

“This groundbreaking book is a compelling chronicle of Nancy Anderson’s journey to the other side of the marital fence—and her return as a prodigal wife who found forgiveness and restoration. It also offers encouraging suggestions, real-life examples, and practical guidance for couples who want to predict, prevent, or pardon infidelity. Counselors and couples alike will benefit from the honest insights of a couple that has been there.”

—RICK WARREN’S *MINISTRY TOOLBOX*

“With lively wit and well-tested wisdom, *Avoiding the Greener Grass Syndrome* unforgettably illustrates that a good, lasting marriage takes a lot of care and protection. Having known Nancy and her husband, Ron, for over fifteen years, I have witnessed their authenticity firsthand. Their story of God’s restoration and the important lessons they share in this book will help you build a strong and joyful marriage.”

—JOEL WINGO, director of Calvary Chapel Bible College, Costa Mesa

“A powerful, timeless story of God’s covenant love and redeeming grace. Highly recommended reading for any husband or wife, and for parents with married children.”

—NANCY DEMOSS WOLGEMUTH, author, teacher,
and host of *Revive Our Hearts*

Praise for the First Edition

“This is an excellent book for all marriages. If you are struggling, it will give you solid steps to freedom, and if you have a good relationship, it will give you creative ways to make it great. Nancy is the perfect voice for today’s readers. She is smart and funny, candid and caring, delivering an established biblical message in a contemporary package—I highly recommend this book.”

—BOBBY VALENTINE, former executive producer for *Focus on the Family*

“Nancy Anderson does a terrific job telling her compelling U-turn story of rebellion, repentance, and restoration. In the second part of the book, she gives helpful suggestions and candidly funny examples that demonstrate how to create a healthy and satisfying green-grass marriage. She has a delightful way of teaching without preaching. A must-read for every Christian couple!”

—ALLISON BOTTKE, author of *Setting Boundaries for Women*

“*Avoiding the Greener Grass Syndrome* is practical, heartfelt, humorous, and motivating. Counselors and couples alike will greatly benefit from the honest insights of a couple who have ‘been there.’ If you want to grow a fulfilling, loving, lasting marriage, then read this book and buy several for those you love. It’s right on target with a purposeful message.”

—MARCUS BACHMANN, PhD, clinical family and marriage therapist
and president of Counseling Care

“My husband and I have known Nancy and her wonderful parents for thirty years, so it’s not surprising that Nancy has written such a wise and insightful book on marriage. She tells her dramatic story in a way that pierces the soul and provides hope for all marriages.”

—MICHELE BACHMANN, former congresswoman

“*Avoiding the Greener Grass Syndrome* is by turns honest, humorous, moving, insightful, and practical. Nancy Anderson does a masterful job at telling her story without going into sordid details, yet remaining vulnerable enough to inspire and encourage struggling couples. I highly recommend this book!”

—DENA DYER, coauthor of *Love at First Fight*

SECOND EDITION

AVOIDING THE
Greener Grass
SYNDROME

How to Grow Affair-Proof Hedges
Around Your Marriage

NANCY C. ANDERSON

 **Kregel**
Publications

Avoiding the Greener Grass Syndrome: How to Grow Affair-Proof Hedges Around Your Marriage

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In part 1 of this book, the story is true; however, some names and certain details were changed. In part 2, some anecdotes and stories have been changed or fictionalized to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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*To my husband,
who loved me when I was unlovable.*

*To my parents,
who taught me when I was unteachable.*

*To my Savior,
who reached me when I was unreachable.*

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To God be the glory, for the things He has done!

—Andrae Crouch

This book was birthed with many midwives:
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Introduction

Can a Marriage Survive an Affair? Yes, Mine Did!

Hello, my name is Nancy, and I was a cheater. I've never cheated on a tax return or a final exam, but I did cheat on my husband. That's why I'm an expert on infidelity—because I've lived it.

The “greener grass syndrome” has seduced many people into believing they'll find true joy and fulfillment on the other side of the marital fence. I believed that lie.

Ron was twenty-six and I was twenty-two when we got married in 1978. Both of us thought that it was the other person's job to “make me happy!” We soon found out that was impossible.

I complained and criticized my way through our first year, and then Ron retaliated with the “I'm a bad husband because you're a bad wife” defense. He was controlling, demanding, and impatient. We both looked for ways to punish each other, and our anger and resentment grew until they overshadowed our love.

That's when I met Jake. He thought I was beautiful, funny, and smart. He only saw the good in me, and he bathed me in compliments. We worked for the same company, so it was easy to spend time together. We started meeting for lunches, then dinners, and eventually . . . dessert.

So this book is different from other marriage books that are based

upon theories, statistics, and clinical studies of infidelity: this book is about *real* life in the *real* world.

The truth is, marriage is both difficult and effortless, magnificent and excruciating, blissful and tedious. Sometimes it's all those things within the same day—even within the same hour.

I know how hard it is to stay in a less-than-perfect marriage while TV talk shows and well-meaning friends are preaching the “you deserve to be happy” gospel. I looked for that verse in the Bible. Trust me—it's not there.

In the first section of this book, you'll read about the self-deception and lame excuses I resorted to for my unfaithfulness. You probably won't like me very much, and I'm okay with that, as long as you keep reading and give me a chance to show you what a swell gal I am now.

You'll also meet my mom and dad. My parents' “tough love” led Ron and me to reconciliation. Without their intervention, I don't know if we would have been able to see any hope for our future. Their prayers and insights led us to the door of forgiveness, and then we walked through it.

The second part of the book is about our recovery and the things we've learned in the past thirty-five years of rebuilding our marriage. We faced our faults, changed our behavior, and decided to love each other. The purpose of this book, then, is to give you hope and encouragement, and provide you with exciting ways to grow a fabulous, affair-proof marriage.

I want to show you how to grow the greenest grass in the universe—in your own back yard.

Your new friend,
Nancy

PART ONE

The Ecstasy and the
Agony of My Affair

Chapter 1

Betrayal

I was in love. I couldn't eat or sleep—I could barely breathe. As I sat near my desk at work, daydreaming about his kiss, he walked up behind me. I knew it was Jake before I saw him . . . His cologne. Polo.

He leaned over my shoulder and quickly whispered, "I made lunch for us. It's in a picnic basket in my car. I'll meet you at the Oak Street Park at noon." He hurried into his office.

I can't wait, I thought. Oh no, I can't go! I'm supposed to have lunch with my husband!

I called Ron and challenged him, "You don't *still* want to go to lunch, do you?"

"What are you talking about?" he asked. "I thought we decided to meet at the deli. Don't you want to go?"

"It doesn't matter," I mumbled.

"What do you mean, it doesn't matter? If it doesn't matter to you, it doesn't matter to me. Just forget it!" I heard a click and a dial tone, and I thought, *Oak Street Park, here I come!*

I left the office at ten minutes to twelve, driving with the windows down and the radio up. On the FM station, Barbra Streisand was singing "I Am a Woman in Love," and I knew just how she felt.

When I pulled into the parking lot, Jake was waiting for me. He had set a secluded picnic table, complete with crystal champagne glasses and white roses. He walked out to the car to greet me, and after a sweeping

glance around the park, he kissed my cheek and playfully bit my neck as he whispered, "I'm hungry." We sat side by side as we ate our fruit salad and drank the champagne.

"Have you told your wife about us yet?" I asked.

He nodded. "Last night, after the kids went to bed. It was awful. I felt so sorry for her. She couldn't stop crying."

"What did you tell her?"

"That I don't love her anymore. That I'm in love with you."

"Did you tell her my name?"

"Yes, and I told her that she'd met you at the company Christmas party. I said that you are wonderful, beautiful, and very smart. When I told her that you are very religious, she punched my arm, and said, 'If she's so religious, how come she's stealing my husband?'"

I winced. "Am I *stealing* you?"

"No, I'm stealing *you*," he said. "Well . . . I guess we're stealing each other. I'm relieved that I told her. She wants me to move out. I guess I'll stay with my parents. Are you going to tell Ron tonight?"

"I suppose I'll have to. He's gonna freak out. He knows that I'm not happy with our marriage, but I don't think he suspects that I have a boyfriend."

Jake teased me as he sang, "Nancy's got a boyfriend; Nancy's got a boyfriend."

I laughed as I grabbed his tie, pulled him close. "I think you're flirting with me," I said, "and I'll give you forty-five minutes to stop it!"

He scrunched up his handsome face, squinted his bright blue eyes, and mischievously growled, "Set the timer."

Then he kissed me.

I left the park a few minutes before he did, and as I drove back to the office I pushed the radio buttons looking for a happy love song. I froze as I heard the voice of Reverend J. Vernon McGee say, "If you stop your sinful behavior, God will forgive you." I quickly turned off the radio and said, "But I don't *want* to stop!"

I went back to the office and called Ron.

“We need to talk,” I said.

“I know. Where and when?” he asked.

“I’ll be working late, but I’ll be home at seven. See you then?”

“Fine.”

After I arrived at our little condo, I hurried into the shower to wash off Jake’s cologne, then changed clothes. Ron came in at about 7:30.

“You’re late,” I scolded.

He ignored my comment and asked, “What do you want to talk about?”

“I want to talk about us. We aren’t getting along. We fight all the time, and you even hung up on me today. I think we need some time apart . . . to sort things out.”

“What things?” he demanded. “Why can’t we sort them out while we’re together? You’re so melodramatic. You always overreact. Why can’t you just be normal?”

“Normal?” I yelled. “Do you think *you’re* normal? You’re the weirdest person I know. That’s why I want to get away from you. You’re too controlling and selfish. You never encourage me or compliment me.”

“What’s to compliment? You act like a crazy woman.”

I shook my head. “You just don’t see me, do you? There are other men who think I’m funny . . . smart . . . pretty, but you just insult me and try to control my life. Well, I’m sick of it, and that’s why I’m leaving!”

He pointed his finger at me. “You are not going anywhere. Your parents will tell you to stay with me. We’ve only been married a few years. What about your wedding vows? What about the people at church?”

“Oh . . . so *now* you want to talk about church? We haven’t been going for months, and you know why . . . because you didn’t want to get your butt out of bed! So don’t start being Joe Christian now. It’s too late! Don’t tell my parents anything yet . . . until we decide what we’re going to do.”

He softened and asked, “What *are* we going to do?”

“I don’t know yet . . . but I know I need some space and time to think on my own. I found a little hotel near the office that rents rooms by the month. I want one month to sort out my feelings.”

I escaped into the bedroom, shut the door, packed two suitcases, and walked back into the living room. Ron was sitting on the couch, crying. He begged me not to go. I stopped and stared at him. Showing no emotion, I walked out the front door.

After checking into the hotel, I went to my tiny room on the second floor. I knew I couldn't call Jake at his parents' house, so I cried myself to sleep, my tears an odd cocktail of guilt, loneliness, and exhilaration.

The next morning I put on a new red dress. Prancing into Jake's office, I closed the door. He looked up from his desk and said, "Wow, you look like a model. Spin around and let me look at you."

I turned slowly as I said, "I told him."

"Everything? Did you tell him about me?"

I continued, ignoring his question. "I moved out of the house and into a hotel. We can finally be together."

Later that afternoon, I told one of my divorced coworkers, "Hey, Carmen, I left my husband yesterday."

She said, "Good for you! I'm so proud of you! Life is too short to be unhappy. I love being single. Hey, I've got a great idea! Why don't you go dancing with me tonight?"

"I already have plans for tonight," I said, "but I'd love to go out with you on Friday."

"Great!" she replied. She touched my sleeve and said, "You should wear that dress . . . you'll get lots of attention."

I was tempted to call Ron to see if he was okay, but I didn't. He didn't call me, either.

Jake and I took separate cars to my hotel. As I drove past a church, I read their sign: "God wants you to make a U-turn." Anger and fear rushed through me as I hit the steering wheel and yelled, "Leave me alone, God!" But He didn't. I could still feel Him watching me—from a distance.

I met Jake in the parking lot, and he held my hand as we walked up the stairs. "Are you okay?" he asked. "You seem upset."

"I'm great," I lied. "Tell me how wonderful I am."

He cradled my face in his hands and said, "You are spectacular . . .

glorious . . . magnificent, and I adore you! Now kiss me!” I melted into his arms, and we danced into the room.

He quickly hung the “Do Not Disturb” sign on the doorknob. Then he locked the door.

Things to Think About

Several signs—changes in your spouse’s behavior—may indicate that your spouse is having an affair. Which ones were evident in this chapter?

- Changes eating and sleeping patterns
- Wears a different style of clothes
- Starts arguments
- Works longer or different hours
- Pulls away from church and extended family
- Takes more showers than usual
- Compares his or her spouse to other people
- Shows cold, emotionless behavior
- Takes off his or her wedding ring

Things to Do

Ron and I should have done a number of things to improve our marriage. You can start doing some of them now.

1. Compliment each other.
2. Attend church together regularly.
3. Be honest about your feelings and disappointments.
4. If you’re having problems, ask a trusted, mature Christian couple for help.