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**Thank you, Parents Without Partners
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The blizzard of 1996 was said to be the worst in Philadelphia history, but I recall an even colder day that July when my wife informed me that she wanted to end our marriage. The news hit me very much by surprise. I became sick both emotionally and physically and lost about 17 pounds within three weeks. I entered phases of denial and anger and could barely deal with the notion that after nine years of living with my wife, and five years of living with my children, I would have to leave them. I had always been there for them.

After moving to an apartment, I struggled to find things to do with the kids on weekends when they were in my custody. I had always relied upon my spouse to help with their care and suddenly felt completely alone in my new situation. However, I had no idea that my life and the lives of my children were about to change dramatically.

In August of that year, a friend suggested that I contact a group called Parents Without Partners (PWP). I had heard of this organization before but never really paid much attention to the name; such a group hadn't concerned me up to that point. After all, PWP was for single parents, and I never expected to be one of "those" types of people. But sure enough, with little warning, I was indeed "one of them."

Before I knew it, I began to look at married couples with great disdain. I felt estranged from a group of people who were suddenly different than myself. Perhaps, in my pain, I felt jealous of them; they seemed so happy and unfettered with their lives.

My growing feelings of separation finally led me to take my friend's advice and call the Parents Without Partners group in my area. Reluctantly, I thumbed through a phone book, found their number and made the call.

I recall my anxiety as I questioned whether I should or shouldn't hang up. To my relief, voice mail saved me from the threat of human interaction. I left a brief message asking for someone to return my call, reassuring myself that I'd be more prepared by the time someone called me back.

Though I was normally an outgoing person, the impact of my broken marriage seemed to have thrown me off balance. As far as I was concerned, the world had changed, and had left me behind.

A short time later, the phone rang; I completely forgot that I had left a message for someone to call me back. Ray, the orientation director for the local PWP chapter, introduced himself and told me about many of the events and activities that were run by the chapter.

He and I spoke at length about many of my concerns and experiences that had transpired in recent weeks. He assured me that I wasn't alone; he and many others were in the same boat.

It amazed me how easy it was to talk with him. Besides talking to me about what PWP was like, he and I discussed many of our experiences regarding what we faced on a daily basis as single parents in a world that, for all intents and purposes, revolved around the two-parent home.

Within a week, I went to an orientation where I met Ray and many other friendly and very understanding people. Soon after I received my very first chapter newsletter, I decided to check into some of the activities that were listed in the newsletter's calendar of events. The Memorial Day Picnic was my first PWP event, and I will especially remember how much fun I had with my kids.

Jeri, who I had met at orientation, who was running the picnic, was more than glad to help me out by entertaining my 3-year-old daughter, Sara, while I threw water balloons with my 5-year-old son, Scott.

I recall how wonderful I felt that I was literally surrounded by people who cared about me as well as my kids. My children, too, benefited from meeting other youngsters in similar family situations.

Jeri and I quickly became friends and I soon discovered that she worked on the chapter's newsletter, in addition to running and planning many of the chapter's activities.

One day, I asked her if I could help her put together the newsletter. I explained that I was pretty good with using a computer and that I had a background in writing. She gladly accepted my help and somehow talked me into running for the board of directors as newsletter editor. Little did I know that after a year as the newsletter editor, members would somehow talk me into running for chapter president.

After serving two years as president of the local PWP chapter here in Philadelphia, I met my wonderful wife, Carrie, at one of our dances. Although she and I were unable to remain members due to our new marital status, we continue to attend some of the PWP events that are open to the public. Nearly 10 years have passed, and we still maintain friendships with many of the members we befriended through this most remarkable association.

Although the Northeast chapter of PWP closed its doors several years ago, the Buxmont chapter, serving Bucks and Montgomery counties, continues to run strong, welcoming single parents who live throughout Philadelphia and its suburbs.

Information regarding their chapter is available online at pwpbuxmont.com or by phone at 215-752-1250.

Joining Parents without Partners was certainly one of the best decisions I had ever made. I would like to publicly thank this marvelous group for everything that they have done for me and my family. PWP will forever remain in my heart. ••