



Zoe and Evan Stern update their divorce book

By ERIN ELLIOTT
Community News Editor

In 1997, siblings Zoe and Evan Stern, then 15 and 13 respectively, wrote a book with their mother, Ellen Sue Stern, titled *Divorce Is Not the End of the World: Zoe and Evan's Coping Guide for Kids* (Tricycle Press). In it, Zoe and Evan addressed a variety of issues that kids of divorce encounter, including living in two different places, welcoming a parent's new partner, and dealing with feelings of guilt or responsibility.

Now, 10 years later, Zoe and Evan have updated the book to offer a new

perspective on how divorce has affected each of their lives.

"We just felt that we had a little bit of a different insight after 10 years," Zoe said. "We wanted to show everybody that look, we're still here, we're still doing great, this hasn't affected our lives poorly, and just share our knowledge and our insights that we've experienced in that time."

In addition to changing outdated language and references ("Walkman," for example, was changed to "iPod"), Zoe and Evan added "10 years later" sections to each of the chapters. After rereading what they wrote in the first edition and looking back on how far they've come, they offer new insight to help kids dealing with divorce today.

In some cases, Zoe and Evan validate what they said in the original book, and at other times they admit that things turned out differently. For example, Evan said that the tone of the first edition tended to be "a little bit too rosy" and repeated the idea that "everything will be OK."

"Obviously, 10 years can add a lot of perspective," he said. "I was able to live it out and say, in retrospect, no, this wasn't so easy. Or maybe it was easy for me at the time writing it, but now that I'm older and I've seen more and have a more mature relationship with my parents, I don't quite feel the same. It's not that straightforward. There isn't just one side to this particular situation."



Nate Uri

Ellen Sue Stern (center) and her children, Zoe and Evan, have updated *Divorce Is Not the End of the World*, a resource for families struggling with divorce and life changes.

The overall structure of the book has remained unchanged and still includes Zoe's answers to common kid questions and Evan's "quick tips." Each chapter also ends with discussion questions designed for kids to explore on their own or with their parents.

Through the process of writing the book, which Evan described as a series of "guided discussions" between him and Zoe and their mother, he said he was better able to process the divorce.

"It was surprising, sometimes, to see

how much Zoe and I were thinking the same things, or how much we were thinking completely different things," Evan said. "By going through all these various topics, a lot of them were an excuse to talk through the realities of divorce. That's how it's helpful for me and I think it's been helpful for a lot of people."

The original idea for the book came as a response to media reports that children of divorce suffered ill effects in later life. Ellen Sue, a writer and the founder of Expecting Change Workshops, knew that those reports were not completely accurate.

"I was really angry at all the bad press around divorced kids, that it just gave people the impression that kids of divorce are sort of inevitably damaged and screwed up and unable to form long-term, healthy attachments," Ellen Sue said. "I looked at Zoe and Evan and said, wait a minute, what if the worst thing that could happen happens and you get to the other side of it, then you have unbelievable coping skills."

Though the process was painful for the entire family, Ellen Sue said she and her ex-husband were dedicated to co-parenting.

"It's terribly reassuring to look at these kids and go, well, they look OK, they're doing fine," she said. "Now, I can tell you without hesitation and knowing what I know, that I would still have married Gary because I really believe that we were meant to have

these two children together."

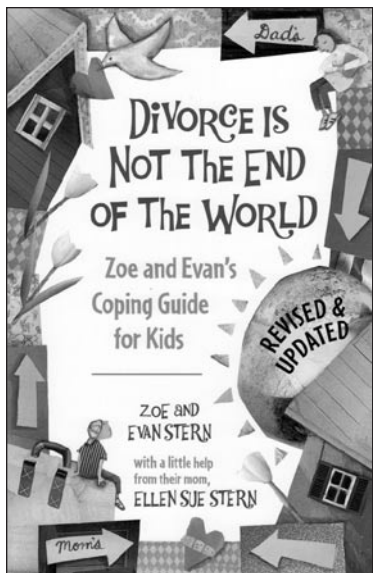
Zoe and Evan, now 25 and 23 respectively, have worked with children for many years. Zoe, a 15-year Herzl camper, considers herself a "lifetime" Herzl Camp alumna; and Evan has served as a counselor at both Herzl and Camp TEK0.

Professionally, Evan works at BANK at the Minneapolis Westin Hotel. He is the former student president of Hillel: the Jewish Student Center at the University of Minnesota, and the former coordinator of Hillel's TAG: Twenty-somethings and Grads program. He also serves on the Ner Tamid Sustainability Task Force at Temple Israel.

Zoe is a child life specialist at Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago and the director of children's programming at the Women's Athletic Club of Chicago.

"This is not a scarlet letter," Zoe said. "I've learned that kids of divorced parents have to be advocates for themselves all the time because people will think that you're messed up or there's something's wrong with your family and in reality there's not... Families are families, and the love that you have inside your family is more important than the structure."

For information, visit: www.ellen-suestern.com.



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