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Austin style and wellness experts offer tips on getting through a breakup.



Deborah Cannon /AMERICAN-STATESMAN

By **Marques G. Harper**
AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

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There's an age-old question asked of countless therapists, friends, hairdressers and just about anyone who will lend an ear: Is there really life after love?

Of course, the answer is yes. So, if you're newly single, don't spend this holiday season lamenting about a relationship past. After all, the time after a breakup can be an illuminating journey to a new self. But how do you get from here to there? Give yourself a do-over — or, as celebrity hairstylist and former Austinite Ted Gibson calls it, a breakover.

Relationship experts, stylists, makeup artists and boutique owners say the process after a breakup should be about returning the spotlight to yourself and regaining your confidence as you create a new you.

Austinite Beth Gwazdosky Martino met her ex-husband while working a high school job at a Pizza Hut in Redondo Beach, Calif. They started dating in 1987 and went to the prom and homecoming. He had a bright red Ford Mustang and drove her around until he taught her how to drive. He helped buy her first car. Still in college, he proposed to her in Las Vegas in 1993. The couple married in 1994, moved to Austin in 1999 and divorced in 2005.

In her breakover period, Gwazdosky Martino took an eight-week wellness course at the Crossings spa and resort near Lake Travis. She also had to make other changes in her life, including parting with her blond hair.

"When I separated, I went back to brown to save on money," said Gwazdosky Martino, a 40-year-old literary publicist who had highlights in her hair from her teenage years through her mid-30s.

Part of her breakover included joining a gym with her friends, quitting her full-time job and spending quality time back home in New England with her mother, who was diagnosed with cancer in 2008.

With family far away, Gwazdosky Martino turned to her girlfriends, who have become a sort of surrogate family.

"I don't know what I'd do without them," she said. "I found out there were a lot of things I could do on my own which I was proud (of)."

That's the true beauty of a breakover, says author and life coach

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ENLARGE PHOTO

Beth Gwazdosky Martino, an Austin literary publicist, found motivation after her breakup in a wellness course and in her friends. More recently, she changed her hair color to celebrate a new job.

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Ann Daly. The Austinite went through her second act 16 years ago. Having been married at a young age, she says, she learned plenty about herself after her divorce.

"When it first happens to anyone, it's devastating. You can't imagine yourself alone," said Daly, author of "Do-Over! How Women Are Reinventing Their Lives," an audiobook of stories about women who are taking second chances.

In her own case, she says, she learned how enjoyable it was to pay attention to who she was.

"I discovered how nourishing solitude is for me personally," said Daly, 50, who started gardening after her divorce. "I had not learned as a young person to be thoughtful about, 'What do I want in a relationship?' instead of all of this romantic smooch stuff that doesn't prepare us for the work of marriage."

Her audiobook's title came from a conversation with a friend who had broken up with his longtime partner. The friend asked Daly if there was anything positive about a breakup.

"I just immediately wrote back, 'How many times do we get an honest-to-goodness chance for a do-over?'" said Daly, who blogged about second chances prior to working on the book.

In October, Daly, who has remarried, visited that same friend in New York, and they chatted about their new partners.

"That's really a big growth moment," Daly said. "No one wants to hear it when we're in that moment. It's an opportunity to rethink who we are without having to think about someone else. It's a moment to try new things."

A second act, she says, isn't meant to be about seeking revenge.

"The best revenge is to learn what you need to learn, think bigger about your life and go after it," she said.

That means you finally might learn how to two-step or hip-hop dance. You could explore continuing education classes — say, at Austin Community College — or take cooking classes with friends. You might opt to get hair extensions, as reality TV mom-turned-divorcée Kate Gosselin of "Kate Plus 8" did in a 20-hour hair session with Gibson.

You might buy a sports car or a house — or plan your own "Eat Pray Love" adventure, traveling the world and maybe finding a romantic encounter along the way.

"This flip side of the sadness is this opportunity," Daly said. "If you can garden enough, and you're in this place that's calm and open, you can start the adventure."

The adventure likely will mean you take a hard look at yourself in the mirror. You might have let yourself go a bit during your prior relationship. So a new wardrobe, hairdo or some personal training sessions might help you move forward.

Stephanie Coultriss O'Neill, a former therapist who's now an Austin retailer of women's and men's clothing, says the period after a breakup is all about the three C's: confidence, comfort and conversation.

"You need a network of people around you," said Coultriss O'Neill, owner of Second Street boutique Estilo. "It's good to be alone and reflect at times. It's good to stay social, and it keeps you distracted and not thinking about the breakup."

To make her point, she mentioned a newly divorced customer who decided to venture out and go to a cocktail party. Before the event, she went shopping for some new garments, including a dress for the night, and she also went from blond to brunette and had her wavy hair straightened.

"It was a whole new look for her," Coultriss O'Neill said. "It got her

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some attention. I've talked to her since. She met someone that night. It's a mental thing: If you feel confident, you exude confidence."

That rule applies to men as well. Coultriss O'Neill said male shoppers who have been through a breakup are on the hunt for tighter jeans and better-fitting shirts to get back on the scene.

Boosting a woman's self-esteem can be as easy as getting a new hair color or a pixie cut or bangs. Or as Austin hairstylist Ron King, owner of Ron King Salon and Bô Salon, suggested: Give yourself long locks with hair extensions.

"So you have a head of hair to fluff or fling around," he said. "I know if I were a girl, that's what I'd do."

Before you make a radical change to your hair, you should have a consultation with a trusted hairdresser.

One of King's biggest suggestions? Change your fragrance. Usually, colognes and perfumes evoke memories, say, of a beach vacation with a former spouse or a holiday moment with your ex. Switching scents can give a person a fresh start mentally, King said.

"It might be a chance to go and indulge and take care of yourself for a change," said King, who claims to have saved a number of relationships through a client's time spent in his chair.

And while you are making changes, don't forget about your makeup, said Michelle Perez, vice president of sales and marketing for Evie Evan, a cosmetics store on Congress Avenue.

That might mean learning how to give yourself a smoky eye or finding a new lipstick shade. The tricks are to not go overboard and to try to highlight your most becoming features.

"People will take a notice that you've done something different without thinking you're a completely different person," Perez said.

Want to work through the pain? Go to the gym or take up a sport. After all, during exercise, endorphins are released by the body and interact with the receptors in a person's brain. As a result, there's a reduction in the perception of pain.

Austin personal trainer Barton Bryan says a person shouldn't become obsessive about working out to win back an ex.

"It's a real vicious cycle, working out hoping you're going to get some validation or gratification from your ex-partner," said Bryan, co-owner of Fitness 4 Mind and Body . "Make sure the working out is about moving forward, not trying to get the person back."

Instead, stay focused on your nutrition and overall health, instead of your former relationship.

The key, no matter what kind of breakover you choose, is to avoid relinquishing yourself to sadness. View the period after a breakup as you might a new year: It's a fresh start.

In Gwazdosky Martino's case, the breakover process has been ongoing.

In July, she got a full-time job. To celebrate, she returned to being a blonde.

"With the blond, I wanted to do something different," Gwazdosky Martino said.

"I finally had enough income from freelancing and a full-time job. Now it's money well-spent because it makes me feel good. ... I love it. It feels empowering."

mharper@statesman.com; 445-3974

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