

FIELD NOTES

This Is to Inform You of Our New Life Apart . . .

By FRANCESCA SEGRÈ

In mid-August, Dominic Thomas, 35, of Atlanta, sent an e-mail message to more than 100 people to announce his divorce.

"I am writing with the relieving yet not quite joyous news that I am finally divorced as of the judge's signature at 6 p.m. last Thursday," it read.

With so many couples on the splits these days, the stigma of divorce is wearing off and the newly single are increasingly publicly pronouncing their breakups.

While the president of France and the mayors of some big American cities have the ability to announce their marital status with microphones and news releases, others may announce their divorces more simply: with mass e-mailings. There are also printed divorce cards for those who prefer a formal approach. Stationers can even create personalized announcements that look and read like their sister card — the wedding announcement.

The two-and-a-half page message Mr. Thomas sent detailed his appreciation of the emotional support he received during the two-year-long custody battle over his son; his estimate of how much the legal process cost him and his former wife; and the finer points of the custody arrangement.

Mr. Thomas, an assistant professor at Emory, said he wrote his announcement because: "I'm reclaiming my life as it is. Letting people know about it. I don't want it to be a taboo subject." It also "helped in the healing process," he added.

Andrew Cherlin, a sociologist who specializes in the study of American families at Johns Hopkins, said nearly half of all marriages end in divorce.

Mr. Cherlin said divorce announcements are something you wouldn't have seen two generations ago.

"It would have been like announcing an out-of-wedlock pregnancy," he said. "The fact that people aren't embarrassed to send out a divorce announcement tells you how routinized divorce has become."

But writer beware: The latest edition of "Emily Post's Etiquette" states that "announcements can backfire, making the celebrant appear cold-hearted and insensitive."

Peter Post, a great-grandson of Emily Post and the author of "Essential Manners for Couples," (Collins, 2005) said, "It's certainly nicer to inform by talking face to face" or by using the telephone. "Terms of the settlement are not to be announced to the whole world — it's a private matter," he said. "Why cause more ill will than necessary?"

More than a dozen friends responded to Mr. Thomas's message. Replies ranged from the raucous ("YeeeHaaa!") to the emotional ("The news of your divorce was really disheartening and saddening") to the practical ("That much debt will keep your nose to the grindstone for a long time").

Robert Olen Butler, a Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist and a professor at Florida State, wrote what became a very publicized break-up announcement this summer.

After his wife of 12 years, the author Elizabeth Dewberry, left him for Ted Turner, Mr. Butler sent an e-mail message in July to a few faculty members and graduate students explaining the split in much detail. "Rumors will soon be swirling around the department, so I want to tell the full and nuanced story," he wrote. "This sort of thing can get wildly distorted pretty quickly."

The e-mail caused a tizzy when it was immediately forwarded and circulated on Gawker, the media gossip Web site.

Beyond the emotional and etiquette minefields that accompany such e-mail announcements, there may be legal ramifications.

"E-mail announcements could adversely affect a judge's decision in a custody battle," said Stephanie Lehman, a matrimonial lawyer and partner in WolfBlock in New York.

Robert, 46, a founder of a music-licensing company in Los Angeles, filed for divorce in June and mailed 30 humorous divorce announcements he bought from TheDivorceCards.com when he moved out. Robert, whose lawyer advised him not to use his last name while still in the middle of divorce proceedings, described his divorce "as messy as can be." He sent the

cards to let people know his new mailing address but also because, he said, "if you don't laugh, you're gonna cry."

"I was devastated; still am devastated," he said. "If you make light of it, you feel like a man."

Avyigail Sanchez, 28, of Los Angeles, filed for divorce in mid-July. "It was so traumatizing for me to leave," she said.

In early August, Ms. Sanchez, an urban

planner, who describes herself as private and reserved, sent an e-mail message to about 15 family members and friends.

"Most of you know that two years ago in April, I was wed to Prince Charming. Some of you attended the ceremony and reception so you know what I mean by 'charming.'" Never did I imagine my life from December 2006 to present to be what it has."

Looking back on the message, Ms. Sanchez said, "I wanted to tell the world: 'Look what happened, but I'm out of it now. I'm out,'" she said. "There's no going back."

Stan Tatkin, a psychotherapist who is a member of the California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists, said a divorce announcement "forces the person to declare the loss and move on."

"It makes it much more real," he said.

But then he added: "I wouldn't recommend it across the board. I would be more inclined to recommend it to someone who wants to reconnect with the world and wants to be in a relationship again. It's a good way to get back out there again — put the word out."

Jennifer Treacy operates Lola Says, a greeting card company in Brookline, N.H. Ms. Treacy sells divorce cards on her Web site lolasays.com. Asked why people send them, she said: "I think it is to say to your friends 'It's finally over. This is where I'll be living, and here's what my new name is going to be.'"

"The women sending out these cards are happy about the divorce. They're not sitting at home crying about it — well maybe a little."

Sherri Hill, 46, of Bethel, Conn., was married 17 years when she divorced in 2001. She created her own announcements, had them printed, and sent them to more than 50 friends and relatives. She used lyrics from an REO Speedwagon song, "Time for Me to Fly," on the front of the card:

*I make you laugh
And you make me cry
I believe it's time for me to fly
Inside the card, it read:
I've finally flown.*

"Our culture makes such a big deal of life-cycle events, births, graduations," said Ms. Hill, a writer and publicist. "In many ways divorce is as big or bigger than other life-cycle events."

She added, "There was another part of me that wanted to say: 'So there! I'm done with you!'"

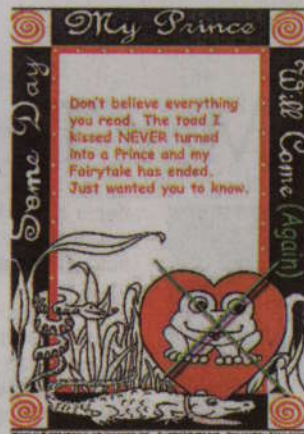


*My wife left with my house, my car,
my money and my best friend...*

and I miss him.

*I am now divorced
here is my new contact info:*

JOSH BLUM, THEDIVORCECARDS.COM



ANNIE SARELL/DIVORCEDELIGHT.COM