



Ties That Bind: Stories Of Marriages That Worked And How We Could Learn From Them

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Preface

Marriage has its up and downs, that's for certain.

It's a matter of how we deal with the rollercoaster ride of marital life. This will determine if our marriage will succeed or fail. Of course, this is often easier said than done. There are a lot of factors at play that can affect any of the applicable situations inside married life.

Spouses encounter problems everyday, some more often than others. It's a part of life... not just married life, but life in general.

But some of these problems are too daunting. Some of them are too painful. Some of them are perceived as too grave and they make us lose our proper senses of what is right and what is wrong.

This is quite unfortunate.

A marriage is a union of two people, a union of two hearts, and a union of two souls. The truth is, both parties in a marriage are bigger than the problems they encounter, if only they'd open their eyes to see this fact.

But the problem is, more often than not, our eyes are blinded by the pains, the frustrations, the disappointments, the depression, and the hatred that the said problems bring about. The result: we fail to realize the beauty of what we have and the reasons – the real reasons – why we are with our partner.

The statistics reflect this at an alarming rate.

There have been 957,200 reported cases of finalized divorces in the year 2000 alone, and this does not include the non-reporting states in the United States. That's almost a million occurrences of divorce, and the number doesn't show the pending petitions filed in court.

What's more telling is that there is an equal number of newly celebrated marriages per year.

Immediately, a one-to-one correspondence between marriage celebrations and divorce proceedings can be established. This is rather sad. It means that every marriage has almost as much chance of failing.

But there are marital success stories. These are stories about couples who have braved the storm to make their marriage even stronger. These are stories that will prove to us that a marriage can work, if our minds and our hearts are in the proper place. And these are stories that will inspire us because they will remind us of one simple principle: that even the most trying times can be conquered.

Marriage is founded on love. Sometimes this love is often clouded by doubts and fears and temptations, but it would take so much to completely eradicate it from our existence.

Remember the saying that the heart does not forget?

Once the heart loves, the heart will not forget. It just gets lost sometimes, because of the mazes presented by the tribulations of our existence.

And the tales of marital success that can be found in quite a number of couples will prove this. Theirs are tales of struggle, of suffering, of sacrifice, and most of all... of love.

And this is what this eBook is all about.

This is a guide for all married couples the world over. It is best to read it together, to ponder on the ideas that are propounded, to savor the stories that are shared, and to find inspiration in the lives of the people who have moved heaven and earth to prove that, yes, a marriage can survive the most turbulent of currents, and, yes, a marriage can indeed last a lifetime.

This eBook is a guide, but it is also a treasury of wonderful accounts of marriages that actually worked. It is a bible for all those tales that will show us how far we can go to save something that we should cherish with all our faculties.

In the pages to come, we will be discussing some salient points of a marital union. What are its components? What makes them tick? What makes them crumble? What should be realized? What can be done?

And in between these discussions and lessons will be stories of marriages that worked. From them we can attain some much needed uplifting, as well as some illustrative examples on how to apply the theories into practice.

Some of you may feel a little skeptical, considering that this is just an eBook. It is not a marriage counselor. It is not a psychiatrist. It's just a set of digital pages to read.

But Sharon Faelten said it best in her edited book, *Tension Turnaround: The 30 Day Program For Inner Calm, Confidence And Control*. She stressed the value of an emerging science called Bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy entails reading the right how-to book, which can sometimes be more efficient than visiting a professional. With self-help books, the right varieties at least, you'll have a firmer control over how you apply what you learn. You're not beholden to any schedule or prescribed plan. It's all up to you.

Change – true and lasting change that is – can only begin from within, after all. It's not something that is imposed. It is something that is realized, and thereafter, practiced by the self.

And this eBook will be your guide. Allow it to open the gates of realization. What you do with such discoveries depends on you. True change, as we have said, begins with you.

Yes, dear friends... your marriage can work. There is a life that can be lived "happily ever after," and such is not confined to mere fairytales.

It's just a matter of knowing the ties that really count, the ties that will help us pull each other up even during the most distressing of situations, the ties that make us stronger, the ties we should never forget...

... the ties that bind.

Chapter One
Marriage
And Today

**Defining Marriage For
The Current Generation**

*No one said it would be easy
These ties that bind can sometimes hurt
They may be knotted tight and stingy
But don't let go, and we're sure to enjoy its mirth*

*No one said that we'll never fall
Stumbling at turns is a part of fate
But these ties should bind us, despite the perils all
So that we'd be together and not separate*

*And no one said that we'll get there fast
So don't lose hope, don't lose faith, and don't be dreary
I am always here, with promises remembered to last
We may not get there quick, but we'll get there eventually*

What Is Marriage?

Jennifer always dreamt about her ideal man. Tall, handsome, kind... these were the qualities she always had in mind when thinking about her future partner.

Of course, she knew she had to be practical. We seldom get what we want, after all. A presentable and loving man would be alright, for as long as he would take care of her and for as long as he would always have the patience and understanding to work out the differences they would encounter.

She was still in college when she met Paul. At 19, Jennifer was in her sophomore year, taking up AB Marketing. Paul was 27, and he was the teacher's assistant, and since the professor was almost, always absent, attending a seminar or two in other states, Paul delivered the lectures in class most of the time.

He always had his eyes on Jennifer. And she took notice as well.

A few exchanged looks led to some lunches together. And lunches became dinner dates. And they got to know each other better. Soon enough, they were going out on a regular basis.

There was a problem to their budding relationship, however. School policies prohibit teacher-student affairs, and that extends to teacher assistants. Much as how happy they felt during the first few months of their togetherness, they had to keep it a secret. They had to pretend that they were just casual friends whenever prying eyes were looking at them.

But the yearning of the heart is a wild beast that is often difficult to repress. A few months after they officially – albeit in secret – became a couple, Jennifer got pregnant.

They talked about the situation, and decided to get married. They wanted to give their child a great future, and they believed that such necessitated a complete family environment for their child's formative years.

Jennifer left school before she could enroll for her third year. Paul left his job and decided to venture into real estate instead, with some borrowings from his siblings.

Jennifer gave birth to a baby boy whom they named Marcelo. He was such a bundle of joy and the couple never regretted their decision to get married. Immediately after work, Paul would go straight home to be with their child. He was there when Marcelo first opened his eyes. He was there when Marcelo spoke his first word. He was there when Marcelo took his first step.

Indeed, their first two years of marital life were wonderful! Those months were filled with laughter and joy and so many precious moments with Marcelo.

But everything, it seemed, went downhill from there.

Jennifer started going out with some new friends. Not that Paul wanted her to stay at home, as he was never the possessive type, but Jennifer's friends were less than ideal. They were wild, and carefree, and had the propensity for experimenting with new things and an unrestrained lifestyle.

Often, Paul would wait up late at night for Jennifer to come home. She'd come home near the break of dawn, in drunken stupor, never even asking about her husband nor her child.

This led to several arguments between the spouses. He'd ask her to realize how destructive her friends are to their marital and family life. She'd answer that she just wants to have fun. There were times when he asked her to choose. Without blinking an eyelash, she chose her friends. He threatened to leave. She did not stop him. He froze on his tracks.

The frustration and hatred between them further drove them apart the months that followed.

Both parties felt they had no other recourse.

They filed for divorce.

What is marriage?

Better yet, how is it defined in our generation?

Different people will have different answers, most certainly. While some would claim that marriage is a customary duty that has been with us since the day of our ancestors, others would say that marriage is a form of security... for company more than anything else. Some would claim that marriage is the preparatory step for family life. Others would say that it's a culmination of their being, something they were groomed for all their life.

These, of course, are ornamental answers.

Why do people get married these days? Let us count the reasons:

- Because the girl got pregnant. Often, when sudden pregnancy is experienced, it's automatic for couples to consider getting married. This is prevalent among young adults. Pregnancy carries with it a lot of uncertainties. And a lot of people feel that the best way to deal with uncertainties is to have a partner by your side.
- Because of the overwhelming feeling of something "magical" in a relationship. Couples are usually swayed by their beliefs in "destiny," "fate," "soul mates," "serendipity," and other similar constructs. For them, marriage is a logical antecedent of something they believe they have waited for all their life.
- Because they are carried away by the moment. A great time in Las Vegas, for example, might potentially lead to a quick marriage via those drive-thru marriage centers. Though some couples do this for fun, they seldom forget that a marriage ceremony binds them for life, ideally speaking. Aside from this, no matter how quick those marriages are celebrated, they are legally enforceable and only a court order can dissolve them.

- Trial and error. With the preponderance of divorce proceedings in this day and age, more and more couples have less hesitation of getting married. They don't give the idea as much thought as it requires. They believe that they can always file for a divorce anyway whenever things don't fall their way.
- Failure to appreciate the repercussions of marriage. Some people feel that marriage is just a union on paper. As such, they treat it just as haphazardly. For them, it's nothing serious.
- Financial security. Painful as it is to admit, some couples get married because of material interests of the other's properties. There are even a few quarters which claim that marriage is the easiest and fastest way to become a millionaire: simply marry a rich partner.

There are more reasons, of course, but these are the ones that are commonly observed.

Are they the right reasons to get married?

No, they're not. All of them treat marriage as a means rather than as an end. Marriage should not be viewed so callously.

So what is marriage?

Simply put, marriage is a union of two people who are in love.

That simple, you might ask? Surely, such an answer won't save marriage from the perils that it encounters. What if the couple falls out of love with each other? What if they decide to put an end to their union because things aren't just working out? It's a mere union, after all. A union presupposes consent to be together. What if they don't want to be together anymore?

These are all valid concerns, of course.

But marriage is different from a mere union. Marriage is a promise to one another, in the eyes of the law and in the eyes of God (for certain religions.) It is the seed that brings about the formation of a family, and a family, as we

all know, is the most basic unit of any society. We all belong to a family, you and me. We all know how important a family is to our lives.

Promises are reflective of our own character. If we can't keep a promise, what good are we for? If we treat every guarantee so carelessly, what good are our words? If we can't fulfill all that we have sought to do, what is our worth?

Indeed, a marriage is a promise, to love and to hold, in sickness or in health, in good times and bad, in richness or in poverty, until the end of our lives together.

So many people have forgotten these vows. So many people have forgotten about the basic tenets of marriage. A marriage is not about happiness and joy all the time. A marriage is not about reaping some benefits every single day. A marriage is neither a status symbol nor a representative of a certain lifestyle. A marriage is founded on three things:

1. Mutual love;
2. Mutual fidelity; and
3. Mutual support.

You cannot simply abandon these things. Marriage does not, and should not work that way. Otherwise, why get married in the first place?

What Should A Marriage Be Like?

During the pendency of the divorce proceedings, Jennifer and Paul sought the help of a marriage counselor as a last ditch effort to salvage their marital union.

During the sessions, a lot was revealed.

“It’s different,” Jennifer said. “When we first started out, I always thought that we would have a happy life together. But as things turned out, I found myself longing for such happiness instead of enjoying his company. Then I realized that yes, I wasn’t happy at all. I don’t know why.”

“Is it possible that you miss your youth?” the counselor asked.

“Perhaps,” she answered. “I don’t know. All I know is that I hate him.”

“Why do you hate him?”

“Because he’s my husband and he took so many things from me!”

At this point, Paul interjected, though the counselor previously prohibited him from doing so. “What did I take away from you?” he asked, screaming. “You have everything that you could possibly need! I work three shifts a day just to provide for you! I go home tired every night, and I have to take care of our child because you’re always out with your so-called friends! What else could you possibly want from me?”

“My freedom,” Jennifer answered back.

“Your freedom?” Paul asked in bewilderment.

“I don’t know how to explain it... I just...I don’t know....” Jennifer said as she broke down in tears.

The counselor intervened. “Do you have any regrets about getting married?”

It took some time before Jennifer could reply. Finally, she nodded.

“Do you know, exactly, the things that you regret?” the counselor asked.

“I wanted to finish my studies,” Jennifer answered. “I was always a straight A student. My parents were so proud of me. I wanted to have a good life... a great life. I wanted a good job. I wanted to visit a lot of places, explore new things, buy a lot of stuff...”

Paul was silent while he listened to his wife. He can’t believe what he was hearing. They never talked about such things before. She never mentioned anything of that nature.

The counselor, too, chose not to speak immediately. Silence enveloped the counseling room. He gave the couple ample time to absorb everything that was shared and he allowed them to think about what was shared.

Finally, the counselor opened his mouth to break the monotony of silence.

“And you can’t do all of that right now?” he asked.

Jennifer, in an instant, stopped crying.

Paul was also caught surprised, as he looked at the counselor.

“What I’m saying is quite simple,” the counselor continued, “you are nurturing so much remorse in your heart that you seem to forget the fact that those regrets can be rectified. Will you just spend the rest of your life in a rebellious streak, feeling bad about yourself and what you think you have become? Or should you stand up and do something about it?”

Again, there was silence.

“I’m doing something about it,” Jennifer finally answered, “I’m filing for a divorce.”

“And that is the solution?” the counselor asked once again? “Divorce is the answer to your problems?”

“Why not?” Jennifer asked once again.

“Does marriage prohibit you from making good of your life?” was the question the counselor asked in return.

Jennifer broke down in tears once again, realizing the errors of her ways.

Paul, who has mostly been a silent observer the whole session, began to speak his mind. “Jen... I have always been a good husband. I don’t deserve all the crap you have given me.”

“Not quite,” the counselor interrupted. “Paul, when was the last time you praised your wife?”

Paul cannot answer.

“When was the last time you gave her some words of reaffirmation?”

Again, Paul was dumbfounded by the question.

“When was the last time you took her out to a nice dinner?”

Paul was still at a loss for words.

“You see, Paul, a marriage involves two people. Two people are responsible for its success. Two people will cause its demise. You were caught up with your own frustrations because your expectations weren’t being met. And how did you react to them? You argued with her. You tried to change her. You failed to understand her.”

“But she wasn’t saying anything to me,” Paul defended himself.

“Isn’t that what marriage is all about?” the counselor asked. “Communicating with your partner? Not with words, but with your heart?”

Indeed, how could a marriage work out if both parties fail to connect?

This is the reason why a period of time is often necessary before a couple should decide to get married. They have to determine how it would be like before they take their vows.

Do they jive? Do they possess qualities that would complement each other? Would they be able to understand what the other is feeling and where the other is coming from?

People should not rush into a marriage, as a marriage is a lifelong commitment. They should not just jump into something they are not ready for. Such would just be a surefire recipe for disaster.

Ideally, a marriage should be a cherished institution, one which is a cause for so many joys by itself. Surely, marriage is perceived by most as part of the process of procreation. But the marriage itself should be able to stand on its own. It should become a fountain of fulfillment with or without the wonderful happiness that kids and grandkids would bring.

A marriage, after all, is a union between you and your partner. Just the two of you. Can you see how intimately special that is? Can you feel how special marriage can actually be?

Regardless of the tide, you and your partner should remain committed to each other. When one of the spouses needs help, the other should be the first to extend his or her hand. When plans about the future are being laid down, the spouses should share their thoughts with one another. It is, and it should be, their future, after all. When big decisions are to be made, the spouses should consult with one another, especially on matters that would affect their marriage.

Of course, communication is a prerequisite to all of these.

Indeed, the spouses must learn how to communicate with one another for the betterment of their marriage. Communication is not merely about listening to your spouse speak. It's about understanding what the other has to say and where he or she is coming from. Communication is not merely about talking to your heart's delight. It's about sharing what you want to share

because you want the other to know everything. Communication is not merely about sharing small talks and grand tales. Often, it's about the feeling in between words that make you realize how special your bond with each other really is.

Most marriages fail because communication breaks down. Lies replace truths and silence pervades arguments. One fails to back down. The other is focused on retaliation.

How would problems be solved, then?

Marriage is not just about communication, it's about trust as well. More than in anyone else in this world, you should have faith in your partner.

But this isn't a one-way street. Trust works both ways. You should trust your partner and your partner should trust you. And both of you should be able to live up to the trust that you give one another.

Marriage is also about acceptance. Your partner is not the perfect person you once thought him or her to be. Familiarity breeds contempt, so they say, because the more time we spend with someone, the more we get to know that person better. And this includes knowing both his good and bad qualities.

How you are able to deal with what you stand to discover will ultimately decide the fate of your marriage.

Marriage is also about enjoying each other's company. Granted that the fun times will eventually wane as the years pass by, this shouldn't stop you from finding new ways by which you guys can enjoy life together.

The common problems that haunt relationships may muddle your goals of having fun together. Often, heartaches breed resentment, and resentment stops us from pursuing enjoyable possibilities with our partner. During these times, it is a must for you to remember that some laughter will help your marriage get back on track. So strive to find that laughter and that smile at all times.

We will discuss these in full detail come Chapter Two.

The Repercussions Of A Marriage In Trouble

The divorce petition was abandoned. The case was ultimately junked.

And years after their session with the marriage counselor, Jennifer and Paul have three lovely children in their family. Next to Marcelo was Janine, who was born 4 years after her older brother's birth. Thereafter, the couple adopted a baby girl named Sheryl.

Today, Jennifer and Paul are established entrepreneurs. Jennifer started a home business that blossomed into one of the more successful breakfast products in the United States. She finished her studies, even though it took her 5 years to do so, as she had to manage her time between her then budding business, caring for her kids, and her academic demands.

Paul continued with some odd jobs for a number of years since their session, but eventually, he decided to stay at home as well. He helped Jennifer with her business, serving as middleman between her wife's trade and some major retail distributors.

Eventually, they had to incorporate. They had to expand. Jennifer became the CEO, and Paul became the President of their very successful company.

The last time I talked to them, I asked them about their marital problems almost 2 decades ago. They still remember those times, though they can now laugh about it.

Surprisingly, they said that sometimes, they're still afraid.

When I asked them why, their answer was brief but poignant.

"We're afraid of what could have been," Paul answered for them, "if we failed to fix things, we wouldn't be experiencing these wonderful blessings today."

“Sometimes,” Jennifer was quick to add, “you need to realize what you stand to lose before you learn how to appreciate what you have.”

Why do marriages fail?

A lot of reasons can be enumerated. These may range from unhealthy relationships, to not being happy anymore, to third parties, to belated realizations, and the like.

Though these are, admittedly, justifiable reasons, they are nonetheless selfish. Yes, they only focus on what will be better for one party, for one spouse, completely disregarding all the parties that are attached to the marriage.

Indeed, a marriage, though centering on the spouses, can involve more people. Since a marriage is a union of two persons, it also becomes a union of their respective families, not to mention their respective networks of friends and loved ones.

Then, there is the matter of the children. It is true what they say. For every marriage that fails, it's the children who suffer most.

Marriages fail because of the following reasons:

- The spouses fail to communicate. Whatever attempt they make is only futile because of the lies and broken promises that have pervaded the marriage.
- The spouses get bored with each other. Once the magic of their initial months fizzle out, they realize who they really married, and, dissatisfied, they would rather start anew.
- Trust breaks down. This is usually caused by infidelity. Trust, once lost, is very hard to regain, and the spouses would rather surrender than risk getting hurt again.

- The spouses fail to understand each other. They fail to know what the other wants and what the other needs. And this results in a festering discontent that eats away at the very heart of marriage.
- Too many small things accumulate into something so big and uncontainable. The spouses lose hope in ever fixing it.

Indeed, these are the most common reasons. Marriage failure is usually attributed to any of the above mentioned occurrences, or a combination of them.

But these reasons can be further summarized into one simple answer:

They give up.

This is rather sad. Nothing in this world is unsalvageable. Not even the direst of circumstances. If we would only try, then we would realize that the best glories are those that are saved from the jaws of defeat. The same goes for marriage. Sometimes, the sweetest moments are those when you savor someone you thought you almost lost.

Chapter Two

Making It Work

Factors That Will Make Your Marriage Succeed

*So much has been said, so much has been written
Yet here we still are, seeking the answers we need
A cure for our hearts both wounded and weakened
A journey to rekindle the love, from which we feed*

*But before we could find that pot of gold to bring back the smiles
We need to stir up some ingredients necessary to sustain
The fires of our passion, to stay alive for more than a while
To keep us safe from the cold uncertainties and the pain*

*They are many, yes indeed, but we must strive
Or each of them would play a crucial role
You see, like honeys collected for a hive
It's often the parts that make us whole*

The Ingredients Of A Great Marriage

Imagine cooking your favorite delicacy without some ingredients.

Impossible, right?

The same can be said about a great marriage. There are some necessary components to make it work. Without these components, the marriage will most certainly crumble.

Making a marriage work involves balancing these components. There should be a little for everything. Let's take a look at these essential ingredients:

1. Trust
2. Communication
3. Willingness to adapt
4. Understanding
5. Avoiding negative scripts

In this chapter, we are going to discuss these components.

What will be important is that you should try to remember them. List them down if you must and recite them over and over again until they are firmly entrenched in your memory.

When the chips are down and things don't seem to fall your way, simply resort to these five principles. They can save your marriage, as they can easily serve as the match that will light the wick of passion that will keep your marital union afloat during trying times.

With each component is a story of a marriage that was salvaged because of it. It is hoped that you will learn from these tales derived from real life and that they will inspire you if you find yourself in a similar situation.

Paine is a young wife. She married Tristan when they were both 18. They belonged to the same group of friends and they have been going out since they were 15. Being neighbors helped a lot. They were never really far from each other.

When she turned 21, however, Paine felt some heavy regrets for having married so early. She feels that she sacrificed her youth for the marital union. She can't go out as much as she would like to, especially when they have a 2-year old baby girl to take care of.

But what compounded her woes is that her husband doesn't seem to share the same amount of commitment she has given to their marriage. In fact, she has spent so many sleepless nights thinking that he was having an affair.

She dismissed such a thought and instead focused on the demands of her marital life.

Until one day, her husband left the computer open. The browser displayed his email account.

Paine didn't want to read what was written there. She just wanted to walk away from the monitor. Somehow, she wanted to believe that what she didn't know wouldn't hurt her, and walking away would save her from a world of pain.

Curiosity got the better of her, however, and she buckled to the temptation of checking out her husband's email account.

What she saw broke her heart.

A series of emails from a girl named Leah greeted her eyes. There were pages upon pages of emails chronicling an intimate and romantic conversation.

She wasn't able to contain her anger. She immediately confronted Tristan.

"What is the meaning of this?" she asked.

"What's the meaning of what?" Tristan asked back, seemingly surprised.

"Who's Leah?" she asked again.

"Leah? Oh... Leah! She's a friend. Why?"

"A friend with whom you exchange 'I love you' messages with?!" Paige said, this time with greater anger.

Tristan knew right there and then that Paige was able to read his email messages.

"What's wrong with you?" he asked. "Those are private messages! You have no right – NO RIGHT – to read them!"

"I am your wife!" she retorted. "I have every right!"

"You're just my wife!" Tristan answered back, to Paige's shock.

"You're cheating on me, you bastard!" Paine exclaimed, as she broke down in tears. "All these years, I have given you everything – EVERYTHING! And this is how you repay me? I trusted you! I trusted you!"

"Trusted me?" Tristan asked, in a fit of rage. "You call that trust?"

The story above is a classic example of two conflicting philosophies.

Who is right: the party who violated the other's privacy to catch him cheating or the party who shielded himself with such a claim to privacy to conceal his betrayal?

This isn't a simple case to resolve.

But then again, this is not a case that demands a resolution.

Trust, you see, is not something inborn. It is something you develop. It is something you learn. It is something both parties work for. And it is something both parties should earn.

Essential in trust is the idea of a compromise. One must be willing to understand and the other must be willing to make his or her partner less anxious.

Trust, after all, is a matter of faith; that is, faith in your partner. If you trust him to be committed to the vows he has made, then you believe that he will pull through for you. This should be enough for you to give him the benefit of a doubt whenever something suspicious threatens to ruin your relationship.

They say that once trust is broken, it is difficult to bring it back. Difficult, yes... but it's not impossible. All that is needed is a firm resolve and a commitment to start from scratch.

Here are some tips that will help you strengthen your trust in your partner:

- Talk to your partner as much as possible. Not just plain talk, but substantial conversations. Make it a point that you share with each other the events of your day, even though you spent the day apart. This will help you keep in touch with one another and will also give each of the partners a feel of what the other expects and what the other needs.
- Erase all negative thoughts in your mind. It is easier said than done, but it is necessary, not only to preserve your marriage, but your mental and emotional well-being as well. Too much suspicion will just give you unwanted stress, which could lead to a lot of possible complications. Always remember that fears are often greater than facts, and until you prove that your fears are true, you should have nothing to worry about.
- Belief in a greater power. It would help if you have a religion, a belief in a superior being. You'd know there would be someone,

greater than all of us combined, who would always watch your back and who has already planned some great things even if you stand to suffer some misery in the process. If not, then the universal law of karma would suffice.

- Reduce your competitive nature. Believe it or not, most trust issues stem from the belief of a partner that he or she is competing against someone else. This sense of competition gives birth to some ghosts that haunt the relationship. Ghosts are more frightening than reality, it must be remembered.
- Take some risks. Losing hurts, but you will never win unless you try. Giving someone the power to hurt you is a very risky act. But love demands such, and so does trust. To be able to trust your partner, you must be prepared to take on the contingent risks.

There are some people who really experience some difficulties trusting their partners. There are many reasons for their disposition. Let's take a look at some of them, as well as some ways by which you can get rid of these difficulties.

- A traumatic experience can greatly affect one's ability to trust another. Have you trusted someone so deeply before, but you ended up getting burned? It would be unfair for you and your current partner to hold on to such feelings. Try to remind yourself that whatever happened in the past should be buried with the past. Today is a new day. Treat it as such.
- A low self-esteem. There are many factors that contribute to low self-esteem. But the result is the same: insecurities that are easily triggered when their expectations are not met. This would likewise magnify suspicious matters even if they don't appear to be serious. A person so situated must ask himself or herself: why does he or she feel so low? Every person is beautiful in his or her own way. This beauty does not depend on someone else. This thought should be enough to boost anyone's confidence.
- False beliefs. Does a woman believe that men are by nature polygamous? Does she believe that the sins of the fathers will be

repeated by their sons? Does she believe that the whole world is against her and it's just a matter of time when she will get betrayed? These and other beliefs are quite unfounded. Holding on to them would just cause unwanted, and unsolicited, misery for such a person.

- Too much pessimism. There are people who are, by nature, negative thinkers. They tend to expect the worst. This mentality is not healthy at all. We can never appreciate what we have if we always think about the vilest things that could happen.

Knowing why you're suffering from trust issues is the first step to curing them. This would allow you to have more confidence in your partner for a healthier marriage which would prove more fruitful and enjoyable for both of you.

Paige never accepted Tristan's explanation that Leah was just an Internet fling.

"I've never even met her offline," he exclaimed.

"Assuming that you're just cyber lovers," Paige started, "that doesn't justify what you did. You would have met her, eventually, and you would have jumped on the first opportunity to get inside her skirt!"

They spent months arguing about the same matter.

And though those months were spent with frustration, disappointment, anger, hatred and pain, they were also spent communicating with each other.

Tristan realized that he was so close to succumbing to temptation. He would have met with Leah if he wasn't caught. And though he feels violated, a part of him was quite thankful for Paige's discovery. It made him realize that he was actually cheating on her, and if it continued, it would have gotten worse.

On her part, Paige realized that she should have given her husband the benefit of the doubt. She should have allowed him to explain his side before she lashed out at him. She should have been understanding enough to at

least listen to what he had to say, and forgiving enough to realize that though what he did was grave, it could have been worse.

After a few more months, Tristan was trying his best to go home early to his wife and share with her all that had happened during their time away from each other.

And Paige, on the other hand, was trying her best to inform Tristan that she needs reassurance and reaffirmation from him, in such a way that she won't seem like a nagger. She would tell him when she feels bad, and he would hold her in his arms to apologize, with a promise that what has happened won't ever happen again.

They almost parted ways because they blamed each other for some sins that were committed.

But because they rediscovered the trust that was seemingly lost, their relationship has gotten stronger and they were able to weather the storm that passed their way.

Soon enough, the name Leah became something that they could laugh about.

Communication

Unlike the other couples we have discussed so far, Kristin married at a later age. She was 34 when she tied the knot with Sam. Sam was younger than her, as he was 31 at that time. Nonetheless, their marriage was nothing but excellent for the first few months.

They laughed together, went out like they were teenagers in love, visited a lot of new places, and planned a lot of fanciful things. They told each other everything and anything that happened during their days.

Kristin was so happy! She felt like she indeed found her “soul mate.” With Sam, she felt that she could say anything that she wanted to say. As such, she tried to be the same to Sam. She listened to him, intently at that. She tried to remember everything that he wanted to say.

So it was a surprise for her when, in their second year as a married couple, he filed for a divorce, citing irreconcilable marital differences due to irretrievable breakdown of marriage. In the petition, it claimed that they had failed to communicate.

She confronted him with tears in her eyes.

“But we always talk!” Kristin said. “We talk for hours on end... each and every day! How could you say that we failed to communicate?”

“Kristin,” Sam answered, “you always expect me to smile and laugh and be happy with you. I oblige. But is that communication?”

Kristin just stood there in silence. She did not know what to say.

“But we were so happy...” she said as she finally spoke.

“You wanted to believe you were happy,” Sam retorted, “but did you ever ask if I was?”

Marriage, despite being a union of hearts, minds and souls, still involves two distinct personalities, each having different thoughts, different ideas, different perceptions, and different experiences.

How would these two distinct individuals connect with each other then?

The answer is through communication. Though communication may be a simple word to understand, it is often much deeper than what it initially means. By communication, we don't mean mere conversations with each other from sunrise to sundown. You can talk about a variety of subjects, but such would not necessarily give your relationship that real communication it needs.

Communication is indeed much deeper than that.

- Communication is not just talk. It should involve a conveyance of feelings. Feelings are more telling than words. Words can lie, but feelings are difficult to fabricate.
- Communication does not involve a restraint on the subjects you discuss. You may claim that you can talk about anything, but can you really talk about anything? Sometimes, though unwittingly, we prohibit the other from speaking about things which are less than joyous. The result? Problems are not discussed, and when they do explode, they're already big enough to create a dent in the relationship.
- Communication means openness. And openness means that ability to talk and act as you wish and not as dictated by the expectations of your partner. Openness should be promoted as much as it is practiced. You should always strive to encourage your partner to be open in your discussions.
- You should avoid negative words. Most of these are unknowingly delivered. We may say one thing which is perfectly alright for us to say, but which our partner finds offensive, if not restrictive. Most arguments start this way. It just takes a little more sensitivity about

the needs of our partners and an addition of a couple of reaffirming words in our vocabulary.

- Always respect your partner, even if you disagree with what he or she is saying. Communication isn't just about listening to hear. It's about listening to understand. Whatever he or she is telling you, try to take it in and realize where he or she is coming from.
- Choose your words wisely, especially in impassioned states. The words we decide to use have the power to make or break our partner, and our marriage as well. Hence, they should be used cautiously.

There is more to communication than mere conversations. If marriage is the tie that binds, then communication is the fabric by which the tie is made of. Mastering your communication skills within the context of a relationship is truly essential in establishing a stronger marriage.

It turns out that Sam was having problems with Kristin's obsessive-compulsive behavior. He wanted things spontaneous. He wanted things exciting. But since Kristin was such a stickler for details, Sam found it quite difficult to express who he really was. He felt restrained for quite a long while. He felt imprisoned. He felt repressed. And this led to his nagging unhappiness and dissatisfaction with his marriage.

That night, when Kristin confronted him about the divorce papers, Sam told Kristin everything in his heart.

It was the first time he was able to do so... and it was a liberating experience for him.

To her credit, Kristin, still with tears in her eyes, listened. Though she found some of the things that Sam shared as objectionable, she tried her best to understand what brought them about.

She did understand.

And she apologized.

This touched Sam's heart. He felt ashamed for immediately resorting to divorce. Somehow, the thought of his wife begging for his forgiveness, when in fact, he was also equally responsible for the sad fate of their marriage, was enough for him to break down as well.

At 6'3", Sam was a burly man. But he fell down to the floor in tears. Kristin joined him. And they just talked... without reservations. They just spoke what was in their hearts.

It was the first time they really communicated.

The divorce petition was dropped.

Today, they're enjoying their first child, which is a relief for them as Kristin initially thought that she was too old to get pregnant. It took them 3 years to conceive a bundle of joy, and now, they're enjoying him as much as they could.

With smiles - genuine smiles from their hearts - to brighten up their days.

Willingness To Adapt

“You don’t want to change!” Leila screamed as she continued to throw some plates at her husband, Ben, who was trying to find some cover. “You always promised to change, but you can’t! I’ve had enough of this! I’ve had enough of you!”

“What’s so %^&#* wrong in drinking with my buddies?” Ben reasoned out. “It’s not as if I’m cheating on you.”

“I work all day and all night just to help out with our expenses!” Leila answered. “I come home early to take care of our kids! And what do you do? You’re content with a job that sucks and what else? You spend most of what you earn for your drinking habit!”

“I told you... that was the last time!” Ben assured her.

“Go to hell!” Leila retorted with anger. “How many times have you said that? The way you disregard your promises is very insulting!”

We have previously discussed that a marriage involved the union of two distinct individuals. Surely, not everything will fall your way. There are stark differences that are exhibited, and often, these differences will come into conflict with each other.

Talking about them would greatly help, of course. Such is the reason why communication is important in a relationship. Both parties must realize their strong and weak points so that they’ll know how to handle certain situations.

What should the parties do once they realize their differences?

This is where adapting to the other comes in.

Adaptation is often synonymous with change. Such syllogism is quite correct. Being able to adapt entails some willingness to change for our partner.

But changing *for* our partner is very much different from changing our partner. The former is ideal, as it involves a sincere and honest disposition to change and it starts from within the concerned spouse himself or herself. The latter is rather forceful and is quite contradictory for what a marriage should be like.

If marriage involves acceptance, we should never change our partner. Doesn't acceptance include everything in our spouse, the good things and the bad? Surely, trying to change him would be tantamount to a declination of love. How can we love someone when we want him to transform to what we believe is ideal?

What should be done is to reaffirm our partner so that he or she himself or herself will realize what you want him or her to be. This way, he or she will initiate the change himself or herself. You will not be changing your spouse. Your spouse will be changing himself or herself to make your marriage better.

Of course, the same is expected from you. You should be willing to change for your spouse as well, and this change, as we have discussed, should begin within you.

Indeed, it is not correct to ask or force your partner to change against his or her will. Your spouse might just develop some resentment against you. You will know when you're actually compelling him or her to change. Here are the signs:

- Constant reminders which are tantamount to nags.
- Unforgiving complaints that can also be considered as nags.
- Always asking the partner that he or she promises to never do a certain deed again, or to promise to try harder in accomplishing a certain task.

- Illustrating what should and should not be done.
- Threatening the partner whenever he or she does something, or fails to do something, in accordance with what you expect from him or her.

Indeed, trying to change our partner comes in many forms. And all of them aren't healthy. Ask yourself this question: would it be easier for you to change because you're being forced to or would it be better for you to change because you want to?

Being married does not mean that we have to transform one another into the beings we always dreamt of marrying. Spouses should hold each other's hands and guide the other to what should be best for the marriage. Forcing someone to change is almost equivalent to pushing a partner in a certain direction, instead of gently pulling his or her hand to lead him or her where you want to go.

Believe it or not, that was the tamest of Leila and Ben's arguments.

There were times when she would threaten to kill herself if Ben refused to change his ways. There was even a time when she actually cut her wrist to prove her seriousness.

This, of course, forced Ben to promise things that he wouldn't have otherwise pledged. Sometimes, his promises lasted for several months. But always, he would revert to how he has always been, a carefree boy living in a man's body.

But when their second child was diagnosed with leukemia, Ben changed into someone whom Leila became proud of. The continuous treatments weren't cheap at all. Their family didn't have enough resources to answer the running medical bills of their son.

Ben looked for, not one, but two jobs of alternating shifts. He worked for 16 hours a day, often doing overtime, during that trying period.

His drinking buddies actually helped out. They chipped in some of their earnings every month. They called it the “Junior Fund,” named after Benjamin Jr., Leila and Ben’s second child and only son.

Leila soon realized that she was lashing out at the wrong man. The Ben she always saw was not the Ben she fell in love with, because her anger prevented her from seeing the real man behind her husband. Her views changed when she saw Ben working harder than he ever did, often dismissing illness, such as a bout with fever and flu, just to continue with his work and earn for their family’s sustenance and Junior’s health.

Though Benjamin Jr. is still suffering from leukemia today, Ben and Leila are still together, stronger than ever. Their marriage almost crumbled because she grew impatient with him. She’s glad she didn’t give up, as she fell in love with her man all over again.

Understanding

“But we’re husband and wife!” Joey complained. “You can’t say no!”

“Since when has that become the rule?” Sandra asked.

“Geez, honey!” he sighed. “If we were merely going out like before, I’d completely understand. But we’re married, for crying out loud! Why can’t we have sex like all the other couples?”

“We do have sex,” Sandra answered. “We do make love. Just not tonight.”

“Why?” he asked.

“Just because” she concisely answered.

“And that’s supposed to be an answer?” was Joey’s perplexed reaction. “Don’t I please you enough? Don’t I satisfy you anymore?”

“You’re giving more meaning to it than you should, sweetie,” was Sandra’s casual reply. “I’m just not in the mood, alright?”

“Fine” was Joey’s frustrated remark as he turned his back on his wife and tried to sleep.

They’ve been having conversations like this every single night before they go to bed. Joey almost always ends up disappointed. They do make love, but only once or twice every three months. More often than not, his invitations are met with rejection.

Joey always wondered why Sandra almost always avoided making love. Somehow, he cannot understand the reason for his wife’s rather peculiar behavior.

That is because he never asked. Yes, he did ask her why she doesn't want to make love with him. But such was for the purpose of getting her to bed. He never asked her what she really felt.

Let's have a quick quiz. What do you think of whenever you hear the word "understanding?"

To listen? Surely, understanding someone takes more than just listening to what he or she has to say.

To interact? What good would interaction be if we just spend time with the other person without really getting to know what's inside his or her heart?

To comprehend? What is comprehension without acknowledgement? What is comprehension without acceptance? Understanding should be greater than that.

So what do we mean by the term "understanding?"

To understand someone is a combination of all the above answers, and more. Truly, we have to interact with our partner and get to know everything he or she wants to share about what's in his or her mind and what's in his or her heart. We should be able to comprehend what our partner wants to express.

To understand is a commitment to acknowledge our partner for what he or she truly is. This includes the acknowledgement of his or her strengths and weaknesses, dreams and fears, fond attributes, and less than ideal quirks... everything.

To understand is to accept all that our partner is. We should not select certain aspects of our spouse because those are the only things we love about him or her. Understanding is about acceptance, and acceptance is holistic.

There are many things about our partner that we do not know. This is why many people claim that it takes a lifetime to truly know someone. But marriage is supposed to last a lifetime. This should give you ample time to really get to know your spouse. But you should proceed with this with an

open mind. You cannot be selfish. There is no room for greed in a relationship because it involves two people. The act of one would necessarily affect the other.

Understanding, therefore, is about giving way to the other.

Is your partner mad because of something you feel is debatable? Allow him or her to settle down before delivering your point. You can never conclude anything when either or both of you are in a fit of rage.

Is there a clash of egos... a conflict of pride? Tell yourself that he or she is your spouse. Egos should not reign in a relationship. Both of you are the boss of the marriage. Respect is the name of the game.

Are you blinded by the pain your partner's ways have inflicted? To feel hurt is but human. Inform him or her about why you got hurt and plead for understanding. And your partner should do the same if ever the roles are reversed.

There are many reasons why your partner would act in ways contrary to your expectations:

- Your partner may be suffering from a traumatic experience that is carried over to your marriage. In which case, he or she will need the breathing room to work things out so that he or she may be able to realize that the past is best left behind.
- Your partner may have been accustomed to an environment different than the one he or she was exposed to immediately after the marriage was celebrated. Perhaps he or she will need some time alone to properly adjust to the new situations that come with married life.
- Your partner may be used to sorting things alone. Do not deprive your spouse this need. He or she will soon come out of his or her introspection as a better person.
- Your partner may be carrying some emotional baggage from previous experiences. Personal issues are something that will take some time to settle and heal. Be patient with your spouse. Soon enough, those issues will disappear by themselves.

Acknowledging and accepting the issues your partner exhibits are the key to understanding. Remember, you cannot understand your spouse if you don't keep an open mind.

If you fail to discover the factors that lead to the things you don't like about your spouse, your dislike may lead to frustration, and frustration can easily fester into hatred. And hatred is unhealthy for a relationship that should be founded on love and commitment and dedication.

Try to pinpoint the things that trigger his or her unexpected behavior and help your spouse deal with them. Marriage is about mutual support after all, and there's no better time to prove this than during those moments when our husband or wife need us the most.

Sandra was molested when she was a child.

This triggered a whirlwind of events that even included a stint in the business of the flesh. She was able to fix her life and leave those chapters behind, to carve new tales with her husband, Joey.

But some wounds run too deep. They need time to heal.

Joey always knew about Sandra's history. He was under the impression that sex is nothing new to her, and it pains him more when he thinks of his wife's past, which is not really consistent with how she treats the act of making love with him.

But Joey was being selfish. And this made him fail to understand the woman he should be able to understand the most in the whole wide world.

Sandra's history has made her quite afraid of passionate contact. Intimacy makes her remember all the painful events of her life, which she has never had the chance to fully deal with. The peace that married life has given her would've been perfect for coping with her past. But Joey's insistence of his needs have made it quite impossible.

Several counseling sessions made both parties realize these points, however, and today, they remain married and their union is getting stronger every year. Joey has learned how to understand his wife. Sandra has learned how to understand her husband. They have reached a compromise that has made their moments together so much more wonderful than before.

And yes, this includes the moments before they go to sleep.

Avoiding Negative Scripts

Most arguments stem from the negative thoughts we entertain. These thoughts are triggered by what we call negative scripts. If we can learn how to curtail them, it would be like an eternal sunshine lighting up our lives. Wouldn't it be nice to live in a world thinking nothing but positive thoughts?

Negative scripts come from within us and from other people as well. Realizing that they are nothing but scripts, incorporeal thoughts that can easily be defeated, would be an excellent first step in the right direction.

But before we can realize them, we must first know what they are.

Triggers for negative scripts come in many forms. Let's take a look at some of them:

- Belittling remarks from other people that feed your inferiority complex.
- Reminders of your failures in whatever deed.
- Less than positive remarks of people about your body, your way of thinking, your way of life, etc.
- Negative feedback from people about something which you believe was worthy of some praise.
- Being rejected through words.
- Pessimistic prognoses from people about matters that are just in the planning stage.
- Words that tend to repress a person from expressing what he or she truly feels.

- Remarks that feed existing fears.

Negative scripts can have a variety of ill effects on the person receiving them. Loss of self-esteem, loss of courage to take risks, a pessimistic behavior, periods of self-pity, developing a protective shell and hiding inside it, developing cynicism, and depression are just some of the injurious and unhealthy results that negative scripts can cause.

What more, when these negative scripts are delivered by a spouse, who is supposed to take care of the person and render full support for him or her?

Such would be devastating indeed.

Additionally, negative scripts delivered within marriage can also cause a variety of possible problems for the marital union. The person receiving the negative scripts may even resent the other for failing to understand him or her.

For a relationship to succeed, it is a must that these negative scripts be avoided at all cost.

Try to deliver reaffirming and reassuring words instead. You shouldn't put your spouse down. Both of you should strive to inspire each other and carefully chosen words are a way to achieve this.

Chapter Three

Fighting The Odds

Common Marital Problems And How To Deal With Them

*We traveled that road in search of our hearts' wealth
And here we are at last, together you and I
Together in sickness, together in health
And though our vows, we seldom meet eye to eye*

*Like passengers in a boat o'er troubled seas
We rock from side to side
With problems here and there and those and these
We stumble, we fear, we hide*

*And though the waters threaten to claim
All that we have worked for all these years
We will conquer, we will persevere, all the same
For as long as you're with me, in the now and here*

Every marriage will encounter some problems at a certain point. There is no exception to this rule. And though you may see an old couple that has been together for 50 years and are still affectionate to one another, never ever think that they didn't have their share of troubles.

The fact is, they did. Every married couple has encountered some rough sailings along the way. The difference? Those who are still together have been successful in overcoming these difficulties and they are still together to celebrate the vows they have made to one another many years ago.

So what's their secret, you might ask? How did they last that long? How did they survive those trying times?

The answers to these questions are the topics we will explore in this chapter.

We just can't pile up all the possible marital problems in one group, however. We have to discuss them individually. There's an entire gamut of tribulations that a marriage is bound to encounter. For this chapter, we are going to enumerate 10 of the most common of these problems.

Based on my experience, if I would just talk about the problems for what they are, and provide suggestions on how to deal with them, I end up sounding preachy, or worse, boring.

So for this chapter, we're going to do something different. I have taken the liberty to solicit some letters from couples who are experiencing the problems we will be discussing. They are real letters, etched in flesh and blood. For every situation you will read about, please bear in mind that there are real people – breathing, existing people – behind these tales.

Their stories are open-ended. They are, after all, experiencing those problems at the time they sent their letters. I will provide the conclusion and the answers as well.

Through this process, I sincerely hope that all of us, especially those who find themselves in similar situations, will be able to gather some useful information so that they may make their marriages stronger and go on to fulfill the vows they have pledged to their partner.

So, without further ado...

Arguments

“My wife and I always argue. Every time I come home, she’s right there shouting at me for the quarrels from the night before. We end up with one eternal quarrel that seems to have no end. I can’t take her irrational accusations. I can’t take her high-pitched voice. I can’t take her failure to strike a compromise with whatever we are arguing about.

“Please help. More of this and I’m afraid I’ll have to leave her.”

- Jerome, Pennsylvania

Some people say that a couple who doesn’t argue is a couple who has lost their feelings for one another. So, in this light, arguments are quite good. They are representative of impassioned feelings. Love is a powerful emotion after all, and the manifestations of love can equally be as powerful.

It is how you deal with the arguments that will be telling on the relationship.

If you allow arguments to ruin your bond, they will. If you allow arguments to get the better hold of your judgment, you will make the wrong decisions. If you allow arguments to cloud your vision of what should be done, you will never be able to do the right thing.

Arguments involve a clash of pride. Is your pride stronger than your love? Couldn’t you set it aside for what would make your husband or your wife happy? Couldn’t you disregard it for a while for the sake of your marriage?

Of course you could! Your marriage is more important, after all!

Many believe that you should not let the day pass without settling a quarrel. Many couples practice this and they praise it to be effective. Try to reach a compromise before the night is through and you’re bound to enjoy many happy days with your loved one.

Hesitations And Fears

“Hi! My husband and I have been married for three years now. For me, three years is a long time. I was just wondering why he still feels uncomfortable with me most of the time. Often, he prefers the solitude of the porch or the basement with his carpentry tools. He seems so distant, like he’s there, but his heart is not. I’m just afraid that one day, I’ll wake up and he won’t be in bed... and he won’t ever come back.”

- Cassandra, Utah

There are many reasons why people would rather be by themselves instead of telling their partners what’s on their mind.

It is possible that such is the way he really is. A loner, an island, a wallflower, or a shy person... take your pick. It’s just that you have other expectations, and because your expectations aren’t met, you begin to worry. Your reaction is but natural. But is it properly grounded? That is the question you should answer.

Have you tried talking to him about it?

I know it’s a much overused piece of advice, but talking about problems do help couples deal with them more efficiently. One cannot remedy what one does not know about, after all. Talking to your partner will reveal whatever it is that’s bothering him, or at the very least, the reason behind his or her seeming distance.

You are afraid of what you don’t know. With your problem paraphrased this way, the solution becomes clear, doesn’t it? To quell your fears, you must know the things that seem uncertain right now. And a good heart-to-heart talk with your husband will be able to achieve that.

Three years may be a long time, but you guys have a lifetime ahead of you... a lifetime that can, and should, be as meaningful as possible.

Marrying At A Young Age

“When people tried to dissuade me from marrying my husband, they always said something about how young I was. ‘You won’t be able to handle the demands of marriage,’ they said, ‘you will miss your youth that you’ll never be able to retrieve.’ I’m 19, and I’ve been married for a year, and I must admit, those warnings proved right. I do miss my youth. I do miss my friends. I do miss going out. And these yearnings have made me quite resentful about my marriage. Please help.”

- Johanna, Boston

How we perceive things define what they are. If we perceive them to be negative, they become negative. Take your marriage, for example. Because you miss your youth, you begin to entertain thoughts that your marriage stole it away.

What we’re forgetting in the process are the things that are obvious for other people. First, you chose to get married. It’s not something that you were forced to do, based on your narration of facts at least. Second, what made you say that your youth was actually stolen in the first place? Couldn’t you enjoy your youth right now? Couldn’t you meet new friends? Couldn’t you go out with them and enjoy new things?

Marriage entails a lot of sacrifices, yes. It may even restrict us from a lifestyle we would rather live. But a healthy marriage doesn’t make us slaves. You can still enjoy the fun times of your youth (you are still young, after all). Nothing’s stopping you.

The fun times need not be compromised. The follies, however... well...

You cannot blame your marriage for the things you miss, more so when the things you long for aren’t really beyond your grasp. You can still enjoy them, savor them, revel in them. For as long as your obligations to your family are not neglected, you can still have a lot of fun!

Age Gap

“He’s 41, I’m 22. A lot of people have said that he’s too old for me, and his circle has told him that I’m too young for him. Mine is not a problem, really. Me and my husband do jive, and I can’t say anything bad about our marriage... it’s perfect! Mine is simply a question. Why do people make a big deal out of this so-called age gap? Is there really such a problem? I never experienced it. Often, I don’t even notice it. So I’m wondering what the fuss is all about.”

- Belle, Boston

Good for you!

Age gap is something that has been an issue in the past, but in this day and age, people’s ages have become blurred. Just a while ago, I saw a 40-year old woman who looks like she just had her prom! The point is that modern culture has evolved, from grooming habits to acceptable customs to radical beliefs. People these days won’t make a big issue out of the age difference between two parties.

What could be an issue is stage gap, not age gap. Stage gap is a difference in the maturity level of the spouses in a marriage. One may think very differently than the other. While a spouse is focused on earning and saving for the future, for example, the other spouse could still be at that age when he or she wants to have lots of fun. This could be a problem, as it involves a difference in understanding and ideologies.

But then again, there exists no problem that cannot be remedied. Everything has a solution. All that is needed is the will to follow through. If the spouses’ hearts are in the right place, they can easily work out their differences, including any problems that may arise from the stage gap between them. So, no, I don’t think age gap is an issue. And I don’t think stage gap is an issue either. Whoever is lagging behind the maturity phase will eventually grow up anyway.

Fulfillment Of Duties

“My wife and I always argue. She always assigns a lot of the household chores to me. I told her that I didn’t grow up in an environment where the men are asked to do household chores. But does she listen? No! She insists that life is different now, and I have to accept my obligations. But for Pete’s sake! I work for 14 hours a day, what else does she want from me? Sorry. Just venting.”

- Rick, Texas

Marriage comes with certain responsibilities that need to be fulfilled. The question here is: who will fulfill them? You could hire some household help if you want, but with the rather taxing demand of that option on anyone’s budget, it’s not really a practical alternative.

So again, who will fulfill the responsibilities that go with marriage? The spouses, of course! And with such fulfillment comes a division of roles and tasks.

We must first accept this as a fact. It’s pure logic. Chores have to be done. Should they be assigned to one spouse alone? Most definitely not! That would be slavery! Both parties should help out in the maintenance of the conjugal dwelling. If they don’t do it, who will?

Of course, household chores are just a microcosm of the bigger picture. The division of roles extends to other matters as well. Who will manage the finances? Who will stay at home and who will pursue a career for the family’s sustenance, if such a setup is devised? Who is the decision-maker in the house?

Division of roles does not entail exclusive tasks. Both spouses can take turns in fulfilling them. Nonetheless, it is something that should be discussed by the couple to avoid future misunderstandings.

Infidelity

“Mine is a tale as old as time. My husband cheated on me, and I don’t know if I could ever forgive him. He had an affair with his co-worker, which would explain all those allegedly overtime days and out-of-town business trips. It lasted for a year and a half, and it wouldn’t have stopped if I didn’t catch him. I feel so low. I just want to give up and move on with my life. What’s preventing me from filing a divorce are our kids. I feel trapped, and helpless, and hopeless. Sometimes I wish my life would just end to spare me from this misery.”

- *Mrs. Winterheart, by email*

Infidelity is a vile act, regardless of what gender perpetrates it.

I must admit that people who prove most difficult to heal emotionally are those who have been cheated on by the partners they have loved with all their hearts. The effects of a betrayal on the betrayed run deep, and though time heals all wounds, it often takes a long time before the pains of betrayal can go away.

If I were to give an estimate, I’d say that one and a half years is the average period by which a person can move on from such an episode.

Most people decide to call it quits once their partners cheat on them. This is actually advisable for relationships without the benefit of marriage.

But for a married couple? There are simply too many factors at play. Primary among them are the children. The children suffer most when their parents are not on the same page. What they get to feel and observe during their formative years from their parents will be carried way into their adult lives. They often become emotional baggage, if not issues that mold their personalities. Some of them become hesitant about long-term relationships, thinking that it will just end up like their parents’. Some of them become promiscuous, since they were led to believe that relationships should not be

taken seriously, otherwise, they'll just get hurt. Others become apathetic about romantic possibilities.

Indeed, when a spouse cheats, he or she is not just cheating on his wife or her husband. Such a spouse is be cheating on his or her family as well. It's not just the other partner who expects him or her to be faithful. The children also demand the same fidelity from their parents.

And so your husband cheated on you, but from what I can gather from your story, he is trying to come back. He is trying to patch things up with you. He did leave the other girl. This can only mean that he can't risk losing you.

Should you accept him back?

Could you forgive him for what he has done?

Forgiveness is not a license for him to cheat on you again. Forgiveness is not a euphemism for "it's alright, everything's alright, and we are alright." Forgiveness is an act of love. Love is self-denial, after all. If you love someone, you'll continue loving him even when he succumbs to the frailties of his humanity.

Do you love him?

Are you worried about not being able to trust him again? You could always ask him to earn back your trust. And if he loves you like he says he does, he will move heaven and earth just to prove it. The question is: will you give him that chance? You'll never know unless you try, right?

Your world does not end with a love betrayed, more so when the betrayer shows remorse.

It's all in your court. Just follow your heart.

Power Struggles

“Where do I begin? I’m a guy, and I feel like I’m the one who’s wearing the skirt in our marriage. The way she talks to me, the way she commands me, the way she wants me to act... there’s only so much I can take. Even in making love, we do the deed whenever she’s in the mood and never when I’m the one who’s feeling the itch. Oh man! Help me out here, please?”

- Eric, Baltimore

What we have here is a classic case of a power struggle. Your wife is in control of your relationship. You want to seize that control, but you can’t, hence, it’s frustrating you to no end.

But Eric, have you actually tried to do something about it? Not that you’ll go on a shouting match with your wife, but have you tried to sit down with her to talk about what you’re feeling?

Power struggles also result from a clash of egos. Egos are hungry entities. They feed on pride and attention and control. When egos are allowed to rule the relationship, the results are often destructive. How do you curtail the warpath of an ego, then? You have to allow it to run its course and realize that there are more things to a happy marriage and a happy life than having to compete with a partner’s pride.

Cooperation is the name of the game, after all, not competition.

Help feed your wife’s ego, but always remember that such is not the end-all and be-all of your marriage. Once satisfied, her ego, just like everything else after a hearty meal, will be settled enough for a talk. This is the time when you should inform her, as gently and as diplomatically as possible, how you feel about the current state of your relationship. This is the time when she is bound to listen to what you have to say without allowing her ego to get in the way. A good talk can solve any misunderstandings, and you owe your marriage that much.

Blame Game

“My husband always blames me for every unfortunate event that happens in his life. When his business collapsed, he blamed me for what he claimed was the absence of my support. When I had a miscarriage during my second pregnancy, he blamed me for not taking good care of myself. He blames me for the simple things as well. I feel like I’m a curse to him.”

- Aby, Singapore

Aby, your husband has issues, and he will need your help so that he can confront them, realize them, and ultimately, deal with them. You are his wife and no one else is in a better position to heed his cry for help than you.

Indeed, his constant finger-pointing is telling of some baggage he’s carrying. Chances are, he is experiencing certain traumas inflicted while he was growing up. The usual cause is rejection. Was he ever rejected so severely when he was a child? Fear of rejection makes people defensive, and being defensive entails putting the blame on other people.

That he blames you does not mean he doesn’t love you. It just means that you’re the person he is most familiar with. Nonetheless, it hurts, and what you’re feeling is perfectly understandable.

But until you pinpoint the trauma that remains buried in his psyche, he won’t be able to change his ways. You must help him out because these aren’t things that he can realize on his own.

For cases like this, I recommend counseling. Modern methods like hypnosis will allow him to retrace his childhood and deal with whatever loose ends are left hanging. How to get him on the couch is up to you. You’re his wife, Aby. You cannot simply give up on him. You have to do everything you can so that he will pursue treatment.

Haunting Past

“My wife always compares me to her first husband. I ask her sometimes, ‘why did you ever divorce him if you treat him like a god?’ And she reminds me that she never left him, he left her. And that’s another slap in my face. It may be true, but how come she’s so brutally honest about it? She’s driving me away and she doesn’t even realize it.”

- *Eddie, by email*

Indeed, honesty can be a two-edged sword. It can relieve us or it can hurt us. Nonetheless, at least she’s honest, and at least you know what she’s really thinking about, right? How to deal with it is another matter, however.

There is a two-pronged approach in a situation like this.

First, you have to realize that the person, and people, she was previously with have become parts of her life. They can never be erased. Memory does not work that way. You love her for who she is and this includes her history.

But this doesn’t mean you have to suffer. Understanding is one thing, being a martyr is another.

The second thing you should do is to talk to her about it. Tell her how much it hurts you whenever she compares you with her ex. But be constructive about it. Do it in such a way that you won’t appear as if you’re restricting her honesty. As we have mentioned above, honesty is a good thing. Don’t allow it to vanish. She loves you. She should. She’s with you after all. Once she realizes how much pain you’re suffering, she’ll take it upon herself to do the corresponding adjustments.

Also, take it as a challenge. Prove to her that you can be a better husband than her ex. Often, competition brings out the best in us. It brings us to a level we never thought we could achieve.

Chapter Four
Believing
In Ever After

**There Are No Fairytale Romances
But There Are Fairytale Endings**

*I am no knight that would slay dragons to save you
I am no frog that would transform into a prince with your kiss
I am no peasant to ascend to the throne as chosen from a few
I am no vagabond that would offer a lamp for your every wish*

*I am no prince who would awake you from your slumber
I am no townsfolk who would help you against an evil queen
I am no heir who would rescue you from your tower
I am not even the handsomest man you have ever seen*

*But what I am is beyond words and verses fair
I am me, I am real, I am here, And I will pursue
Against time and tide, I will persevere and dare
To live a life of happily ever after with you*

And so we have come to the end of this eBook. It is hoped that you have learned much from the tales and principles that have been shared.

Throughout the previous pages, we have discussed a lot of things that can contribute to the success of your marriage. They were culled from experiences that other couples have undergone. They have weathered the stormy days of their relationships. With what they have shared, there is no reason why you can't do the same thing with yours.

We have learned what a marriage is and what a marriage should be. A lot of people in this day and age do get married for the wrong reasons; hence, causing a dramatic and alarming increase in number of divorce petitions being filed.

We have learned what a marriage should be. Amidst the glitz and the glamour of a wedding celebration lie problems – real problems – that the couple will have to confront, eventually. A marriage is a union of two distinct individuals, after all. They are called “individuals” for a reason. They have different bodies, different minds, different thoughts and different beliefs. Naturally, conflict, in one form or another, should be expected. It's how the couple deals with these conflicts that will ultimately decide the fate of the marriage.

And we have also discussed the manifestations of these possible conflicts. We have enumerated and profiled the common marital problems most couples encounter. We have mentioned some ways on how we can deal with them properly.

We have also discussed the five essential ingredients of a successful marriage. These components are vital for your marital union and they will come in handy whenever problems do arise in the relationship. Let these five ingredients be your bible of sorts. Remember them by heart. They have saved a lot of marriages before. Who knows, they may save yours when you need them the most.

A lot of people believe in fate. They also call it destiny. And with that movie they released in the 90's, some people have even started calling it serendipity.

Others go to the extent of calling their partners soul mates.

I am telling you right now, romanticizing relationships, and marriage in particular, in such a manner is courting disaster. Allow me to tell you why.

Destiny, fate, serendipity, soul mates... these are ideas that promote the belief of predetermination, that is, everything that has happened, is happening, and will happen in our lives has already been prepared. All we are doing, basically, is going through the motions.

You hear people saying "I will wait for the one I love because someone out there is meant for me." It's the belief in predetermination at work.

What if that person never comes? Would that mean that you were destined not to meet a romantic partner?

Should you wait for the right partner or should you go and find the perfect love for you? Or better yet, should you go out and strive to achieve the perfect love you have always dreamed of?

Predetermination destroys the idea of free will. If we believe in destiny, fate, serendipity, or whatever word it takes, we are, in a way, saying that our choices don't matter. What good are the decisions we make when everything has been planned beforehand?

Destiny, fate, serendipity, soul mates... these are highly romantic and romanticized terms that may solicit a few giggles from high school girls. But marriage is a different matter altogether.

Marriage requires work.

Lots of work.

It's not something that we can simply leave in a corner to watch it grow. It's something we should care for so that it may develop as beautifully as possible.

It's not something that we can just leave to chance. It's something where we should control the probabilities so that we may continue to enjoy marriage for an entire lifetime.

Marriage needs work. And it needs both parties to cooperate with one another. Marriage, after all, by its very definition is not a one-way affair. It is always a two-way street where both spouses must meet halfway and where both spouses must commit themselves to the betterment of their married life.

Destiny, fate, serendipity, soul mates...

These are great words used in fairy tales of undying love and unwavering courage, where good always triumphs over evil and the protagonists always ride off into the sunset to live a life described by a classic cliché.

But there is no such thing as fairy tales in real life.

Though there are fairytale endings.

But these are endings we should work for. These are endings that result from the series of choices we make. These are endings created by our commitment and desire to make our marriages work.

Indeed, fairytale endings do exist. But much work needs to be done to achieve a life that can be lived happily ever after.

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