

## When your spouse cheats

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Anne Bercht remembers the irony. She was driving home from her Monday night voice lesson. The song on the minivan radio was just in her range, and she was belting it out.

"Un-break my heart, say you'll love me again. Undo this hurt you caused when you walked out the door and walked outta my life. Un-cry these tears I cried so many nights. Un-break my heart, my heaaaaart, ooooooh."

She was happy the Toni Braxton lyrics about love gone wrong didn't apply to her own life. Bercht was happily married, with three children. She and her husband Brian had sex every night and it was great sex. They were best friends. They were church leaders.

When her husband, who owned a construction business, got home and told her he needed to talk, Anne didn't suspect a thing. There had been not one single clue.

He told her he'd been having an affair with a woman at work. On his lunch hour.

"The shock is indescribable," she says. "I can't imagine what someone in the public arena feels like."

For women in the public, such as Adam Giambone's partner Sarah McQuarrie, the pain is compounded by public scrutiny and judgment, says Bercht, who has written a book with her husband, *My Husband's Affair Became the Best Thing That Happened to Me*.

The Berchts, who live in Abbotsford, B.C., have appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *Dr. Phil* and now run a business (on the Web at [www.beyondaffairs.com](http://www.beyondaffairs.com)) counselling other couples on surviving an extramarital affair.



Misconceptions about infidelity abound, says Anne. People think it's about sex. They assume the relationship is unhappy. Women are made to feel stupid if they had no clue, when in fact, some research has shown that in half of cases, there are no clues.

Or if there are clues, the adulterer explains them away, leaving their partner feeling crazy.

The shock is so great that it's not uncommon for betrayed partners to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, says Bercht. Fundamentals they believed to be true are not true. The foundations of their lives have been smashed.

"I forgive you," Bercht told her husband when he broke the news. She didn't mean it. It was just the first thing that popped out of her mouth, an effort to maintain the illusion of her perfect life.

It took her a while to understand that her husband wasn't asking for forgiveness. He was trying to decide whether to continue their marriage or leave her for this other woman.

Bercht spent that entire night sitting up in her kitchen, stunned by the revelation. She felt like the stupidest woman in the world. She couldn't think straight for weeks.

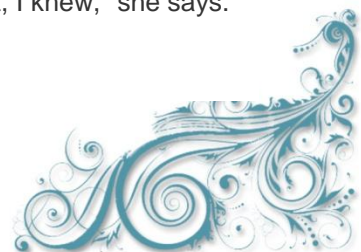
For two months afterward, she obsessed over the possibility the other woman might be pregnant, forgetting entirely that her husband had had a vasectomy and they hadn't been practising birth control as a couple for 12 years.

Another time she drove her son to a friend's house and left on foot. She forgot where she was, who she was or why she was there.

Elle, a former Toronto mom of three, says women are judged for staying. She does not want her name used because she doesn't want it to affect her children. She does want to help other women, so she launched a blog last fall at [BetrayedWivesClub.blogspot.com](http://BetrayedWivesClub.blogspot.com).

For months before her husband's confession in 2006, Elle had a sense that something was wrong in her marriage. Her husband was drinking more. He had become impatient and critical of her.

Then one day, she tried to reach her husband on a business trip and couldn't. "In that instant, I knew," she says.





Absurdly she added "confront husband" to her list of things to do that day, after "getting kids to school," and "walk dogs."

When her husband finally confessed, it was from a fetal position on the floor, he was so ashamed.

Elle had thought she had married the most principled person she'd ever met. If she was so wrong about him, what else was she wrong about? "It makes the world a scary place," she says.

Marriage counselling gave them an arena to thrash things out without fear of homicide, she says. Months later, her husband confessed that he was in fact, undergoing treatment for sex addiction. There wasn't one woman, there had been many.

"When someone faces their demons, the prognosis is pretty good," says Elle. They remain together, but she misses the innocence of her love before this happened.

"I find myself feeling jealous of other couples who can still believe in each other absolutely," she says.

Bercht says it took her and her husband two years to mend their marriage. They've spent eight years now trying to help other couples, and to get out what they believe to be a critically important message: If you believe you are invulnerable to an affair, you are vulnerable.

"People think willpower will keep them from having an affair. Knowledge will keep you from having affairs. Naïveté does not lead to monogamy. You have to be informed."

