



YES Christina Young is a relationship coach and author of a new book about surviving infidelity. She is married to Doug, has three children and lives in Surrey.

We'd been married for 24 years and I'd just turned 50 when my husband confessed he'd had an affair. I'd always thought our marriage was pretty good. We met in our twenties and, with the kids getting older, had got to the stage where we had more time for each other. We shared interests and did lots of things together, although our relationship had never been strong on physical intimacy.

Ironically, it was in an attempt to change this that prompted Doug's confession. I'd begun training as a relationship coach and had persuaded him to accompany me on a weekend course. On day two, he told me that from early on in our marriage he'd had one-night stands and gone on to have an affair with one of my friends. I was devastated – not only shocked by the knowledge he'd cheated, but also that I'd been betrayed by a friend. >>

Every city break featured an odyssey for an English language newspaper. And he never wanted to socialise, preferring his books and his study. Now I'm free of all that and just get the nice bits.

If I were an actress and needed to cry on cue, I could still conjure up a tear when I think of how sad it is that we parted, but, actually, I'm so much happier now in my life than I was even before we broke up. My new man and I get on wonderfully. He's tall (my husband was short), he's slim (my husband wasn't), he's athletic, whereas the ex, bless him, thought reaching for the remote control was an extreme sport. Neither is new man remotely interested in politics, and probably thinks the West Bank is a branch of Barclays. We vacation without turning on the TV, spend a lot of time walking, and regularly listen to live music. He's turned me into a massive

football fan, and I've turned him into a foodie. Best of all – we don't live together. Probably never will. When we're not together, we each follow our own interests, see other friends, spend time with our families.

So, far from the affair being the end of something, it actually extended my life, opened it out and became a new start. I actually feel lucky – a lot luckier than the woman he had the affair with. She and he have loads in common, but not four children, not 25 years of history we shared, not the Christmases, the birthdays, the celebrations. Sometimes I think I got the best of everything – that wonderfully rich past, and the possibility of a future that belongs entirely to me, to spend as I please, with absolutely no rolling news coverage.

renewed happiness made sense. The affair wasn't over. The marriage was.

So the flowers never appeared. He hid them in the back garden where they rotted still in their cellophane. Whatever he wrote on the card, whether sincere or not, was never read. The gift, he eventually gave me, I returned. It turns out that expense isn't necessarily a sign of affection.

I really wanted my marriage to endure. So what if he'd had an affair? Life and marriage are both long. I was sure we could weather the storm and work on our problems, but looking back, I have to admit that the main reason I wanted to hold on to it, even though it was so obviously broken, was because I was afraid. It was fear that made me hold on; fear of change, fear of the unknown, fear of my life not turning out the way I had planned. The future stretched before me empty and alone and uncharted. I kept thinking, "Who will I belong to?" as though I were a broken umbrella that had been left on a bus, with no purpose if there wasn't somebody there to claim me.

Three years on, we're still separated; he with another woman, the Swiss Miss, and me with another, sort of, partner too. Life has moved on. I'm working in a job I love. I have colleagues I didn't have before. I have a better and, more importantly, entirely separate, relationship with my kids. Oddly enough, I even have a better relationship with my ex-husband, who I continue to see every couple of weeks, though now he's more like a beloved sibling than a former partner. He is still someone I can confide my troubles to, and remains one of my go-to people when I'm upset.

Twenty-five years of marriage gives you an intimacy you don't have with, say, your workmate – he already knows me, warts and all. Sometimes, I think he gets the bum deal. He left me, but he still has to listen to me moan. I, on the other hand, don't have to put up with any of the stuff that drove me crazy when we were together. He was a news junkie, obsessed with the Middle East, and we were tied to BBC News 24 like a life-support machine, even during holidays.

"The reason why I wanted to hold on to my marriage was because I was afraid of change and the unknown"

COULD YOUR MARRIAGE survive an affair?



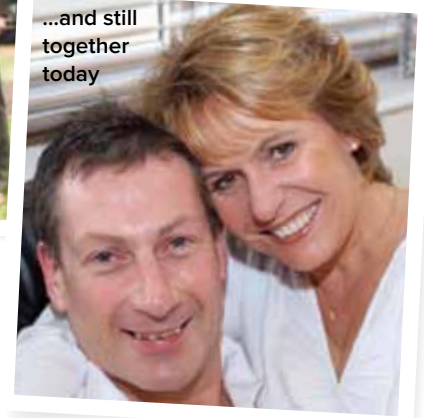
Two women explain what happened when they found out their husbands had been unfaithful

NO Marion McGilvary's 25-year marriage ended three years ago. She is a writer, lives in London and has four children. My husband and I always celebrated anniversaries alone – a magnificent bouquet would arrive early in the day and in the evening we'd open a bottle of Champagne and a tin of caviar, just the two of us. But on the eve of our 25th anniversary, we were both a little battle-scarred. The past year had been agony. I knew my husband had met someone else and even though he said

it was over and seemed happier, it didn't feel like we had a lot to celebrate. "Don't be silly," he said. "We're celebrating making it through 25 years," and put his arm around my shoulder for a conciliatory hug before rising to lock the doors so we could go to bed. And then his phone buzzed beside me on the sofa. A message flashed up on the screen. "Are you passing through Switzerland next weekend?" it said. Suddenly, everything fell into place. The woman wasn't, as I thought, in the States, but within easy visiting distance. Even his



...and still together today



Above: Christina and Doug on their wedding day in 1982...

The next few days were full of pain. Doug told the children, who were then aged 15, 19 and 31, what he'd done. I fantasised about them turning against him, but as far as they were concerned, he was still their dad and a good one and, deep down, I knew I didn't want that.

Doug moved into the spare bedroom and we avoided each other. I was hurt, angry and confused. I insisted he delete all email addresses and phone numbers for my so-called friend – I knew I'd never have any more contact with her.

Anger was followed by depression, then loneliness. But I also decided not to make a knee-jerk decision and say the marriage was over. I knew I had to deal with my emotions first.

Luckily, I'd been due to go on two coaching courses and was able to engineer five weeks away. Being away plus the work I was doing helped me think about my life. My childhood wasn't happy and my father was often critical. That made me look for love and security but also made me controlling in my adult life. Sexual intimacy wasn't that important to me and I didn't realise the importance of that in our relationship.

During my last weeks away, Doug and I started to communicate. He'd also been doing a lot of thinking and talked

to someone about his own problems. We agreed to go away for the weekend and spent the afternoon talking. We recognised the lack of communication in our marriage and although I don't blame myself for what happened, I do take some responsibility. Doug, in turn, had not been providing enough certainty, making it harder to let go and trust.

That evening we went out for dinner and I felt closer to Doug than I ever had before. Later, we were both unsure about getting in the same bed. Initially, we just cuddled and held each other. I hadn't planned what happened next, but for the first time in my life, I finally knew what making love was all about. I completely let myself go with Doug, and him with me.

Gradually, I began to feel that he loved me and I was the most important thing in his life. Before, it was his business and golf! Now, nearly five years on, we can speak to each about how we feel and that's how we intend it to stay.

Doug says Looking back, things weren't that bad between me and Christina, there just wasn't any spark. Today, our marriage isn't perfect, but now we know how to talk to each other honestly. *Christina's book, A Woman's Guide To Forgiving Infidelity (Bookshaker, £12), is out now. See christinayoung.co.uk.*

“My childhood made me look for love but also be controlling”

8 DIVORCE SURVIVAL TIPS

From Adele Theron, who runs nakeddivorce.com, which helps people recover after divorce

- 1 Don't sit around doing nothing – that's the worst mistake of all. Healing doesn't "just happen" – it's an active process that requires concentration and focus.
- 2 Avoid **STEATS** (short-term emotion avoidance tactics), such as excessive socialising, shopping, drinking and workaholic behaviour, which take you away from healing.
- 3 Focus on how you feel. Completely surrender to your emotions. Rather than trying to keep yourself together or put on a brave face, scream, cry, sob, be depressed and let it all out.
- 4 Go cold turkey and don't see your ex while you heal.
- 5 Write your relationship story, and articulate everything you learned from the relationship so you can do better in the future.
- 6 Be honest about the true source of your divorce. Try to take responsibility for your own part, rather than just blaming your ex.
- 7 Establish a grounded routine as fast as you're able. It really helps to have a structure and built-in purposes to your days.
- 8 Get back in touch with your dreams; the ones you'd forgotten or put on hold – and make plans to see how you can make them happen. **w&h**