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WORKSHEET: WRITING A MARITAL HISTORY FOR YOUR LAWYER

Your marital history will help your lawyer understand how your marriage worked or did not work, what outside influences have contributed to your marital problems, and, especially, what barriers your lawyer may face in assisting you and your spouse to amicably resolve your divorce.

Your lawyer can best protect you and your interests and plan for your case by knowing as much as possible about what to expect when you and your spouse begin the legal process. The more you include, the better. Take your time.

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1. CHRONOLOGY OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Provide a brief chronology of your relationship from the time that you and your spouse met, through dating, up to marriage.

2. ROLE OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Describe your family's involvement and your spouse's family's involvement in your marriage. Mention how you get along with your spouse's family, and vice versa. Do the same for close friends, as applicable.

3. EDUCATION HISTORIES

Explain the extent of your education and your spouse's education and/or training, including how it was paid for. If you have loans, how were or are they being repaid? Include any special contributions, money or support, you or your spouse, or your respective families, made to the other's education and training.

4. YOUR CHILDREN

Describe their growth and development; their health; their educational needs; and your and your spouse's expectation of them.

5. PARENTING RESPONSIBILITIES

Describe the relationship each of your children has with both you and your spouse and what you and your spouse's roles have been toward the children. Who attended their events, supervised their homework, and took them to doctor's appointments? Cover also the paternal and maternal extended families' involvement and influence.

6. PARENTING CONFLICTS

List areas of conflict about the children, such as religion, school performance, and behavioral issues. Especially address how decisions were made, how you argued and disagreed, how you resolved conflicts, and, if you didn't resolve them, what happened next.

7. EMPLOYMENT HISTORIES

State your incomes and describe how they were spent and/or saved. Include any contributions that either of you have made to the other's employment or promotions and actual work at your spouse's employment.

8. FINANCES AND FINANCIAL CONFLICTS

Explain how the finances were handled. Include areas of conflict regarding money. Especially address how decisions were made, how you argued and disagreed, how you resolved conflicts, and if you didn't resolve them what happened next.

9. GIFTS AND INHERITANCES FROM FAMILIES

List gifts or inheritances from either of your families, to whom they were made, and how they were used. Especially address how decisions were made, how you argued and disagreed, how you resolved conflicts, and if you didn't resolve them, what happened next.

10. ASSETS AND DEBTS

Explain in whose name each asset is titled and who signed the indebtedness, and generally what part each of you played in the acquisition of those assets and debts. Especially address how decisions were made, how you argued and disagreed, how you resolved conflicts, and if you didn't resolve them, what happened next.

11. COUNSELING AND THERAPY

Describe what counseling, psychological or psychiatric treatment either you or your spouse has received either individually or together.

12. THE BREAKDOWN OF YOUR MARRIAGE

Explain the events and conflicts that led to the breakdown of your marriage. State any barriers you perceive to amicable resolution. Be as fair to yourself and your spouse as you can.

13. MAJOR LIFE EVENTS

Detail any major successes or tragic events that occurred during your marriage.

14. HEALTH HISTORIES

Provide a detailed health history of yourself, your spouse, and your children. Include diseases or illnesses that run in your family. Outline any major operations or health problems. Indicate the names and addresses of physicians for any current problems.

15. KEEP IT CONFIDENTIAL

A typewritten history is preferable because your lawyer will probably refer to it often—but most important is that it remain confidential. Do not discuss your marital history document with anyone other than your lawyer or allow it to be on a computer that can be accessed by your spouse. If you decide to handwrite it, secure it in a place that is inaccessible to your spouse.