

# THE MEDIATOR

Mediation Offices of Michael Becker  
Experience Matters

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## It Happened Then

On April 1, 1976 Apple Computer was formed by Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak, and Ronald Wayne. Soon after, Wayne sold his 10% share for a total of \$2,300.

## Quote Me On It

"You have to leave the city of your comfort and go into the wilderness of your intuition. What you'll discover will be wonderful. What you'll discover is yourself.

— Alan Alda

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## Nonadversarial Divorce Is Here: At Least for Simpler CT Cases

A new Connecticut law allows certain couples to get divorced more quickly and without going to court. It's called "nonadversarial divorce."

At least for now, the Legislature has chosen to significantly limit the situations in which such divorces can be granted.

To qualify for nonadversarial divorce, a couple must (1) be married 8 years or fewer, (2) not have or be expecting children, (3) own no real estate, (4) have assets totaling less than \$35,000 excluding liens, (5) have no defined benefit pension, (6) not have a pending bankruptcy, (7) not be receiving or applying for

Medicaid, (8) have no restraining or protective orders pending between themselves, (9) have no other pending divorce action between themselves, and (10) meet the usual residency rules.

Nonadversarial divorce simplifies the divorce process by replacing the 90-day waiting period with an approximate 35-day period, and by allowing courts to grant the divorce 'on the papers' — the parties don't have to go to court to get divorced. Parties can also waive service of process.

Parties must elect a nonadversarial divorce, if they qualify. They can still have a conventional divorce if they prefer.

## Cost of the Ring and the Wedding: Predictor of Divorce?

Emory University researchers surveyed over 3,100 people who were or had been married, and found that spending more on the engagement ring/wedding correlated with higher divorce rates.

Specifically, people who spent \$2,000 to \$4,000 on rings were 1.3 times more likely to be divorced than those who spent between \$500 and \$2,000.

Also, people whose weddings cost over \$20,000 were 1.6 times more

likely to divorce than those who spent \$5,000 to \$10,000. The average cost is around \$30,000.

The researchers think that spending a lot on a ring or wedding — without being able to really afford it — causes financial stress. This then strains the marriage and leads to divorce.

This runs counter to the wedding industry, which generally connects expensive rings and weddings with happier marriages.

## Social Security: **Divorce Basics**

If you are the spouse who made less money in the marriage and then get divorced, Social Security has a potential benefit for you.

Upon divorce, you can typically receive the higher of your own Social Security benefit or half your ex's (which may likely be greater). Collecting on your ex's earnings doesn't impact their benefits, or those of their current spouse. Social Security just makes up the difference.

This rule applies even if your ex is remarried, and he or she won't know that you are collecting based on their earnings history. And your ex can have multiple ex-spouses collecting on his or her earnings history.

To collect on your ex's earnings history, you typically need to have been married to him or her for at least 10 years, not be currently married, and over 62.

There are other rules, such as those about when you can start collecting. So it's best to go to the Social Security website for the fine print.

## Tools & Tips

An excellent resource for kids going through divorce is Isolina Ricci's **Mom's House, Dad's House for Kids**. Ricci also wrote the iconic book, *Mom's House, Dad's House*.



I keep multiple copies of this book in my client library, and they circulate regularly.

It's aimed at kids over 10, though Ricci encourages parents of younger kids to read age-appropriate sections together with, or to, them. She also encourages parents to read the book themselves.

Ricci helps kids navigate the daily realities of divorce in an engaging way. I appreciate sections on typical questions kids have about divorce, understanding legal terms, what to do when parents date and/or remarry, and how to navigate stepfamily relationships. Ricci also encourages kids to take care of themselves, take pride in their family, and — most important — to have dreams and goals.

**Michael Becker** is a Westport attorney who also holds a Bachelor's Degree in accounting and a Master's Degree in marriage and family therapy. An ACR Advanced Practitioner and an APFM Advanced Mediator, Michael is one of the most experienced mediators in the area. He is also founding Director and twice President of the Connecticut Council for Nonadversarial Divorce, and a James W. Cooper Fellow of the CT Bar Foundation.