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Why get married? Why stay married? With the divorce rate soaring in many Western countries, how do we establish relationships that will last? How to start again when things go wrong?

Here a variety of people—married, single, widowed and divorced—say what they think and what they are finding.

ON WEDLOCK AND DEADLOCK

Claire Evans was born and grew up in France, and married an Englishman. In 1975 she was told she had inoperable cancer. In her few remaining months she wrote a book, 'Freewoman'. On marriage, she writes:

THE ORIGINAL RECIPE for marriage is one of absolute simplicity: a 'yes' which commits a man and a woman to a privileged relationship for the whole of the rest of their lives.

The expression 'trial marriage' seems to me a contradiction in terms. I can understand what is meant by trial sex, but marriage contains an element of permanence which excludes the idea of trial. This permanence is then reflected in sexual life in terms of stability, trust and lack of haste.

Seen from this point of view, marriage is clearly a commitment and not a feeling, even if feeling plays a very important part. From his prison cell Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a sermon for the wedding of one of his nieces, in which he made an interesting comment on the relationship between love and marriage:

'Just as it is the crown, and not merely the will to rule, that makes the king, so it is the marriage, and not merely your love for each other, that joins you together in the sight of God and man... It is not your love that sustains marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love.'

Being realistic is a help. Married love is

like a stream that freshens and brightens the countryside; if it stops flowing, it is usually because there is a blockage. It may be something apparently trivial, but that does not make the blockage less effective.

We have often experienced the almost magical effect of a moment of honesty, about a temptation, a mistake, a disappointment, a fear, a hope. Love needs truth to remain alive, and nothing stifles it more than the desperate efforts of our pride to present a better image of ourselves than the reality.

Often, of course, the division is more serious. One fine day an unsuspected weakness is discovered, and a weakness which deeply hurts. A hard-working, conscientious man suddenly realises that his wife is extravagant and has run up debts. A woman who treasures courage above all other virtues finds that her husband has a streak of cowardice. A jealous wife discovers her husband flirting.

It touches so intimately the deepest fibres of our being, it destroys so completely the ambitions and hopes of a lifetime, that it feels intolerable. And at that moment the temptation to run away raises its head, in

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Bombay with a bump

by Michael Brown



FROM THE DAPPLED green lushness of the English New Forest where we were married, and the warm heather-crested hills of Hebridean islands where we spent our

honeymoon, Bombay was coming down to reality with a bump. It was hot, sticky, crowded, noisy... and tense with a political emergency imposed only a few weeks before.

Why Bombay? We jokingly told friends that it was the half-way point between Jean's English home and my Aussie habitat. We had, in fact, both been in India before and for some reason friends wanted us back—proof, no doubt, of that Indian quality of tolerance. Above all, we had a sense that God wanted us to be there, and to create a heart and a home amongst our band of friends whose concern was to meet the challenges of that great, groaning, glorious country.

For any newly married couple, life has its moments. Like when Jean boiled my handkerchiefs till they were soot; or when a monkey pounced into the middle of a picturesque picnic and made off with half the goods. These have their funny side. But there are other incidents which are no laughing matter—not 'fights' exactly (we are still waiting for a good stand up shouting match) but, shall we say, moments of 'agrieved tension'.

One such moment occurred the very day before our wedding when I felt Jean in

authoritative tone was laying down the law on certain wedding preparations. 'Heavens, it's started already,' I thought. That night, at the point of *no return*, I went on my knees and found in prayer the principle that whenever I felt annoyed with Jean or pushed around by her, the cause was to be found primarily in myself. Simple, but fundamental.

And not so simple. I had, for instance, long considered myself to be an overstretched, undervalued, dedicated worker. After a long day in the office, I would collapse into a chair and unburden myself of the injustices and frustrations of the day. As a bachelor, this little drama sometimes generated sympathy. But when I tried it on my new wife, it left her cold. It took some time—and tears—for the truth to penetrate my thick Australian skull that to expect one's spouse to deal with one's moods was just selfish, and hurtful, exploitation.

Likewise we have found that any irritation or coolness between us reveals some remaining corner of our nature which needs chiselling off and healing with God's cleansing forgiveness... things which in our single days might have been tolerated or avoided by friends but which in the closeness of marriage are hurtful unless faced humbly and honestly.

These lessons, often painfully learnt, no doubt make married life more secure and peaceful. But what of love? Love does not come from walking into sunsets or dining by candlelight. These, it must be said, can be helpful. But what we find most satisfying is to plunge into someone else's situation of need and actively seek to bring God's inspiration to it. Even in India, where needs are so apparent, it is sometimes difficult to break out of the barriers of petty preoccupations, self-concern or comfort, especially after a long hot day. But whenever we do, we are often aware afterwards of a fresh joy and affection for each other. That, we believe, is the real basis of love in marriage.

Now, complete with yells, yawns, gurgles and dribbles, we are three. And seven-month old Adam is as good a way to win friends and open hearts as anything God has created. In fact, we find it hard to conceive how anyone of such perfection can come from the parentage he has.

'Just wait a few years,' we can hear some wise old heads muttering. 'You'll learn.' And indeed we hope to, with God's help, for the rest of our years. But that bump into Bombay reality was a good way to start it all.



WHO SAID INCOMPATIBLE?

WHEN 'BUNNY' AUSTIN married Phyllis Konstam in 1931, the press headlined it, 'The Wedding of the Year'. Austin was a member of the British team that went on to win the Davis Cup four years running (1933-36) and in 1938 was ranked number two in the tennis world. Phyllis Konstam was a star of the West End stage.

After her sudden death in 1976, 'Bunny' Austin wrote a book, 'To Phyll with Love'. It is in the form of a series of letters to Phyllis recalling their life together. Since its publication last year many people have written to the author in gratitude for it. 'It gently knocked and pealed at my own arrogance and self-love,' wrote a nun, 'and gave me inspiration to continue to try to be a "listening" person.' Here we print extracts from the book:

MY DARLING PHYLL,

I never thought how much I'd miss you. I was quite unprepared for your going. Even the night before your heart attack you were striding out. Though you were so tired you would insist on writing to our dear friend Elizabeth who'd been going through such a hard time with her divorce. And then in the night the pains came.

I must admit I wasn't worried. Of course you would have to slow down. But there was much we could do together—we could write the book you had on your mind, *How to be Happy Though Married*. Already you had written snatches of it in your notebook, full of humour and common sense, written out of the considerable experience we had gained in learning to make a marriage of two incompatible people work—at least incompatible is what we could have been called if we had not decided that, incompatible or not; we would by the grace of God make our marriage work.

In the following letters 'Bunny' Austin describes their meeting, courtship and marriage and his encounter with the Oxford Group, later to be known as Moral Re-Armament:

Their way of life was infectious. They were fun and they meant business. Christianity to them meant obedience to Him every hour of every day, a total surrender and commitment. And their vision was world-wide, their aim to make God regnant in the life of every nation. It appeared to me as a great adventure.

You, my darling, reacted differently. The challenge of absolute moral standards got under your skin and brought your conscience alive.

We argued, we fought. You wouldn't let the matter drop. In the end you won. I let the whole matter of the Oxford Group drop.

When I married you, darling, I wanted to be faithful to you, and for all my weaknesses and in spite of the many temptations of your actress friends, I had succeeded in being so. Now, alas, my good intentions went out of the window. I'm not going to go into all the details: you know them only too well, and for what happened next I can never be sorry enough.

As war approached, 'Bunny' felt God was calling him to return to the Oxford Group. He did so. Phyll was furious. But she did agree to come with him to a meeting at the Hollywood Bowl in the USA:

It was an occasion to appeal to your dramatic sense: the floodlit arena, the clear star-studded Hollywood sky, the four searchlights stabbing through the night air. And as individual after individual climbed the rostrum to speak, people of many nations in their varied coloured costumes, people of many races and every type of background, here was an unfolding drama to appeal to your love of the colourful and dramatic.

After the meeting was over you talked to Jimmy Newton, an able young business executive. You talked about the guidance of God. You told Jimmy you thought it was dangerous. He asked what you were guided by, and when you told him it was often fear, queried whether it was not more dangerous to be guided by fear than by God?

You took a notebook and pencil and, as Jim had advised, wrote down the thought that came into your mind. It was, 'Be honest with your mother: you have always lied.'

If I had been God I'd have taken a different tack. But God knew what He was doing. He knew the metal He was dealing with, and when we got back to England at the end of July you went to see your mother. It was the first real talk you had ever had with her and for the first time you lost your fear of her.

One day one of your maids who had served in your house at Hampstead came to see you. She saw you working at the stove and her astonishment knew no bounds. 'Phyllis Konstam,' she exclaimed, 'What on earth has happened to you?' You had a long talk with Dorothy. She told you how the way you had lived had made her bitter and in consequence she had become a Communist. You told her how sorry you were and how you were finding a new way of life. And then Dorothy confessed her own trouble: her son was fed up and was leaving home that night. Your own openness, your honesty about your own faults and mistakes and the new love you had found for all people opened Dorothy's own heart. She told you she had become a dictator. You had apologised to her, she said, and she was going home to apologise to her son. She did so and the next morning telephoned you—her son had decided to stay.

Dorothy became the first of a long line of people stretching over the future years who lived to be grateful for the warmth and openness of your heart.

There was still the shadow of "the other girl" in the back of our minds. One night you raised the subject and we talked it through. That night I didn't sleep. A thought came into my mind, "You were callous and cruel". I got a new picture of myself, not a nice polite Englishman but one who could be—and had been—callous and cruel. I realised I was no different, neither better nor worse than anybody else. In short I had a human being's nature, capable of rising to great heights or sinking to great depths, all depending on the influences that were brought to bear and the decisions that were made. I realised how desperately I needed God to make me different and how deeply I needed to ask your forgiveness.

Now came a great challenge to your spirit. Konrad Adenauer, shortly to be Chancellor of Germany, had been to the MRA centre at Caux, Switzerland. Deeply impressed by what he saw and heard, he asked for *The Forgotten Factor* to be translated into German and to be played in the Ruhr where, at that time, the Works Councils were 72 per cent communist. The play was translated into German and you were asked to direct it.

Your spirit quailed and you cried in your heart, 'Not me! Not me!' Your German Jewish relatives had largely escaped the Nazi pogroms thanks to the foresight and generosity of your father. But some of them, and all your relatives in France, suffered in the concentration camps or died in the gas chambers. The very sight of a German turned your stomach. 'No, not this!' you cried. 'No, God, not this!'

You went up to your room and prayed. On your knees you asked God to take the bitterness out of your heart.

You went downstairs and met with the German cast. One of them had a gash on his face. He seemed the very epitome of the Germany you had once loved but had come to hate. You swallowed hard. You told the cast about your bitterness, and how sorry you were for it. You told them the story of the sufferings of your relatives. Many of the Germans wept. Some told you they had never been Nazis nor in sympathy with the regime, but they were guilty men. They had not had the courage to stand out against it.

So a German cast was trained and soon travelled to the German Ruhr. Here *The Forgotten Factor* was performed night after night to houses crowded with the workers, many of them Communists. The spirit of the Ruhr was transformed. Some of the Communists, finding a faith, travelled with us in the days ahead.

You were having an immense influence on many people, darling, and success is a heady wine. God was using you. But you were becoming, little by little spiritually proud. And pride comes before a fall. Candid friends at last raised the matter with you frontally and told you you could not go on as you were, and needed to find a humbler and more Christ-like spirit.



Cynical no more

by Nathalie O'Neill

France



BEING IN MY MID-TWENTIES, it is natural that I should ask myself now and again: 'Will I get married or not?'

This question can become a preoccupation when I am feeling dissatisfied—when I have allowed life to become dull and routine or there is a difficult relationship on my mind. Fear too can be a reason for wanting marriage—fear of what some in my family or among my friends will think if I do not get married, or simply fear of being all alone one day.

Many of us girls desperately try to marry as we see in marriage the answer to our problems and a source of permanent satisfaction. Sometimes we think of a husband as a hero who would provide us with a better life and whose main job would be to lavish on us unflinching affection. Such ideas survive a long time at the back of many girls' minds and we can waste so much of our time, energy and money trying to make ourselves attractive—or simply daydreaming.

Scots on the rocks

by Marjory Wise

London

A FEW YEARS AGO a couple came to share our house with us. The wife had been a friend of mine ever since we were both in our teens.

We had a quite different approach on most things, though we are both Scottish. Rather than giving in to one or the other, we had to work it out. There were times when feelings ran high. Our husbands must have been quite amused. I know that some of the household were.

There came a time when I saw I had to face up to the need for change in myself, rather than always hope my friend would. My reactions, annoyance and irritability did not add up to the Christian life.

Then I realised that I sometimes felt irritated by my husband—but with him there was a way through and beyond my feelings to harmony and joy. What was the difference? The still small voice in my heart said, "The difference is that you love your husband." Did this mean I did not love my friend?

I had to admit that I needed to find a love for her. I asked God for it, and said sorry both to Him and to her.

The prayer was answered and together with our husbands, we talked honestly. Joy and humour came back and everyone benefited.

To a certain extent I lived like this—until I was honest enough to admit that it left me totally dissatisfied. I wanted something new for my life and I realised this kind of living was holding me back.

Gradually I found the strength to end these preoccupations. My attitude towards men changed. Till then I had usually thought of them in terms of the fun they could give me. Now I found a respect for them as individuals, and a new understanding of marriage, about which I had been rather cynical.

As a student in Paris, I had questioned married life. Why couldn't young people live together as long as they got on, and then break off their relationship when they no longer did? It seemed to be a good way to avoid disintegrating partnerships and unfaithfulness—the thing I dreaded most in married life.

Over the last two years I have lived and worked with couples for whom the question of unfaithfulness apparently never arises. Something holds them together which is stronger than mutual attraction or feelings.

I have discovered it is a commitment, which, often, each has made before meeting the other—a commitment to care genuinely for other people, communities and countries in order to build a healthy human society. Their whole lives, in their professions, in society, as a family or as individuals, are geared to meeting others' needs. And in return they gain, among other things, a satisfying relationship.

Does this mean that to be used to care for others is a condition of a fulfilling marriage?

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every guise ranging from resignation to divorce or suicide.

There is a total contrast between the public image of these 'solutions' and the way they actually feel in daily life. If divorce by mutual consent becomes law, the press hails the event as 'a great victory for freedom'. But in practice I have yet to meet one divorced person celebrating a victory. At best it is an admission of failure; at worst it is a tragedy from which a person never recovers. Even when it is unavoidable, divorce is always painful.

Why change partners if it is possible for both to become new people? Why separate if the selfishness which makes the situation intolerable can be broken?

I do not say this lightly. Our marriage, like most marriages, has been through two or three of those crises in which the horizon seems for ever closed. It was through change in human character—in the event, mine—that we emerged. Human beings are free. We can accept or refuse change. If we refuse, then we have to find other roads. But by denying the possibility of change, we slam the door in the face of hope and condemn ourselves to non-satisfying solutions.

'Freewoman', Becket Publications, available from Grosvenor Books, 54 Lyford Road, London SW18 3JJ, price £1.95 or £2.30 postage paid.

Some months later you went back to England to look after your mother, leaving me in America. You were still nursing grievances against those who had felt you needed to be different. You wrote to me suggesting I, too, return to England and that we buy a house and settle down.

I need not dwell on this unhappy interlude, for interlude was all it proved to be. After six months you rejoined me in America. You hadn't been back long when you became seriously ill. You had pneumonia and pleurisy.

You were in the infirmary on Mackinac Island and your room looked out on to the great lakes. At one end of an island opposite, known as Round Island, there was a lighthouse. By a strange chance the light from this lighthouse shining on the wire mosquito frame of your window formed a Cross. It was as if Jesus Himself was speaking to you. Suddenly you realised all the blame in your heart. You sent for a secretary and wrote eleven letters of apology to those against whom you nurtured bitterness. You regained your spiritual health and with it your physical health too.

Now the decision was made that the Westminster Theatre, which had been bought in 1946 as a memorial to the men and women of Moral Re-Armament who had given their lives in the war, should be used for the production of plays to further the ideals for which they had fought and died.

During the '60s the theatre was fast being degraded. Purity was not popular.

But you had the moral guts to fight for what you knew to be right. You, who had fought so passionately against God and His standards, fought now with equal passion for all those things you had earlier fought against. You had now caught the vision of what a Christ-centred theatre could do for our country and the world.

And outside the theatre you continued unremittingly in your care for people. Often on walks together we would be chatting and I would ask a question. There would be silence. Your mind would be elsewhere, wrestling to find an answer to a problem besetting a friend.

I had no idea how soon you were to go, but looking back I realise you were ready, even though you hated to leave us. God had perfected His instrument. Your humility, your courage had won through to a marvellous grace. You found as the years went by a marvellous purity and it shone like a light in your face. Yes, in my eyes you grew more beautiful every year. It was the beauty of holiness.

'To Phyll with Love', Grosvenor Books, 54 Lyford Road, London SW18 3JJ, price £1.50 or £1.70 postage paid. Gift edition £4.95 or £5.20 postage paid.

A lifetime in two years

by Daphne Horder

a clinical dietician, London

MARRIAGES CAN BE 'made in heaven', but often disintegrate on earth in the daily routine and pressures of life. Two decisions we made when we got engaged determined the course of our marriage. The first was that from the evening we got engaged we decided to pray together daily. This immediately gave a new perspective; our marriage wasn't just for us, but a gift from God for others too. It enabled us to open our hearts, and later

our home, to all who came our way—especially when we wanted to nurse our hurts or keep our comforts to ourselves.

The other decision was to consciously go on appreciating each other. It was only later, as I saw so many friends' marriages lose their bloom and excitement that I realised the value of this decision. We can so easily take each other for granted, and become less and less sensitive to each other's needs and feelings.

Patrick was ill when we married, so we learnt to live each day as if it were our last—and indeed his last day came suddenly, and far sooner than we had expected. It meant there was no time to waste, delaying to do what God asked, or carrying forward re-

actions or disagreements into the next day. And God poured love and peace so richly to us and so many friends that someone said when Patrick died, 'You two have meant more to each other and your friends, and packed more into two years than many couples do in a life time.'

Through the dark, drab days following his death, I questioned how a God of love could give so much, and then apparently take away so much. But Patrick was sure in his last days that God was training us for new things. How new and different we didn't realise. But I know that His perfect plan for each of us continues still, joyously, humorously, adventurously and obediently—though no longer side by side.

Out of despair in Eritrea

by Ann-Kristin Särnbrink

Sweden

SOME YEARS AGO Kerstin Säfström was divorced.

She has no children and, she says, the years after the divorce were the most difficult in her life. She went into a deep depression.

After one very difficult night, a friend of Kerstin asked a doctor to visit her.

'I knew that this doctor herself had gone through very great difficulties,' Kerstin told me. 'But the thing that caught me was not so much what she said but the radiance in her face. It told me that life is worth living although so full of suffering.'

Through the friend and this doctor, Kerstin learnt of the school for deaf children in Keren in Eritrea, and later got a job as a teacher there.

'I am very grateful for the two years in Eritrea and Ethiopia,' she says. 'In a war situation, you never took life for granted.'

'Once five hundred people were massacred only 200 metres from us. We had to run out to collect the children, get them away from the ricochets and shelter behind the school buildings with our arms around the children.'

Though she longed for a faith, she had great intellectual doubts. 'But step by step I have found a faith that lasts,' she said.

'The first step on that road was probably the almost unconscious choice that I made when the doctor came to visit me—to turn away from the dark road that I was on and to start to walk towards what I saw was the light.'

The time in Eritrea had meant much to her, especially a talk she had with a man who came to visit them. He had said to Kerstin, 'Every morning before the day begins take time in quiet, and think—What have I got to be thankful for? What in me needs to

change? What shall I pray for and what shall I do?'

'It was simple and clear and I started doing that,' Kerstin went on.

'This fellowship with God has come to mean much to me. It is something dynamic. Something is happening all the time.'

'During the year after the divorce, and sometimes also in Eritrea, I felt a complete loneliness. But I got a new strength through it. I had, unconsciously, been clinging on to other people. Now I stood there alone. There was nobody to cling on to—and I survived.'

'From that I learnt that nobody but myself is responsible for my life. That discovery gave me a new freedom.'

Expectancy

I asked about her family. 'I think that the family is extremely important,' she said. 'My family has meant a lot to me. My parents have always been happy to see me and have always cared for me. They didn't spend a lot of time with me but they were always there, in our grocery shop in Stockholm, when I needed them.'

'They taught me that the important thing in life is to care about what you have got right now and make the most of it.'

'Now I don't feel lonely. There is so much to think of and so many people to think for. I have got many friends, and my family and the situation in Eritrea are with me all the time.'

Kerstin has taken a job as a teacher of deaf children in a school near Stockholm.

'You need to have positive expectancies, not negative ones, not least when you are with children. Nobody is condemned to continue on a negative track because of circumstances.'

'But it means that you say yes to what you feel, deepest inside you, is right. It costs something to leave the habitual road and set out on a new one. But out of the deepest despair there is a way out, even if you don't see any light at all in the beginning.'

Leg-break victory

by Tony and Heather Hazell

England

'TO LISTEN to the still small voice of conscience can be the start of a new way of living together'. So writes Annejet Campbell in her book *Listen to the Children*. We have found this works. Not only has a new spirit come into our home. We have discovered the need to care beyond our four walls, to think and pray and live for our neighbours, which, we are beginning to realise, means an ever increasing number of people.

After four years of marriage a wife can learn to lean on her husband who, in turn, rather likes to do the driving, in and out of the car. Then husband breaks a leg on holiday. With him not able to do many things previously taken for granted, a wife can discover latent strengths and abilities, and confidence in herself. We have since spent nearly two weeks apart, having previously been apart no more than a few hours, and have learnt that this can actually help to build a better marriage.

As a consequence of the broken leg there was time to stop and reflect. It became clear—*resign from your job*. Since the small Christian Trust we both worked for could hardly run without us, quite an inner battle ensued. In any case, what if the next job was slow in coming? With encouragement from friends and family we took the step. The Trust seems to be all right.

We decided to get involved. Rather than look with awe and wonder at those who seem to be so much better at doing things than us, and make that an excuse for doing nothing, we asked for and were given a specific job to do by God.

We enter 1980 with the conviction to try, with others, to discover the constructive action that will alleviate unemployment. How this will work out we do not know. But we believe this is what God is asking of us.