I sort of explained it. Sometimes when you have anxiety or stress in your [00:18:00] life. And it's kind of hard to take that breath after that happened. And it was like an authentic moment that we never really had had before.

[00:18:07] **Ben Heldfond:** Uh, the breath just felt a little easier. It felt a little lighter. There seemed to be some space for possibility of something different than, than, you know, when I left the house. And so, uh, yeah, it wasn't all of a sudden, you know, we snapped our fingers. Uh, but, but after the apology, the, the one question I did brings up something about the divorce and I.

[00:18:27] **Ben Heldfond:** When we go through down this road, do you have any problem with joint custody, 50 50 across the board with our son? Asher.

[00:18:34] **Nikki DeBartolo:** Absolutely not. You know, you were good, you know, he's a good father. There was no, there was no reason why other than for my own ego that I didn't want to give up my child for that, you know, But, so I said, absolutely not.

[00:18:48] **Nikki DeBartolo:** And I think that was a turning point also that was like, okay, anything past this, we can figure it out.

[00:18:54] **Ben Heldfond:** Yeah. And that made it again more space. Cause that was the main, you know, the [00:19:00] biggest point for me. And once that, you know, w was disarmed too, I said to her, I said, well, all the other shit can be worked out.

[00:19:07] **Ben Heldfond:** Then we met at that coffee shop, uh, about five more times. And we worked out our whole. Divorced

[00:19:20] **Ben Heldfond:** the same table, the same place. And we just went through each point. Now each in between each meetings, obviously we had a representation, we'd go back and we discuss it. But we were the, you know, this was our life. This was our future. This was our, this was our son's future. And our lawyers, no matter how great they were, my therapist, everybody involved, they didn't love our son.

[00:19:41] **Ben Heldfond:** Like we did. And so we needed to take the reins, right. We needed to take the reins and really drive this, this deal. And we did,

and then we, you know, drew it up the lawyer and told them to put, you know, told them to put the run-ons, you know, in it and there, whereas, and [00:20:00] then, you know, however lawyers talk, but you know, again, I think the turning point, like you said, was that moment where.

[00:20:06] **Ben Heldfond:** You know, we cleaned up the records as much as possible, not to say it was gone, but we cleaned up the records of the past to work

[00:20:13] **Nikki DeBartolo:** And we continued to work on ourselves right. It wasn't like after that moment, ok were done.

[00:20:19] **Ben Heldfond:** It just seemed like we weren't making decisions after that based off of how we could hurt each other or what the other person did or didn't do you know? It was just about moving forward.

[00:20:28] **Samantha Baines:** I think that's the top tip. Isn't it? Meet up with your ex in a public place. So you can't just scream at each other is a great idea.

[00:20:36] **Nikki DeBartolo:** Yeah.

[00:20:39] **Samantha Baines:** It's the ad break. So it's a perfect time to remind you to hit subscribe, to be notified about more episodes. You can also leave us a lovely review because honestly it makes a difference to the chart positions.

[00:20:53] **Samantha Baines:** And one time I was in the charts next to Michelle Obama and I was really thrilled about it. So it'd be nice [00:21:00] to do that again. You could also join in the conversation. Social media. We're on Twitter and Instagram at divorce pod. We have a website, the divorce, social.com. And you can also join us for our like nineties style divorced chat room experience over on Patreon

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[00:21:32] **Samantha Baines:** So you were sitting down in this coffee shop, you worked out your whole divorce. Then you went back to the lawyers, you got the paperwork sorted.

[00:21:39] **Nikki DeBartolo:** And our lawyers did think we were nuts. You're like, are you sure you want to do this? We're like, yeah.

[00:21:47] **Samantha Baines:** So you got all that sorted and then you've got the custody 50, 50. What's the process look like after the divorce is finalized, how do you go about becoming the friends that you [00:22:00] are today?

[00:22:00] **Nikki DeBartolo:** Faked it for a while, we faked it, we faked it till we made it.

[00:22:05] **Nikki DeBartolo:** Like we would go to Asher's event. Together and everything was about him. We didn't want him to have to choose. Oh, I went to this parent last time I went, so I have to go. I went to mommy last time. So this time I have to go to daddy, we didn't do that. It was, we sat together. We did things, you know, any event that had to do with him.

[00:22:23] **Nikki DeBartolo:** We did together. I mean, we didn't want to do it together, but we did it together. And I think that was one of the things that was like, okay, we can sort of tolerate each other. So then we, it was baby steps that we kept getting a little more friendly, where it was a little less-

[00:22:40] **Ben Helffond:** yeah,

[00:22:40] **Nikki DeBartolo:** it was a little less forced.

[00:22:42] **Ben Helffond:** I don't know if that's in any therapy manual or, you know, to, to sort of suck it up and fake it and put on your smile or, you know, put on an inauthentic smile, but it worked for Nikki and I, and to say that it was all, you know, uh, rainbow waterfalls and unicorns would be completely [00:23:00] inauthentic and a lie.

[00:23:00] **Ben Helffond:** I mean, we had our tough times. We had our arguments. We would, you know, she's still. You know, knows how to push my buttons. I know how to push her buttons. And when we're, when we're in that cycle, we would have those emotional boomerang fights where we're just throwing the, you know, the thing back and forth, back forth.

[00:23:17] **Ben Helffond:** But there was always when, when Asher was around or there was a school event, we would somehow managed to just put all that behind us and not have him, like Nikki said. I mean, one of the worst things about, you know, growing up in a divorced high conflict divorce is. I almost, and my brother and sisters almost had to become.

[00:23:38] **Ben Helffond:** The adults, you know, and, you know, uh, after a sporting event, I would have to play in my head as I was walking over, like,

who do I go to first? I was thinking, I went to mom last time. I think it was today. And I was 13 when my parents got divorced and it didn't end when they got divorced. Right. I mean, it continued this dark cloud, um, [00:24:00] unhealthy, toxic cloud, uh, you know, around.

[00:24:04] **Ben Heldfond:** Uh, from my graduations to my, you know, whatever it was my wedding, uh, about where mom and dad are gonna sit where, you know, and all the nonsense that a kid just shouldn't have to deal with. You know, Asher didn't have any choice in any of, you know, our life decisions, uh, including getting, meeting, going on our first date, getting married, having a kid, you know, getting Divorced.

[00:24:28] **Ben Heldfond:** And yet, you know, at least my parents, you know, sort of handed us the emotional bill for their choices and we just didn't want to do that to him. So, you know, we really, you know, put him first and suck our ego up. Now that's not to say that ego didn't roar, its ugly head here and there. Um, but we were all, we somehow always sorta came back to the table.

[00:24:50] **Nikki DeBartolo:** You are to understand then when we started bringing other people into this equation, Yeah, you had to go through the whole cycle again, of checking your ego [00:25:00] and realizing, okay, this is a good person he's bringing around. This is a good person. She's bringing you around. It's not a bad thing for Asher to have other people in his life that would love him too.

[00:25:10] **Nikki DeBartolo:** So that was a whole. Ego checking moment for both of us.

[00:25:14] **Samantha Baines:** Yeah. I definitely want to talk to you about how dating er works, but first of all, do how far in to the divorce. So after you were divorced, how long was it before you could consider yourself friends?

[00:25:31] **Nikki DeBartolo:** Real true friends. A couple of years, I would say.

[00:25:37] **Ben Heldfond:** Yeah. Well, I mean, for me probably where I felt safe, um, you know, talking to Nikki, like you would talk to a friend about, you know, Suffering or hard times or whatever it is in life that didn't come right after the coffee shop. You know, definitely that took, um, a while. I think it was probably, I think she said a couple of years now, Nikki [00:26:00] was also, you know, Nikki in that she you know, a caregiver, she's got a huge heart

[00:26:07] **Nikki DeBartolo:** oh you said something nice, I was afraid where that was going.

[00:26:09] **Ben Heldfond:** You were afraid I was going to say something nice. I did mean I could have, you know, we are recording a podcast here. Um, but, but, you know, she would make sure that, you know, and you know, the, the line of maybe a little control too, was in there too.

[00:26:23] **Ben Heldfond:** There's not something nice, but, uh, but she would, you know, make sure that I had everything for Asher or that, you know, when she went shopping, You know, for new pair of shoes that she would get to. One from my house and one. So, so there was just like these little signs that so bad that she wasn't so bad, but I I'm trying to remember.

[00:26:45] **Ben Heldfond:** We had had some conversations like friends had, but I was dating my wife. We had this like, you know, difference of opinion or what we wanted in life. You know, I didn't want to get married again. I didn't want to have kids again. She was a little younger. She didn't have [00:27:00] the, you know, the, she wanted those things.

[00:27:02] **Ben Heldfond:** Uh, and so we would break up, get back together, break up, and then there was the, you know, I think probably would have been the final straw. Um, and Nikki called me up and she said, you're an idiot. What the hell are you doing? You're not gonna find anybody better than this woman fucking marry her, or you're going to end up like your dad alone and old.

[00:27:26] **Ben Heldfond:** And at that point, you know, I was like, okay, here's my ex-wife right. Telling me, you know, just to step up, but also to marry another woman. Right. So that, I think that was probably the, now that was four years into, you know, maybe our, our, you know, after our divorce and there had been signs like that, but I think that's the one that stands out where it was like, yeah, this is a friend.

[00:27:52] **Ben Heldfond:** This is a woman who loves me.

[00:27:53] **Samantha Baines:** Nikki can you remember a moment where you thought, oh, we're friends.

[00:27:57] **Nikki DeBartolo:** It probably has a little bit to do with [00:28:00] when I was getting married. I mean, my now husband asked him to coffee at the same coffee shop to say, listen, like he was trying to be respectful. Granted, he

probably was still gonna marry, like ask me to marry him, even if he said no, but he was trying to be respectful.

[00:28:17] **Nikki DeBartolo:** And I knew when Ben looked at him and said, I don't know why the hell you'd want to do something like that. That then was like, Okay. Take her like, take it. This is good. Like, this is going to be this everything's going to be okay from here on.

[00:28:28] **Ben Heldfond:** Yeah. And so I, you know, there's just times like that and, uh, where, you know, it's authentic, it wasn't a forced, forced, and, and it was just, you know, real.

[00:28:40] **Ben Heldfond:** It was like any friend that you would have. Right. Who cares? Nonjudgmental when you bring something up or cynical or whatever, you know, we get, we get caught in. Uh, but, but like I said, that was probably the, the, the moment for me

[00:28:53] **Samantha Baines:** Lets talk about bringing other people into this equation, as you said it, so who [00:29:00] got the first girlfriend or boyfriend? Do you remember?

[00:29:05] **Ben Heldfond:** The monkey bancher over there?

[00:29:07] **Nikki DeBartolo:** The monkey brancher? oh my god

[00:29:13] **Ben Heldfond:** swing from one to another..

[00:29:15] **Nikki DeBartolo:** I hate to be alone, i do, i really do

[00:29:15] **Samantha Baines:** nikki, you had the first boyfriend. How did that feel? Did you feel like, cause my ex had a girlfriend bef well, I still don't have a boyfriend. I'm just chilling out it live in my best life. My ex had a girlfriend first and it sort of felt like he'd won in that first step.

[00:29:34] **Samantha Baines:** Did you feel like you'd won or were you past that point?

[00:29:38] **Nikki DeBartolo:** I was past that point because. I may have had a boyfriend, Ben had a revolving door.

[00:29:47] **Samantha Baines:** hooo, now its coming out!

[00:29:49] **Ben Heldfond:** We have to say about her boyfriend. And this is sorta like, uh, you know, the test to this like happy divorce foundation we built is, you know, putting your ego aside and, and all the [00:30:00] other stuff we just talked about is her boyfriend. Uh, happened to be somebody we knew while we were married and, you know, talk about a test to this new way of being this new, you know, this new, yeah.

[00:30:15] **Ben Heldfond:** It was hard to levitate after I found that one out. Right. I mean, talk about a blow to the ego. Uh, and you know, this guy didn't even wait to the body he got caught or, you know, he moved in or what went well, you know, all this stuff that, you know, my head was telling me, I remember there was a. It was the first time that Nikki told me there was a, I was coaching Asher's baseball game or baseball team, and he was coming to the game.

[00:30:38] **Ben Heldfond:** Now Nikki told me, I think that's another great thing we had done is communicate. Nikki told me that Chad was going to come to the game. So it wasn't some, you know, big, you know, shocker. And after the game,

[00:30:48] **Nikki DeBartolo:** he didn't always tell me about crystal and chandelier though.

[00:30:51] **Ben Heldfond:** Oh, you're so mean. Um, and so after the game, you know, I had cleaned up the dugout and Asher was already over there and I was walking over.

[00:30:59] **Ben Heldfond:** And I [00:31:00] knew this was the moment like this was going to be a moment, right? This was going to, you know, either going to be, it was going to be a great moment or it's going to be, you know, the, the band who ripped up the picture and put the ring in the middle of it. And what I was telling myself, walking over there was literally what's best for Asher.

[00:31:16] **Ben Heldfond:** What's best for Asher. This isn't about you. This isn't about your, you know, and so I walked over, uh, and the first thing I did was I gave Chad Nikki's husband, a hug and just, that was my way of letting Asher know, letting Chad know, letting Nicki know that this is okay now that's not really what I was feeling.

[00:31:37] **Ben Heldfond:** Right. That's not really what was going on inside. And it was probably the most awkward man hug in the history of man hugs. But it was this, you know, that, that, especially for our son, that this is okay, right.

This is okay for you to, you know, to, to love this man. Your mom loves, uh, Then it got easier. And now we actually have very authentic hugs, me and

[00:31:58] **Ben Heldfond:** very authentic.

[00:31:59] **Nikki DeBartolo:** And I [00:32:00] think too for me is when I knew Ben was, I mean, obviously I didn't need to know all the people that were the revolving door, but at some point I looked at, I called him and I said, Hey, listen, do me a favor. And I said, Until you are serious in there. Somebody's worth him meeting, please. Don't introduce all these women to Ash and I think his first response was screw you.

[00:32:26] **Ben Heldfond:** No, no, no, no. I didn't say that. I thought that

[00:32:30] **Nikki DeBartolo:** until he realized that maybe I was right.

[00:32:33] **Ben Heldfond:** Yeah. Th that's the difference between at least the desertion between. Responding off of ego and then responding out of truth. Right. And the first that reaction was when she said that in my head was who the hell are you to tell me who I can and cannot bring around my son.

[00:32:51] **Ben Heldfond:** Right. But I didn't say that instead. I thought about it for a second. And you know, at the end of the day, she was. And that's hard for me to admit even today, [00:33:00] right? That, um, what's best for Asher is not to have this revolving door of women in and out of his life, who aren't going to be there, who are going to love him, who aren't going to buy into what we're doing, um, and could be, you know, a cog in the wheel on what we're trying to accomplish.

[00:33:15] **Ben Heldfond:** And what does that show about relationships? He's already had this trauma of his parents getting divorced. And so. You know, I made that promise to Nikki, you know, I said, I, I won't you're right. And, uh, even my wife, I think it was 8 months before I introduced Asher to, to Nadia and my wife

[00:33:33] **Nikki DeBartolo:** and you set the words buy into which sounds really terrible when you're talking about your family, but that was a big deal for us when we did start dating and we were seriously dating somebody.

[00:33:44] **Nikki DeBartolo:** It was a big deal that they understood from us what we were trying to accomplish with our child. And if they weren't willing to do. Be a part of that and make this relationship better and not harder, it wasn't

gonna [00:34:00] work. And so, and as much as we would have loved these people, we wouldn't have allowed them to stay around.

[00:34:07] **Ben Heldfond:** Yeah, I believe it. And I think Nikki would agree with this. So there there's no woman or man in this world, uh, that we could have met that was going to, if they were going to be a disruptive, uh, part of our, you know, What we're trying to accomplish. They wouldn't be in our lives, you know, cause at the end of the day, our first, you know, uh, choice was to have Asher and that needed to be the, the main focus.

[00:34:33] **Ben Heldfond:** Now we, uh, you know, there were people out there and, you know, there were two wonderful, beautiful people who we both fell in love with who. You know, not only, uh, you know, uh, you know, bought into it, but they add to our

[00:34:49] **Ben Heldfond:** chats at first,

[00:34:51] **Ben Heldfond:** but they add, you know, they don't subtract from, from our ha a happy divorce or our modern family or whatever.

[00:34:56] **Ben Heldfond:** They are great, you know, uh, step parents to [00:35:00] Asher, but also great partners and great friends. You know, Nikki is great friends with Nadia. I'm great friends with Chad

[00:35:05] **Samantha Baines:** and I, cause I was going to ask you, did you meet anyone who thought this is all very strange? I can't get involved with this. I can't believe you're friends with your ex and in your kind of dating landscape or even your friends,

[00:35:20] **Ben Heldfond:** friends for sure.

[00:35:21] **Nikki DeBartolo:** Our friends and families. I think at the beginning, thought that

[00:35:25] **Ben Heldfond:** I think people had questions, um, that I was dating, you know? Cause. But, but I don't think anybody sort of, it is weird. I mean, they, you know, especially 14 years ago it was something that was, luckily it's a little bit more common today, but you know, people that's, that's really why we wrote the book too, is because people are like, what's going on over there, the Heldfond/DeBartolo house, like, what, you know, is this like some, you know, swinger, polygamy or whatever it was, but it was.

[00:35:54] **Ben Heldfond:** So they started asking questions and then we started getting phone calls from friends, right. Who had gone through it, [00:36:00] are going through it and they wanted advice. That's another reason. So many questions people had is why we decided to write the book

[00:36:07] **Samantha Baines:** it's interesting because I think I'd feel, if I'm being honest, I'd feel very threatened.

[00:36:13] **Samantha Baines:** If I met someone and they were really good friends with their ex I think had, I'd be like, oh, well, what's going on there? Are you still in love? Do you want to get back together? Like what's going on? So it's nice that people you're dating were a bit more open minded than me.

[00:36:28] **Nikki DeBartolo:** It's funny. Two years ago. One of the things that we decided Asher was when he was growing up, he was totally into animals and everything had to do with animals.

[00:36:40] **Nikki DeBartolo:** So we knew in our, if anything was going to ruin our happy divorce, it was going to be if one or the other took our child to Africa. So we both. Wanted to wait twos old enough with the shots and everything. You need the pill with all that stuff you need to do. And we decided two years ago, two and a half [00:37:00] years ago, we were going to take Asher to Africa.

[00:37:02] **Nikki DeBartolo:** We invited our spouses at the time my husband couldn't leave because of his job and his wife. They have two little kids, but they looked at us and they said, Asher will love it. You two need to do this with him. So the three of us off went to Africa for two weeks together. Like it was nothing. I mean, and I, and I don't even think, I think people asked a few questions when they would start seeing our photos and realize, okay, it's just the three of them together, but that's what we have built with our significant others where it's not strange and they know, and they're very comfortable.

[00:37:40] **Nikki DeBartolo:** With us and they they're very comfortable with the relationship we have and you know, his wife will call me and say, Ben did this or Ben did that. And I'm like, yeah, no kidding.

[00:37:51] **Ben Heldfond:** Yeah. That's that's the one negative to our happy divorce.

[00:37:55] **Samantha Baines:** And, and how did you manage that? Practically going on holiday, like who did [00:38:00] Asher sleep in a room with?

[00:38:02] **Samantha Baines:** And did you try and have your separate alone time on the holiday or we just together all the time as if you were married.

[00:38:08] **Nikki DeBartolo:** All the time we were. I mean, except for when we were sleeping, Asher stayed with me because I was afraid of animals.

[00:38:15] **Ben Helffond:** Yeah. I mean, I, you know, although it would be funny to see, but there w you're sleeping and, you know, would there be an elephant that just would stroll by your room

[00:38:26] **Nikki DeBartolo:** or you hear things rubbing against your tent? And so, I mean, for me, I was scared to death. Ashley just didn't care. He wasn't afraid of anything, but we ate breakfast, lunch, and dinner together. All day together. You'd wake up, have breakfast, go on a safari, come back, have a, like an hour or so downtime have lunch and then go back. It just, we were constantly together for two weeks.

[00:38:47] **Ben Helffond:** Yeah. And it's not something like the alone time. It's not like you go for a walk. I mean, you, you stay, you really don't want to just go on a walk, uh, you know, with the, uh, the lions and the hyenas and all that. But, you know, it was just a, [00:39:00] uh, it was probably, that probably was one of the most amazing trips.

[00:39:04] **Ben Helffond:** And, and to be able to have that with my son, because literally if one of us had taken Asher to Africa without the other one, that it wouldn't be the romance. It wouldn't be the finance. It wouldn't been all the other stuff that sends divorced south. It would have been, you know, this, but, uh, you know, we were at a place where we had traveled together before, but never.

[00:39:22] **Ben Helffond:** I don't think the three of us. Um, and it was, it was just special.

[00:39:26] **Nikki DeBartolo:** But with all of us, but this was, yeah, this was different.

[00:39:29] **Samantha Baines:** It sounds like a real test of your friendship and it sounds like your past. So now you've written a book, a happy divorce. How is the experience of writing the book? Were there any arguments, did any old marriage kind of sharing things come up in the writing?

[00:39:48] **Nikki DeBartolo:** It probably came up. Not as much with us as it is other people that we may have talked about, or I don't know. I think I enjoyed understanding [00:40:00] his perspective of it that maybe wasn't something I saw, whether I liked it or not. At that point, it was like, okay. That's okay. That's okay. That you felt that way.

[00:40:11] **Ben Heldfond:** I think. Great thing about the process of the book is we didn't, it was healing. It was healing, but it was also absolutely, but it was also like when I, I obviously read Nikki's chapters and she read mine, but I never said you shouldn't write that or why this wasn't the way it happened, or I never questioned, she never questioned my experience or my perspective.

[00:40:35] **Ben Heldfond:** Um, and I think that that in itself, Probably showed you how great our relationship is, right? Like what you didn't, like Nikki said, there were some things in there. I was like, ah, I don't know if you really have that perspective. Right. But that was her perspective or her her experience. And it was a. You know, it, it was great.

[00:40:52] **Ben Heldfond:** It was a, like Nikki said, learning a different perspective and how it was for her to walk into [00:41:00] that. You had me call her and walk into the coffee shop, even though I knew that what I wanted to do and what I was expecting, you know, what was going to happen is I just called her and said, Hey, let's go to coffee.

[00:41:08] **Ben Heldfond:** And I never really thought about how that must have made her feel and how, you know, scared or worried or whatever she was. So didn't see. That was, it was a great thing.

[00:41:18] **Samantha Baines:** It's so interesting. I feel like every divorce couples should write a book just so you can read the other ones chapters. And actually find out what happened?

[00:41:28] **Ben Heldfond:** Let me just add one other thing that we don't, you know, the good thing about the divorce and I think the good thing or the book and the good thing about our, what we did is. We don't talk about what happened in our marriage. Right? Like it ended, it didn't end on a winning streak. Um, you know, it, there was everything that happens and why divorces and, and, and one of the reasons that we don't do that is, or the main reasons, cause it doesn't matter.

[00:41:54] **Ben Heldfond:** Right. The end of ma, like it's just symptoms of her really bad problem and it's unhappy people and an [00:42:00] unhappy

marriage. And so, um, you know, the, the, the book isn't about the past, it isn't about what happened. Uh, and I think that's also why we're sitting here today is because we haven't, we didn't make decisions.

[00:42:13] **Ben Heldfond:** On the past or what happened in the marriage. Um, and so it's, it's a solution book and it's a solution story and we don't live in the problem.

[00:42:22] **Samantha Baines:** I love that. Well, it sounds great. I can't wait to read it. Um, just to round up, can you say one thing each, that is the best thing about your happy divorce scenario, Ben what's the best thing.

[00:42:39] **Ben Heldfond:** Lack of stuff. You know, for 14 years, for the most part is we haven't had this past or, you know, what happened in marriage affect us in every area of a life. I don't have to worry about when the phone rings and it's Nikki or I get a text from Nikki that it's going to be this, you know, drag out fight.

[00:42:58] **Ben Heldfond:** And also [00:43:00] most importantly, no suffering for, you know, we limited the suffering and the damage to our son.

[00:43:06] **Nikki DeBartolo:** I think for me, it was the fact that I didn't lose. Family. I ended up actually gaining family. I mean, I love his kids. It just as much as I would if they were my own. And so, and I, you know, I got. What should I call his wife?

[00:43:22] **Nikki DeBartolo:** I got actually call her my ex wife, but I, I got a friend out of this and I got two, I have two more children that, you know, love me. And they think of me as their step-mom because they don't under, they don't know, they know Asher as a step-mom. So it was like, okay, well then that's my step-mom too. So we grew and.

[00:43:40] **Nikki DeBartolo:** Got smaller.

[00:43:41] **Samantha Baines:** Amazing. Well, it's been so great to chat to you, both. Um, remind us about your book, where people can get it and where they can follow you online.

[00:43:50] **Ben Heldfond:** Uh, they can follow us anywhere. Uh, on social media, everything are happy. Divorce books available, anywhere books are sold Amazon. And if anybody's listening and have questions [00:44:00] or maybe is

listening and they're thinking themselves what a, you know, th th this is can't be true.

[00:44:06] **Ben Heldfond:** This has gotta be, you know, a fiction. but, if you had told us 14 years ago that we'd be sitting on a podcast talking about our happy divorce and our trips to Africa and all the other craziness that goes on in our lives, we would look at you sideways. So just, you know, hopefully if you're listening, just, you know, open up some space to the possibility that there's no way we ever thought this happened, but, but, but if, what if we can do it, we're, we're pretty much, you know, determined that anybody can.

[00:44:34] **Ben Heldfond:** So, uh, if you have questions. We're not coaches, we're not therapists. Just reach out to us on social media, everything and happy divorce. We'll be glad to talk to you or, or answer any questions.

[00:44:44] **Samantha Baines:** Amazing. Well, thank you so much.

[00:44:45] **Nikki DeBartolo:** Thank you

[00:44:46] **Ben Heldfond:** thank you very much.