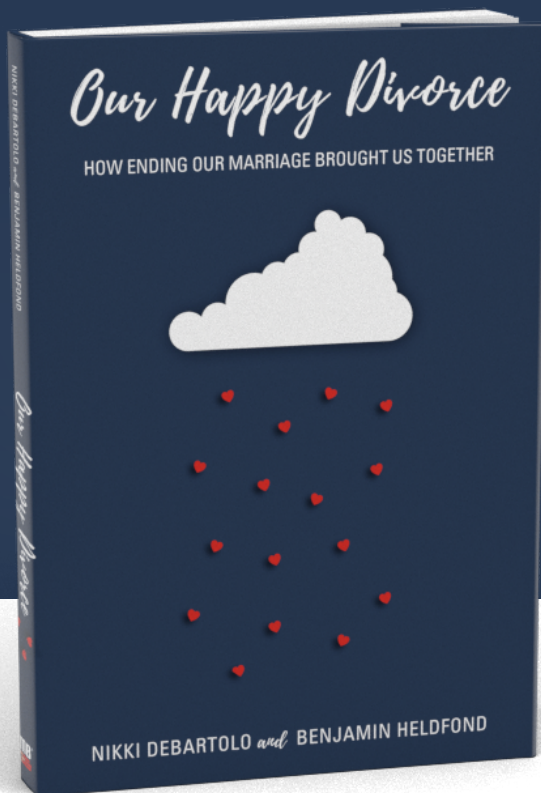


Our Happy Divorce

HOW ENDING OUR MARRIAGE BROUGHT US TOGETHER



NIKKI DEBARTOLO *and* BENJAMIN HELDFOND



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How ending our marriage brought us together

From weeknight dinners and homework sessions to Christmas card photos and vacations, Nikki and Ben have created a tight-knit, enviable family. They work and play well together, from the smallest daily tasks to the biggest life events—and it only took a divorce to get them there. Though their marriage has been over for nearly a decade, they still share a happy life with each other and their son Asher, along with their spouses and children.

Nikki and Ben had hoped their wedding would start their happily ever after—but seven years, one child, and countless financial and familial entanglements later, their *I do*-s had turned into *We can't*-s. Armed with their fierce love for their son and a desire to give him the best, they realized they needed to find an alternative to the seemingly inevitable toxic divorce that loomed over their lives.

Refusing to participate in the standard litigious legal divorce process, they devised a new strategy and worked to confront their hurt feelings and fragile egos head-on. Committed to putting Asher's needs first in every decision, they helped each other heal and build a future. Their happily blended family today is a testament to their commitment to a few core principles and their incredible son—during the divorce and beyond.

Throughout the book, Nikki and Ben elaborate on the difficulties of their divorce experience, their individual pains and triumphs, as well as their unique approach to relationships and blended families. Their story is sure to inspire others to pursue something few believe possible... a happy divorce.

ourhappydivorce.com



Testimonials for *Our Happy Divorce*

“Divorce can be traumatic for everyone, especially children, but Nikki and Ben show that it’s possible for divorcing parents to be kind, loving, and supportive of one another and come out the other side as friends and allies. This beautifully written book is a godsend for divorcing parents—a useful and inspiring guide.”

— *David Sheff,*
author of *Beautiful Boy: A Father’s Journey
Through His Son’s Addiction*



“*Our Happy Divorce* is an aspirational true-life embodiment of what we talk about when we refer to The Evolution of Dissolution. It is my sincere hope that readers take a page from this book (literally and figuratively), absorb, and practice a new and better approach to divorce.”

— *Laura A. Wasser, Esq.,*
Founder and CEO of It’s Over Easy

“*Our Happy Divorce* hits home with an honest and positive take on parenting after divorce. Nikki DeBartolo and Ben Heldfond are the perfect role models for creating a loving, modern family after divorce.”

— *Jerry Rice,*
NFL Hall of Famer, Wide Receiver

“Anyone who is splitting up needs to read this book, an amazing story of breakup, personal growth, and love. Nikki and Ben show that you can emerge from divorce a happier couple than when you were married.”

— *Kris Drewry Perelmutter,*
author of *Breakup Positive:
Turn Your Heartbreak
Into Happiness*





Nikki DeBartolo & Benjamin Heldfond

Nikki knows firsthand how being supported by a strong, loving family can influence the way a person navigates life, love, marriage, and motherhood. Having grown up as a member of the iconic San Francisco 49ers football family, she was thrown into the limelight at a young age. The values her family instilled in her have helped shape who she is today, and she continues to live by them. As Vice President of the DeBartolo Family Foundation, Nikki has made it her mission to give back to her community in every way possible, from supporting local grassroots movements to national charities, all while being a strong, supportive wife and mother. Nikki resides in Tampa Bay, Florida, with her son Asher and her husband Chad Chronister, who also serves the Tampa community as Sheriff of Hillsborough County.



Ben graduated from the University of California, Berkeley with a Bachelor of Science degree in African American History and Business Administration. He is the owner of Heldfond Holdings, LLC, a holding company that invests in a wide variety of companies, including private equities, restaurants, and a record label. He is also a member of the board for Swig Company, LLC. Ben is involved with many organizations supporting those who struggle with addiction and substance abuse. An avid golfer and sports enthusiast, he currently resides in South Tampa with his wife, Nadia; fifteen-year-old son, Asher; six-year-old daughter, Isabella; and three-year-old son, Jackson.

Q&A With Nikki and Ben

1. When did you know it was time to write this book?

NIKKI: When every other day we would get a Facebook message or a comment from someone in shock of our relationship. People would always say, “You should write a book,” but of course in my mind it was, “How in the hell do we do that?” I guess that’s why it took us as long as it did!

BEN: After years of people making comments to us on social media or people telling us in person how inspiring our story was, it was clear that we had too good of a story not to share with as many people as possible.

2. **Nikki, you mention in the book that a big step was admitting to yourself that it's okay the marriage didn't work. What helped you come to this conclusion?**

NIKKI: I don't know if it was any one thing in particular, but growing up thinking marriage was the happily-ever-after Cinderella fairytale definitely had an impact. The last thing I wanted to do was fail and disappoint my parents who have been married for almost 51 years. Yes, my marriage failed, but something so wonderful came from it.

3. **Ben, your own parents' divorce shaped your ideas about divorce from an early age. Was it difficult to separate these ideas from what you wanted your divorce to look like?**

BEN: At first I was so blinded by resentment, fear, and anger that I didn't care or remember how hard my parents' divorce was on me or the effect it had. It wasn't until that moment on the plane when I started reading the lawyer's prenup plan that I saw *clearly* how our divorce could end up going the same way as my parents'. Going down a negative, anger-fueled road wasn't going to cut it. In that moment, I knew I had to find a different way.

4. **One of the biggest motivations in your happy divorce was making sure Asher's needs and happiness came first. What did you learn about your son during this process?**

NIKKI: Kids are so much smarter and aware than we give them credit for. I always knew how smart he was, but to watch him navigate a divorce with us was enlightening. It was almost like he was figuring it out along the way too. Kids are simple, and honesty is key.

BEN: I agree. Thinking that kids are resilient and will get over this is just bullshit parents tell each other to justify their behavior.

5. **Would you say you're better people now post-divorce?**

NIKKI: I can only speak for myself, but yes, 100%. I have grown so much as a person. I am a better mother, wife, sister, and friend. I would say I am so proud of my relationship with Asher and how close we are. I still work on it every day.

BEN: Absolutely. This process has taught me how strong the power of forgiveness is. This happy divorce started when I forgave myself for everything I had done to end the marriage and also forgave Nikki for her part. I am also a stronger person because I have Nikki as a best friend who doesn't let me get away with my bullshit.

6. **What is the most difficult part about parenting as a divorced parent?**

NIKKI: Making sure all five of us know what's going on all the time and where Asher is going when and with whom! I think we all definitely parent differently but have tried to keep all the same rules at both houses.

BEN: I think it is consistency and not parenting to try and get the "favorite parent" award. For us, that is mitigated because we communicate and work hard on keeping things consistent.

7. **What is the best part?**

NIKKI: Knowing he doesn't have to choose or take sides and that we have kept his life as normal as we could.

BEN: This is the *hardest* question in the world because the answer is all the above and more. The bottom line is we were able to avoid weaponizing him against each other and sticking him with a huge emotional bill to pay in something he had no choice or say in.

8. I'm interested in your take on divorces that take place in the public eye and if that had any effect on your approach to the new version of your relationship.

NIKKI: Maybe more so the divorces I saw growing up—the horrible ones where parents couldn't even both go to their kids' games at the same time or had to have other people drop off their kids so they could stay away from each other. As I said, kids are smart, and this type of behavior is just destroying them.

BEN: I don't think it was the public divorces as much as my own parents' divorce that motivated me to find a different way.

9. A happy divorce takes a certain amount of respect and maturity. What has helped you remain friendly to each other, even in the midst of the difficulties of divorce?

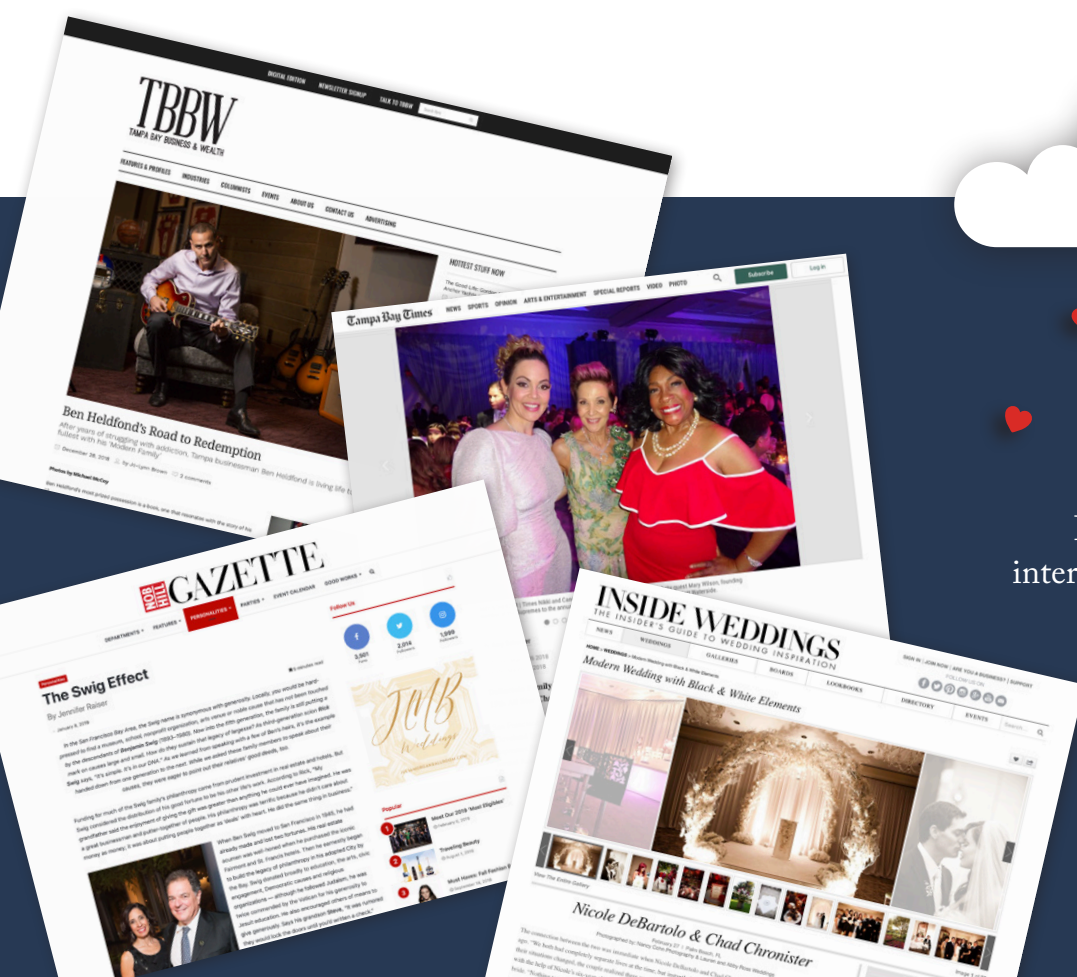
NIKKI: Checking my ego at the door. You can't get to where we are with egos.

BEN: I agree with Nikki. Also realizing that we were the adults in this situation and we had to act accordingly.

10. What advice do you want to give to separating couples?

NIKKI: My advice is, no matter how hurt you are, check your ego. We had everything working against us too. We had to remember what was best for Asher.

BEN: It is okay to break your vows to each other, and you need forgive yourself and each other. But under no circumstances can you break the inherent vows you take when you become a parent. Nikki and I didn't snap our fingers and immediately go on vacation together with our son. We took it slow and were committed to doing what was best for Asher. A lot of times we were faking it until we made it. No one has ever been able to survive eating the whole apple in one bite. It has to start with one bite at a time.



Ben and Nikki are available for interviews, events, and appearances.

For press inquiries or to request a review copy of *Our Happy Divorce*, please contact Chantelle Siegel at chantelle@advantagepr.com