A NEWSLETTER FOR MARRIED COUPLES

Foundations

Fall

How's the Merger Going?

What are the pieces of your life that connect you the most? Is it the shared love of music? The home you both live in? The children you have? Your memories of adventures taken together and relive in the stories you tell about it?

Marriage tends to create so many things we share, investing them with a special meaning. Still yet, we don't lose our identity, the memories from before we met our beloved, or some of the "stuff" that we brought into our marriage.

We go on being ourselves after we marry even though we gain our now linked elements.

Anne Fadiman, in her delightful book *Ex Libris,* has an essay entitled "Marrying Libraries." In it, she talks about the difficulties she and her husband encountered merging their two libraries after they married. The first problem they encountered was whether or not to keep duplicates. Both of them had books they couldn't get rid of, especially when one copy had been given by someone important and one had notes in the margins the other partner had written in the text. Another difficulty was the way books should be shelved. Should they be arranged alphabetically or by topic? In chronological order? But definitely not by size!

While that may not be a problem you face, there might be some variation of it. How many baseball bats in the sports equipment closet? Is there room for a tennis racket or two? For some, it may be the cooking equipment. You may not need two cast iron skillets, and certainly not two stand mixers. So which one do you keep?

We go on being ourselves after we marry even though we gain our now linked elements. So that's why we devoted an issue to *Yours, Mine and Ours.* Hopefully you will find the articles in this issue helpful, and that they will ring true to some of your experiences. Whether you have to figure out a middle path with pets or vacations, hobbies or food preferences, you are bound to have things you can't give up that your spouse doesn't value and vice versa. That means you will be facing the Venn diagram of marriage – those things that are yours, and the things that are your spouse's, and the great middle of the circles where the things you have in common reside.

Stepfamilies

One of the most important and challenging "Yours, Mine and Ours" adjustments that you may have to deal with in your marriage occurs if either (or both) of you brings children into the new marriage. Becoming a stepfamily creates unique situations, but there is no doubt that a stepfamily can be a happy, healthy environment for raising children. It does take attention and patience on the part of the adults, though. The following are some tips for living in a stepfamily:

1. Believe that your stepfamily is a good family. It may feel different from the family you grew up in, but it has its own strengths.

2. Allow relationships to develop slowly. Don't rush or push. On average, it takes a child as long to accept a stepparent as the age of the child when the stepfamily is formed. So if the child was two when you got married, it will take about two years before the child really accept your place in the family.

3. Recognize that relationships will change. Your relationship with your child will be different once you remarry, and that may feel uncomfortable for a while, but it's natural and will come in time to feel better. Be clear about your role, and your new spouse's role. For the most part, it's best to allow the biological parent to set and enforce rules. As stepparent, you can best help your spouse by supporting them in their parenting role, not by taking it over, especially in the beginning.

4. Join a group. Smart Steps is designed for remarried or partnering couples and their children. It focuses on building couple and family strengths while addressing the unique needs and issues that face couples in stepfamilies.

Children and adults attend parallel sessions, coming together at the end for a shared activity. You can find more information at stepfamilies.info

4. Develop new traditions in your new family, while also carrying some traditions over from your previous family. If there have been some things that your child really looked forward to than try to keep them part of your routine.

5. Allow your child to express feelings, even negative ones. They are losing their former life and some grief and loss is natural. Help them to move on by acknowledging their sadness.

Be hopeful. Be realistic. Be yourself. Many young adults will tell you that they had a great stepparent, and felt that person was a positive influence in their life. Keep that in mind as you navigate your stepfamily.

The Last Rabbit, and Other Thoughts of Pets

While you might think that creating a combined life is just something that happens at the beginning of a marriage, it's not really the case. If you have been married for a while, it's very likely that there are things that are more one person's territory than the other's.

Pets

In our life, pets are something that have definitely been more the wife's (me) and less the husband's. He did not grow up with pets he explains, and he has been very good about accommodating to a dog. However, when we got a rabbit for the third time, he drew the line. But see, we had this empty hutch from the last rabbit, and I was sure he'd said he wouldn't mind having another one.

Either I misremembered or he had amnesia, because when he came home and saw the rabbit he was not pleased. Perhaps it had to do with the fact that he'd been responsible for feeding the rabbits, and that meant trudging through the snow and ice for all the months that make up a Maine winter. So I fed the rabbit, except when I could lean on one of the kids to do it, and unfortunately it was the least pleasant of the rabbits who had shared our lives.

Time

Adopting the rabbit, then, ended up meaning I had an additional task, which brings up another aspect if our shared life – time. Is time community property, or does your time belong to you unless otherwise designated? Is it okay for one person to watch ALL the football games that are broadcast? Or should there be some Hallmark movie time allotted?

Back to Pets

Because of the pandemic, more people than ever before took to adopting pets. They were working from home, so they were there to care for the pet during the day. Their social life was severely limited, and a pet provided companionship. But as in our marriage, often one person is more enamored of the pet than the other. Visits to the vet can be expensive and time consuming. And if you opt for a breed dog, just getting a special breed can cost a pretty penny, and could be a strain on the family budget.

Current Pet Status

We currently have a dog (only a dog!) and she is a small rescue dog. When we got her I said I would do all the walking, but after about a year with her, I hurt my knee, so Steve had to take over the walks. In the grand tradition of reciprocity, Steve then had a health problem that took him off dog walking duty for a while. Fortunately, in the meantime, my knee had healed, so back I was on the circuit.

The Marriage "Box"

It's complicated and challenging. Harville Hendrix, the author of *Getting the Love You Want: a Guide for Couples,* says, "In today's society, you are encouraged to view marriage as a box. First you choose a mate, then you climb into a box."

> You renegotiate over the course of your lives and each time add a nuance onto the understanding you had before.

But marriage isn't a box. It's a living reality that grows and changes according to the way you grow and change. And you don't deal with an issue and be done with it once and for all. You renegotiate over the course of your lives and each time add a nuance onto the understanding you had before. And it's worth it, it truly is!

Yours, Mine, and Ours Intangibles

Beyond the usual suspects when it comes to our individual and joint items is the realm of preferences, skills, and beliefs.

Preferences
You each have acquired ways of relating that you prefer, and that includes how much you want/need to be close. You may have a high desire for connection. When you're not at work, you would like to be hanging out with your spouse. Your partner, however, may prefer significant "alone" time, or time with friends.

Skills
If either one of you has a skill that takes practice, that might be another area of your life that won't overlap. If you need to practice your skating, or piano, or rowing, it may be something that does not fit into the "ours" category. Developing skills can also mean a financial investment that will have to be negotiated.

Beliefs
Lastly, if one of you has a religious belief that is not shared by your partner, that may be something you pursue alone. You may go to services, or read literature, or attend workshops that have no relevance to your spouse. As long as your partner does not oppose your beliefs, you can hold your practices and convictions without harming the relationship.

Hopefully if any of these things cause stress between you, there are accommodations you or they or both of you will be willing to make. You may want the shared activities to be the larger portion of your lives, but even more important is to make the decisions that are acceptable for both of you. Then when you do have shared time, it will be happy time, comfortable time, and will reflect the things that brought you together in the first place.

To Love is not to Possess

To love is not to possess
To own or imprison
Nor to lose one's self in another
Love is to join and separate
To walk alone and together
To find a laughing freedom
That lonely isolation does not permit
It is finally to be able
To be who we really are
No longer clinging in childish dependency
Nor docilely living separate lives in silence
It is to be perfectly one's self

by James Kavanaugh

Exercise

What have I brought into our marriage and how does my spouse feel about it?

Check all that apply and then have a conversation about any that raise concerns.

From My Family	You	Spouse
Possessions		
Beliefs		
Attitudes		
Traditions		
Other		
From My Life As A Single Person	**You**	**Spouse**
Possessions		
Friendships		
Educational experiences		
Work experiences		
Other		
From Previous Relationships	**You**	**Spouse**
Hopes		
Concerns		
Assumptions		
Habits		
Children		
Other		

Spirituality

Once we were reading a mission magazine, and a missionary was telling a story about walking with a young child. They went by a modest house and the child looked up at it. Then he said to his companion, "I heard that the people who live in that house eat every day."

The Larger Sense of *Ours*

That story highlights the larger sense of what is ours. We know from our religion that we are expected to share what we have, and we know that it is not right that children would not be able to eat every day, but we feel so helpless in the face of that need that we often turn our faces away from it. Sometimes, though we have a leader who points us in the right direction, a more hopeful one.

Dilexit Te

Pope Leo XIV has written an encyclical called *Dilexit Te,* encouraging us to be one with our brothers and sisters who are struggling both in our own country and around the world. We need to keep them in our sights and share what we can with them, the pope says. Our culture wants us to focus on what we don't have, but our faith wants us to rejoice in what we have and work for all people to have a decent life.

Learning to Trust

Letting go of our fear that we won't have enough or that someone will take what belongs to us is a shift in worldview that is both freeing and loving. You may already be there, but if you're not, either as an individual or as a couple, then why not take a look at how you view your possessions and the rest of the world. A little sharing is a marvelous thing!

Scripture says…

While commercials tell us that we are going to live until we're 104, and how will we have enough money for that, the scripture tells us that by taking care of one another we are building the biggest treasure of all.

God will not allow your foot to slip;
Your guardian does not sleep.
Truly the guardian of Israel never slumbers now sleeps.
The Lord is your guardian;
The Lord is your shade at your right hand.
By day the sun cannot harm you, nor the moon at night.
The Lord will guard you from all evil, will always guard your life.
The Lord will guard your coming and going both now and forever.

—Psalm121:3

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