

LOVE MATTERS May 2002

Surveys show Australians value having a happy relationship above all else. 90% of your happiness or misery is determined by your primary love relationship. It affects your health, wealth, work, sexual satisfaction and your kids.

Are you:

~in a good relationship and want to make it deeper?

~about to get married and want to co-create a fulfilling life partnership?

~in a difficult relationship and want to resolve long-standing conflicts?

~near break-up or divorce and want to decide if the relationship can be saved or how to save it and repair and re-build it?

You can learn how to do this.

I would like to share with you some information that came off a web-site I would recommend at www.lifepartnerquest.com I invite you to reflect on how you would handle such a life challenge.

What if you were in the shoes of this husband, or this wife? I'm reminded of the saying "Life is what happens to you whilst you're making other plans" Many experiences are constantly challenging us and our relationships. Even becoming parents impacts on couples lives in many ways. Few parents-to-be anticipate the pressure parenthood can put on their marriage and how it is often the beginning of the end.

A man sent in the following letter asking for help:

"My wife and I have been happily married for a little over ten years.

I love her with all my heart and I know she loves me, too.

We are both devastated. She has just been diagnosed with breast cancer.

We are in our mid 30's and we are shocked. We never thought something like this would happen to us. We were at a place to begin having our family. And now this. I've got so many mixed feelings going on inside me right now. I'm scared to death of losing her. I'm scared I won't be able to be there for her like she needs me.

I've heard of marriages falling apart when something like this happens.

I'm afraid of what it will do to her if she has to have a mastectomy and

if I will be able to show her that I still love her as much as ever. I'm

scared of how I might react to seeing her afterwards.

I hear that women think their husbands will not still want them as much as ever. I don't want to screw this up. Can you help me? How can I support my wife through this and show her that nothing will ever make me stop loving her? My mind is a jumble right now and I am so scared"

I was very touched by all the answers that were sent to this man to assist him and his wife to cope with this very difficult life challenge. Firstly, because of the special things that people suggested that he do, but secondly, and most importantly because all the things that were offered to him are just the very things that we need to do daily to create a strong, loving relationship. And sadly, most people don't prioritise doing these things until something quite devastating happens. Statistics tell us that people come to marriage counselling six years after a problem is recognized, about half of most marriages end in divorce and pain, and too many other people have resigned themselves to living in loveless or less than happy relationships.

Monogamy doesn't equal monotony. Successful relationships don't just happen. They need work like fitness, health and career success. We need to learn how to create them and to make the work of relationship a welcome practice of our daily life. As **Stephen Covey** says (in "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People") "...love is a verb." It's a doing word.

*"It's a misconception that love is a feeling and you either have it, or you don't. The fact is that loves grows in response to getting your needs met", says **Pat Love** in "The Truth About Love".*

And says **Diane Sollee** (director, Smart Marriages) *"Love is not an absolute, a truth, or a limited substance - that you're in it or out of it. It's a feeling that ebbs and flows depending on how you treat each other. If you learn new ways to interact, the feelings can come flowing back, often stronger than before."* Love and marriage are actually skill based. Like football. The way it's set up is a couple gets married and they're sent out to win based on "love and commitment". No skills at all. That's like asking a football team to win on team spirit alone. What is different about the marriages that make it are behaviours or skills. And along with learning these new SKILLS or BEHAVIOURS relationship growth and deepening requires attention to our ATTITUDE.

Some of the suggestions to this man were:

"The most important gift you will give her is your honest communication. If you are afraid - discuss it. Deeply listen to her and mirror her. Ask her what she needs from you. Find support groups or a specialist for each of you to have a safe place to share and expose all of your feelings. Ask her about her fears and worries.

-Remember all the unique attributes of your wife and write them down. Appreciate her.

She is more than her body...what are those qualities that made you fall in love with her?

Tell her how she touches your heart every day.

-Together write down 100 things you want to do together in the next 10 years, your dreams and visions.

-Make a collage together of the places you want to see

-Have a couples picture taken together

-Make chemo days really special with flowers and love notes

-Plan time to play and laugh together, go on dates and to funny movies

Most of all ...hold her...tell her she is beautiful....tell her...no matter what, you are by her side...

May I suggest you :

-LIVE with all the abundance that life offers to you

-LOVE in the best possible ways you can dream up

-LAUGH as if there were no tomorrow

-TOUCH as many lives as you can between now and the end

(what a hoot if the 'end' is not for another 50 YEARS, eh? :)

-CREATE the most amazing life together you are capable of, giving no thought to how long or how short.

Living in this way you may just discover that you're building habits as a couple that will carry you into the next four, five or six DECADES.

I wrote a poem called "Grief" eight months after my previous partner's death and would like to end off with a piece from that.

"So look at your mate
 look deep into their eyes
 deep down into their soul
 and just for a moment
 imagine never having that gift
 of looking into them again
 imagine your heart breaking into tiny little pieces
 and feeling like they'll never fit together again
 like nothing seems to make sense anymore
 like wondering what really matters

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Just savour this moment.
Know how precious your Beloved is.
Just cherish and adore them.
Love them as if you may never get this chance again."

Please don't wait till your Beloveds get sick, die or leave. I invite you to start right now choosing some action or behaviour that will increase your loving. You can change whatever is stopping you....

Future articles will feature how you can become proactive about building, strengthening and nourishing your relationships