

NOT YET READY
FOR PRIME TIME

This book is born from our personal discoveries. We thought it only fair to tell you a little about us so you'd have a context. It is *not* a book about us. We believe that the ideas we present are universal and applicable across age and culture differences.

In our personal relationship journey we quickly discovered that old ways of thinking about relationships didn't seem to apply. We bought into the notion that being in love, really in love, was a sound basis for marriage. But how could we know if we met that standard? After all, our former loves had been real.

We were fairly good at identifying our feelings, competent at negotiating differences, had enough individual psychotherapy to take responsibility for ourselves, and knew that the love resonating between us was real. What was missing, we both wondered, if we couldn't quite commit to a lifetime together?

Here's what happened. In the beginning, our love and enjoyment of each other was all we knew. We were immersed in the *idea* of love. We had both emerged from extraordinarily painful divorces, so we allowed the relief of understanding, of finding again how to have fun, and the physical celebration of our bodies all to enchant and distract us from the reality of our inad-

equate skill sets. Our skill sets, when it came to real intimate conversation, were woefully lacking.

We knew how to argue. We didn't know how to embrace conflict. We knew how to mutually diagnose each other, but we didn't know how to do the 100 % rule. We knew distance and the heat of coming together, but we didn't know how to stay in the fire of relationship together.

The enchantment of the old model – “who's to blame;” “what's your problem” – seduced us into analyzing each other and kept us from surrender. *Our 'working model' of marriage was not sufficient to guide us here.* We not only had to learn a lot about inner work and its relationship to intimacy, we also had to learn about the **Four Kinds of Intimacy**, about invitation, sacred space and sacred time. The idea of creating a **Philosophy of Marriage** hadn't occurred to us yet either, and the **Three Journeys** weren't available to help us picture this relationship. Finally, we hadn't identified the process of **Tending the Roots** and so we floundered.

A. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT WHAT MARRIAGE ADDS TO THE QUALITY OF A RELATIONSHIP

There seemed to be a great vacuum as we talked about how we wanted this relationship to “show up” in the world. The talk of “should we marry,” the awareness of the pain of divorce, the challenge of forming a new family, the stress on the children – all came down to this: *What does marriage add to a relationship?*

If a mature couple is comfortable in their loving, and their relationship seems to work reasonably well, does marriage add value to relationship? And, if it does, how?

This notion of “added value” generated a lot of discussion, considerable conflict and some very intimate moments between us. We looked at marriage as we knew it, how we had had practiced it and related to it in the marriages of others. It seemed like a blurry concept. Marriage, an almost institutional concept, suggested more promise than could be articulated.

Some couples were in it reluctantly and would joke with us about “life sentences,” etc. Others seemed resigned to a status quo kind of arrangement.

Of course there were couples who were blissfully unaware of the possibilities in their marriage and so had settled in to a kind of “comfortable shoe” life.

We noticed a great deal of masked hostility among men and women towards their partners. When we asked them to define marriage they mostly offered a tepid definition: “it’s being faithful,” “it’s being best friends,” “it’s having a lot in common,” etc. The hostility often showed up in their jokes.

We were faithful ourselves but not yet ‘best friends.’ Our arguments and lack of resolution would more often look like “suspicious friends.” On the surface we had much in common but we both felt that there was more to be said, more to be revealed, if only we could break ground to a deeper level of trust. Intimate conversations were possible if we could move beyond the circularity of our conflicts.

My partner is Connecticut raised and boarding school educated. She finished all that at Sarah Lawrence. Imagine that! She lived in one house from birth till marriage. Her father an attorney, her mother a sculptress, they had material comforts, stability, and community.

I was born in Hoboken, New Jersey. I lived in seven or eight different houses or apartments before I finished eighth grade. After eighth grade I left home. I worked for and lived with a farm family in Pennsylvania for two years and quit high school after the tenth grade. From then on I worked twelve hour shifts in the factories of northern New Jersey until I returned to school at age nineteen. I had little confidence in my ability to learn or to be socially competent.

By the time my wife and I had lived in the house we currently live in for five years, I had lived longer in that one place than at any other time in my life.

This is the *first* potential added value of marriage – to create stability and community in the midst of change and growth.

Marriage is a container that holds a family in an accountable and relational contract over time.

This ‘added value’ has nothing to do with the mobility social scientists often refer to in our culture. Family stability is a crucial ingredient in the healthy development of children.

A *second* added value is somewhat subtler. Psychologists talk of the necessity and desirability of “individuation.” What this means is you and I get to become the person we are meant to be. We’ll talk about this more fully

later, but the marriage container is a wonderful lab for self development, self evolution, self deepening. We could see that risking *being true to ourselves while fully in relationship* was something neither of us had ever done.

Further, marriage, a container for self-revelation and partnering, provides an impetus to self-discovery.

The first time I referred to going to a party as a “duty dance” my wife was offended. Her friends love her and wanted her there. I understood that, but it didn’t interest me. I had no hostility towards her friends. I only had a clear sense that I wanted to do something very different with my evening. We worked it through. She went. I didn’t. Some weeks later in a considerably lighter frame of mind she said: “I know this. I’ll never have to worry if you’re telling me the truth. You are clear even when I hate how clear you are.”

That was a big moment for us both. In past relationships I had rarely been firm about what I needed or wanted in my life. I was the great accommodator. She was, too, and in some ways my firmness opened the door for her.

A *third added value* is a function of the second. Because we are driven to self-realization we are in deep need of its corollary, the need to discover a rich spiritual life, which is related to the need to love.

To become fully who you are you must travel the path of uncovering the resources of your own loving. *At the core of being fully the individual you are meant to be is the discovery of the love you are meant to manifest.*

Individuation – which is simply attending to the seed within that holds the promise of all you are meant to be – requires relationship and is strengthened and deepened by commitment, continuity, and relational coherence.

Relationships that hold together over time expose the quality of love in the relationship. Marriage potentially does that when you agree to let it do what it’s supposed to do. To agree to continue when the path isn’t clear, to stay with a partner who seems lost, to insist on your love when you can’t feel it – good marriages offer this.

Here are a couple of observations that may clarify the interdependence between becoming the individual you are meant to be and the need for stability – relational, psychological, spiritual and physical – over time.

My childhood, though unfolding in a loving family, undermined my confidence in my own love. My mother was too emotionally dependent on

me for me to get a sense of balance. I was either too important to her or not important at all.

Additionally, the effects of our frequent moves, the fear engendered by living in the inner city, or the resilience/ invulnerability (depending on your point of view) formed in me by having to be too competent too early left me with an artificially strong persona and a near hollow core. I knew how to be 'strong' but in relationship it showed up as an inability to be needy. And when I was needy I consumed my partner with an avalanche of demands.

Relationally, I needed to do some inner work. But I also needed a stronger, more explicit model of marriage, one which could hold me accountable and at the same time feed my hunger for discovery and my desire for a deepening intimacy.

(My partner should actually write this next part but I can't get her to do it so here it goes.) As an adopted child, she grew tough early. The combination of a New England ambience – not much “feeling” talk, stiff personal resolve, a merry social life – and her adoption at six months, together with being sent to boarding school left her with plenty of spunk, but not a whole lot of belief in the staying power of others. The ending of her first marriage only confirmed what she already believed: *She* loves but... could anyone else love her?

We stumbled along, I suggested metaphors and models that helped me conceptualize the process. She proof read them out loud. We'd stand in the kitchen and I'd barrage her with still another way to picture what marriage is or could be. I'd study her eyes, her mouth, the way she moved. Every now and then she'd say “Yes! That's right.” And I'd have another piece.

We weren't yet “ready for prime time.” The model hadn't fully exposed itself to us, but we were slowly breaking the enchantment and we discovered another piece that cleared the way for light to shine through.

B. OBSTACLES: GUNNY SACKS, EXPECTATIONS, AND HISTORY

My second therapist, Dan Rothstein, a Jungian scholar, was tall, serious, and kind. He liked to say that we drag gunny sacks full of our unfinished business into our living rooms, bedrooms, and kitchens.

Over the course of our lives we take our wounds, losses, betrayals, and slights, and, instead of dealing with them in the moment, we store them for future access. The importance of this idea cannot be underestimated for relationships.

It can look like this: My wife forgets that I'm working late. She fixes a wonderful dinner for our family. Time passes, the dinner cools. She's probably not thinking of how much I love her, how sensitive and kind (and hard-working!) I am. Instead she (unconsciously) reaches back into her gunny sack for a memory that seems to fit.

She grabs a night early in her dating life when a treasured young man doesn't show at all for a date they planned. He's charming about it the next day and she doesn't deal with it. She tosses it back into her largely empty sack and saves it for the night I'm late to dinner.

Although she isn't saying "you're just like him," something in her attitude feels accusing and blaming as I walk in the door. I, no more conscious than she at the moment, look into my gunny sack. There buried beneath hundreds of misunderstandings, lies an event with my first wife when I felt repeatedly accused of things that simply weren't true. Armed with this image I pull out my howitzer and fire away.

Soon a simple mistake has morphed into a serious argument and neither of us knows what happened.

Gunny sacks need frequent emptying but not on each other. Good therapists are skilled in this work and can help us lighten our loads. Gunny sacks also influence our expectations.

The bigger issue with expectations, however, is our unresolved and unexamined interactions with parents. Freud said it this way: when two people marry, six get in the bed. Our parents' marriages were templates for us. We saw what we didn't want and we also learned patterns without consciously evaluating them. Since a major portion of relational learning takes place before we're out of grade school, we come into marriage "knowing" a lot more than we realize we "know."

We begin our relationships full of hope, enthusiasm, optimism, and certainty. I don't think I've ever heard a bride or groom say, "I can't wait till the divorce." When things start to change it isn't because the one you married has changed so much as the one you married begins *to reveal who they are* underneath all the flurry and excitement of hormones. And, you do the same.

Their history and yours begins to sit down at dinner. The unresolved stuff with their own childhood shows up in their parenting skills (or lack of them). They regress to old patterns in conflict, in money management, in intimate challenges.

Many couples have described a “wall-like thing” that surprises and stuns them. They were going along pretty good and suddenly “he/ she won’t talk about this.” That wall is part learned expectations, part social history, and part unresolved stuff buried deep in the gunny sack.

We were no different. Although we both had worked on ourselves, this relationship and the finding of our life partner, the surrender into a deep and profound loving commitment opened us to new levels of challenge from which this book grew.

We were, and are, continually surprised by not only the searing challenges our love offers, but also the discovery of new levels of intimate talk unfolding with every encounter.