

Runaway Husbands

Launch

Nicholas Hoare Bookstore
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It's been a long journey since I last stood in this spot three years and four months ago at the bittersweet launch of *My Sister, My Self*. Some of you were there then. That journey began a few days before when my husband left and although I was seared to the bone, I knew I had to understand how it was possible for such an apparently loving guy to have been living such a double life.

When I was thinking about this event tonight, at first I questioned why it was necessary. The book is already "launched" throughout the world and in the hands of hungry women in Belgium, Ireland, Malta, Britain, Canada, the U.S., and lots of women in Australia. But then I realized that this launch was an important part of the cycle and, in some way, an honouring of my journey, and the one that all those women are struggling through right at this moment.

I worked hard to get through my own recovery, but was always aware that I was rowing a boat that carried many passengers and I had to ferry them too. I felt a strong sense of mission and, as dramatic as this may sound, a sense of anxiety that I had to stay alive in order to complete it because I knew people were depending on me.

As soon the *Runaway Husbands* website went live years ago, it became a lifeline for women all over the world who Googled "wife abandonment" hunched over their computers in the middle of their far-flung nights. In the morning, I would receive an email from one of them, telling me how comforting it was to read the information and the posts on the site. She may have been suffering but she no longer felt alone. The email always ended with the same question – "When will the book become available? I need it now!"

Runaway Husbands is a book about betrayal and redemption. The betrayal is of trust, and as flawed as any marriage may be, the ones we are talking about in my book are marriages in which the wife had no doubt of her husband's honesty and loyalty and had entrusted him to protect her emotionally. The loss of trust in a person is profound, because if you are unable to trust that person who appeared the most reliable, then who can you trust? It alters your relationship with the world and all the people in it, and contorts its previous shape and form.

But more importantly, the book is about redemption. In that, I mean finding a way to step away from the loss of meaning in life and refashion a new way to live on your own. Many of the women in the study said that they wouldn't give up all they'd learned, in spite of all they'd suffered. Even while they were going through it, they said that they

were proud to find out how strong they could be. Once they stopped clinging to the idea that they needed their husbands to create the form of their lives, they came to love the freedom to sculpt it into any shape of their own liking. They took their futures into their own hands, kicking and screaming, because that certainly was not the way they had envisioned it. But, an important step in their recovery was learning that they were okay on their own and that, in the final analysis, it was not about him but about them, and what *they* were going to do with their lives.

An excerpt from an email I recently received:

I finally received my book. I am so glad I had the patience to wait. I only wish I had it a year and a half ago when my husband walked out suddenly after seven years together. I lost 45 lbs, when normally when I was going through a tough time I would overeat. It was the only time in my life I just could not bring myself to eat at all. I was physically sick. Your book is my life. I am just lucky that this book came out so I can catch up in the final chapters in how to deal and move on: how to trust and find happiness again. That is where I have been stuck. But now understanding what he did and seeing the signs looking back and making sense helps, but it doesn't hurt any less.

I just never believed this was possible and I have struggled so much the last year and a half to come to terms with what happened. Thank you for sharing your experience and writing this book. My only regret is if I had had this book when things first happened, I would have treated myself better and stood up for myself instead of taking the blame. It really is all about me and not about him. I have to remember that. Anyway, I just felt I had to write and say thank you. THANK YOU. The women on the website who comforted me and shared their lives with me even though we were complete strangers made me believe that there is a better life out there for me. I am just hoping I get a crack at it soon.

And, in closing, I want to read the final story in the book. It says it all:

The second summer after my husband had left, I got involved in marathon paddling—racing long distances in 40-pound Kevlar racing canoes using 7-ounce paddles. A friend had asked me at a gathering during the winter if I paddled. She suggested that we train together in the spring to see if I liked racing. We did and I loved it. During long-distance training runs, I would moan and groan to her about my sadness and sorrow over his leaving. She herself had had a horrible divorce some years previous. She used to say, “By the time you get to Dawson City (746 km down the river), you’ll have washed that man right out of your hair.”

I did eventually learn not to look back because if I did, I couldn't keep the damn boat straight. The physical exercise and workout were such a help to me at that point in my grieving. I put everything of myself into that boat and into those races—it helped me forget for a little while. At that time, the sheer raw physical paddling rhythm and speed saved me. Six years later, I'm still racing and have the honor of holding the fastest women's time in the longest canoe and kayak race in the world.

The river and the paddling made such a great impact on me—it was one paddle at a time, just like one day at a time. Who could ever (I sure couldn't) imagine a race starting with the first paddle stroke and reaching Dawson City 746 km later? I did it, one paddle stroke at a time. There is no magic formula, just keep going, eventually you will get there, the sadness WILL lift.