

## **256 Steps: Dealing with Divorce**

by Juliette, New York

It's 256 steps from my front door to my front door; a journey I make every other day that sparks reveries of reminiscing over the days when my parents were one. So close are the two houses that shelter me and yet so far apart are my two parents.

Twelve steps up the road, I see the crack in the pavement and I remember the first time I rode a tricycle – a hot pink contraption with a white whicker basket. My mom helped me up on to the seat while my dad adjusted the pedals. Slowly, I began to pedal, faster and faster. Soon I was riding without the security of my parents. Yet within seconds I reached a bumpy part of the road and was propelled into the air. I distinctly remember the way my parents ran towards me, together, and when they reached me... I felt safe. My mom carried me while my dad made funny jokes to hush my crying. I laughed so hard I couldn't even feel the stinging pain in my knee. All I could think about was how happy I was with my parents.

Ninety-eight steps and as I round the corner, a car comes speeding past me blasting loud music. I dive into another memory, as the voice of Evanescence transforms into the voice of Cindy Lauper. 2350 Broadway, my dad and Cindy were in the midst of a "recording session." I ran around the room, playing with my airplane wagon while my mom sat separately, busy in conversation on the telephone. Mom told me to be serious for a moment while dad and I continued to jump up and down, mimicking a "famous rock star" for Cindy. Something had changed. My parents stopped kissing in public. They spent less time together. My parents had always been on the same wavelength, but because I had what my grandmother called an "old soul," I sensed intuitively that they were drifting apart. I was a stranger inside my own home— I was confused: my parents no longer seemed inseparable. In fact, they seemed so far apart, I could hardly remember when they'd ever been together.

After 187 steps, I feel tired and alone. I see a couple bickering in their yard, and I can't help but sink into my past. The fighting seems all too familiar. The

screaming, the slamming doors, the vulgar language all envelop me. I had to change. I had to adapt to my new situation. My parents were fighting again, the word separation floated throughout the house, drifting in and out of every room stinging my ears. I became a chameleon, morphing from one parent to the next. I celebrated Christmas with my mom, Chanukah with my dad. I ate pasta with tomato sauce with my mom and mac and cheese with my dad. DIVORCE. They decided to go to court—the question of custody made me nervous. Monday: dad. Tuesday: mom. Wednesday: dad until 9, then mom. Thursday and Friday: mom. Weekends: even more confusing. And holidays: alternate depending on even or odd year. My body split in two, mitosis rendered me into two completely different people. Two houses, two rooms, two beds, two pillows, two ME's.

237 steps, I'm almost there. It's time to think of an opening to put him in a good mood. I'm 45 minutes late, I know. It was because mom needed me. Think positive, what can I say to distract his attention from infuriation? How about his girl friend, or maybe a compliment regarding the house. Hundreds of opening lines whirl around inside my head. A whirlpool of words; I try to organize my thoughts so that they flow like the words in a sweet song. Time to switch into 'Dad Mode'. No mentioning of mom, no asking for money to buy shampoo or conditioner, no acting "rude," no complaining about the food served for dinner—I can do this.

256 steps, I've reached my front door and the transformation is complete. I'm ready. A five minute walk has sent me wandering through my past, zipping by the good times and the bad. I know they both love me, they just love different ME's. In only 55 hours and 15 minutes, the short weekend will be over and I'll begin my journey back to my front door.