

*FROM
THE FRYING PAN
TO
THE JACUZZI*



**GOURMET RECIPES
FOR A GOURMET RELATIONSHIP**

Vernon R. Bradley

From The Frying Pan To The Jacuzzi
Gourmet Recipes For A Gourmet Relationship

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The *Reference* section makes it clear how many wonderful thoughtful folks have influenced me. All their discoveries and “awarenesses,” along with my own life experiences, have come together in a unique and creative way in this book. To be a pathway for the Author with the Big A is a privilege and an honor.

I must make special mention of Virginia Satir. I was lucky to have attended her workshops and even luckier to have been a participant and not just an observer. I looked at her autograph today which I had forgotten I have. She is one of my Giants and continues to mentor my work.

Similarly, there is John Bradshaw who has been instrumental in my integration as a man, father, husband, therapist, and teacher. I was also lucky to have participated in his workshops at the time that one could actually talk to him during a break and get a hug from him at the end of the day!

And another one of the Giants is Robert Johnson, a brilliant storyteller and therapist, who literally embodies the spiritual mysteries of Jungian thought. His humility is his gift to me. I will always treasure having lunch with him at the annual gathering of the Redwood Men’s Center at Camp Gualala.

Then there are Folks, who I have never met, but whose wisdom lives in my brain. Julia Cameron, Jon Kabat-Zinn, Wayne Dyer, Daniel Siegle, and Mary Hartzell I have listened to Wayne Dyer’s voice on CD so much that I think he might recognize me if he saw me!

Of course, there are the obvious people that deserve my acknowledgment. Mom who taught me tolerance and Dad who gave me business savvy. Aunt Frances and Uncle Art whose fights were utterly delightful. My Sisters whose admiration of me is precious and uncomfortable! My Grandfather, Vernon, who watches over me. And my soul “peekers,” my trusted therapists: Chris, Melody, and Mac. There is a particular man, who didn’t even know me, but was willing to read a draft of this book and give me valuable feedback. Thank you, Al.

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There are two special women in my life. Roberta and I were married for almost twenty seven years. I think she let me get away with a lot! No longer physically here, she makes her presence known when I most need it and least expect it. And, of course, my wife, Dianna, who does not let me get away with very much, calls me to be the best that I can be, and insists that I get out of the frying pan and into the Jacuzzi. I ENJOY our life together. She’s my Sweetie Pie.

Last, but not least, THANKS TO ALL YOU COUPLES who have honored me by inviting me into your relationships and trusting me to support your healing and growing.

Thank you, ALL, including God.

INTRODUCTION

I have been telling folks for several years now that something different is happening with couples who come for marital therapy today, compared to couples who came twenty five years ago. And in July, 2007, while camping, I was inspired to write about it. We were close to the beach, and I was lying on my back on a large queen-size air mattress staring upward at the scattered clouds through the netted opening of our tent. To my delight and surprise, within minutes, the chapter titles began funneling from the sky through the tent's opening and on to the pages of my notebook!

The couples I see in my practice today really want to stay together. The last thing they want to hear from me or anyone is that their relationship is hopeless or doomed. I could almost say that they are committed to staying together no matter the cost in pain. It's not that they're masochistic or outright stupid. But they seem to be coming to an awareness that there is something pretty awesome about their relationship. They're coming to see that the conflict in their relationship is not the whole enchilada and certainly not a good reason for either one of them to abandon the relationship.

What's both holding couples together as well as triggering the at times intense conflict is a desire and a determination to live in a relationship that is characterized by equality and reciprocity and less by traditional roles, traditional expectations, or traditional norms. In other words, couples want to be in an EQUAL relationship. And it's profound that this is what couples are wanting and struggling to create. It means to me that our notions and beliefs about freedom, equality, and democracy are really trickling their way down into the nitty gritty of our lives.

Unfortunately, there are no models for equality in marriage or partnership. There is no Declaration of Independence or Constitution for couples to follow, definitely no "models" in the various media, and sadly, no direction for living an equal relationship from our pulpits.

From The Frying Pan To The Jacuzzi provides couples with some twenty "knowings" or "awarenesses" that will actually MOVE them toward equality in their relationship. For example, Know that you can engage without fighting or going to war!

I refer to these "knowings" as delicious pieces of fruit that we can pick from the Tree of Knowledge and eat or better devour. Thus the on-going "bon appetit!" greeting throughout the pages of the book. Each "knowing" unfolds, in its own chapter, into simple (not easy) and doable "exercises," or in keeping with the food metaphor, recipes. And because this book invites all of us, myself included, to really reach and stretch beyond the ordinary, they are truly "gourmet" recipes and the resultant relationship is truly a gourmet relationship.

As couples move toward an experience of equality in their relationships, then marriages and partnerships can be the models for society and perhaps even models for the world. The news anchors will be reporting, "Look at these couples! This is how people can get along. This is how people with differences can live together in peace and harmony."

In Chapter Two, I refer to a couples' commitment to their relationship as their personal contribution to the war on terror! It's meant to make the reader laugh, but at the same time,

I'm serious! I really believe that each change a couple makes in their relationship, no matter how small, has an impact on the big ol' world out there, sort of like the butterfly effect.

During this past year, I have been putting into practice these "knowings" or "recipes" for myself. I am batting somewhere between 250 and 300! There are several sections on page 21 explaining this batting average approach to life and relationships. The nice thing about even a low batting average is that it means that you are willing to step up to the plate one hundred percent of the time!

I have enjoyed so very, very much typing every word of this book. ENJOY reading every word!

And if anyone wants to write or email to give me some feedback, hey, please do. I will welcome it with open arms, the negative as well as the positive. Postal and email addresses are on the copyright page.

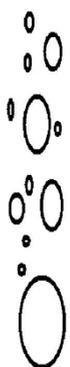
Bon Appetit!

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Chapter One

Bon Appetit!

WELCOME TO THE JACUZZI

Yes, welcome to the Jacuzzi! Oh my! How could I? How could I make such a disastrous mistake in the very first sentence of this book? I really apologize. I just forgot! I forgot that many of us aren't even in the Jacuzzi yet! We dream about it, but we're not there yet. Or we're in and out, and not sure how to stay! And some of you have no clue what being in the Jacuzzi means let alone being in the frying pan! Maybe you're still just thinking about being in a relationship or just beginning to consider an engagement. Of course, you have no clue. It's all wonder-filled right now. Please don't take offense. I don't mean to imply anything about your intelligence or maturity. It's simply about experiencing certain kinds of relationships. I think they are most often referred to as INTIMATE relationships. Not INMATE relationships. But yes, sometimes intimate relationships feel like imprisonment!

Intimacy and Imprisonment

Why would such a wonderful experience like intimacy feel like imprisonment? A very good question. It's not a simple answer. But for whatever reason, intimate (not inmate) relationships at some point trigger a lot of OLD STUFF. Whatever we experienced in those primordial relationships, for better or worse, it all gets triggered when we engage in an intimate relationship.



I know, primordial sounds like something that occurred billions of years ago, and perhaps you're still in your teens! Wow! Wouldn't that be awesome? You're seventeen, eighteen, nineteen and you're reading this book! So how could a young person, a non-dinosaur, experience a primordial relationship? Well, primordial relationships are the relationships we had and perhaps still have with....yes, with...this isn't a blame game....really it isn't....with....well, you know....with MOM AND DAD! Yes, everything that ever happened or did not happen in our relationship with Mom and Dad sets that stage for our intimate relationships.

What Frying Pan?

I know, some of you are still wondering "What frying pan?" So maybe it's good that some of you don't relate yet to being in the frying pan with your Prince Charming or Sleeping Beauty. And just maybe, just maybe, through some miracle of the universe, some critical mass event, just maybe, you might avoid ever being in the frying pan. But I doubt it! Us old timers (dinosaurs) are so familiar with the frying pan, it's like we're two eggs cooking away! Can you see that picture, two eggs, sunny side up, cooking away?

Basically being in the frying pan is, well, I think you know. It's like being in the dog house or simply BEING IN TROUBLE. And later on, we will talk about being all "growed-up" and not being able to get into trouble any more! Yes, that's right! Can't get into trouble anymore. It's one of the perks of being all "growed-up."

Something Happens

An intimate relationship starts out all "cool" and all "hot" at the same time. But then something happens, and in the chapters of this book, we'll be talking about what it is that happens. Something does happen. The relationship is no longer fun. Worse, the relationship becomes painful. Painfully hot and painfully not the "hot" of when we first fell in love. We're in the frying pan!

Attempts To Make The Pain Go Away

And once in that sizzling hot frying pan, couples become desperate to make the pain go away. We have an affair, file for divorce, separate without divorcing, or we turn to any number of addictions. Some folks outright kill themselves and some kill each other. I think all of that is known as jumping from the frying pan to the fire.

I have always believed that there is a way for us folks who like relationships to keep the HOT and the SIZZLE without the BURN! Yes, the JACUZZI is the answer, where our relationship can bubble, soothe, heal, entice and be STEAMY!

This book is about making the big leap, the leap from the frying pan to the Jacuzzi. And it is amazing to me that most folks are really interested in making that leap. They want more than just out of the frying pan.

That's why so many of us, including myself, search for the right weekend getaway, the right workshop, the right therapist, the right jewelry, the right flowers, the right bottle of champagne. All of these "rights" can be important ingredients but they're not the Jacuzzi.

And if you're not in the frying pan yet, then maybe the information in this book can prepare you for the frying pan and show you ahead of time how to leap from the frying pan to the Jacuzzi. I don't think you can avoid the frying pan all together.

One might think that relationships begin in the Jacuzzi, but I don't think so. I think the Jacuzzi is something that couples create over time, like old wine skins.

Therapy

Just a thought or two about therapy. It's one of those funny things. My Father would always say something like "You know what therapy does!" I would shout in shock, "Dad!" "Well, it's true," he would insist. Some of you, like Dad, don't believe in therapy or believe that it leads to divorce. Some of you would just never think of therapy because of the traditional notion of keeping your dirty laundry in the family!

There are actually some of you who go to therapy without hesitation. Then there are those of you who come to my office, but park across the street (at the mortuary of all places!). Some of you come to therapy thinking that something is going to occur right there in the therapist's office. And lo and behold, sometimes it does. But therapy is beyond the walls of the office. The office may be the place where you get the therapist's support to keep on truckin'. It may be there that you get a refill of suave and an infusion of vision. But therapy—healing—is never ending. You're "in therapy" when you keep talking in the car on the way home from your appointment! You're "in therapy" when you call each other on the phone during the day. You're "in therapy" when you walk in the door at the end of the workday, and you're keenly conscious of either the clouds or the sunshine that you bring in behind you! You're "in therapy" when you decide to sleep closer to the middle rather than balancing on that outer mattress ridge! You're "in therapy" when you decide to read this book together! You're "in therapy" or in a process of healing for as long as you keep the desire alive to keep your relationship blossoming and expanding and going to places where no couple has ever ventured before! Hey, a little Star Trek, why not?

Need Therapy?

And it just might be that none of us really NEED therapy. It's something that's out there and available to us. But maybe at rock bottom, we all have resources inside of us that work pretty well when we access them! And my hope is that this book can help you access them!

I Am Writing To YOU

I'm predicting that the following pages will be simple to grasp. The suggestions and exercises are perhaps not easy to put into play, but definitely doable. No pain, no gain! And

what the heck if you're already in the frying pan?

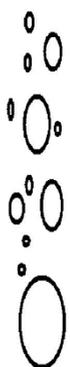
As I write, I am writing to YOU and YOU and YOU. Sometimes, I will be writing to YOU, the couples who have honored me by seeking my professional support. Other times, I will be writing to YOU, the person just looking for an interesting read about relationships, or the person wanting to avoid the pitfalls of relationships. Then there are the "lucky" ones who have been in and out of the frying pan a thousand times, but have never quite made it to the Jacuzzi. I am writing to YOU also. Last but not least, I am writing to those of YOU who have been out of the frying pan and into the Jacuzzi over and over again and you're ready to stay—yes IN THE JACUZZI! There's a little something here for everyone.

Twenty Five Years

It's difficult for me to believe that I have been practicing for over twenty five years. Wow! But if you are reading this book fifty years from now, I am one hundred twelve and practicing for 75 years! Is that possible?

Well, during the first twenty five years of practice, over time, I began to notice a shift in what couples were looking for from their therapy. The pages of this book speak to that shift. There's really no big mystery to it. It's simply that couples, more and more, to want to stay together and want their therapy to support that happening. They are no longer looking for a way out, but a way in and a way to stay. They're looking for the Jacuzzi. And I want to support them (and Dianna and myself as well) in creating that Jacuzzi.





Chapter Two

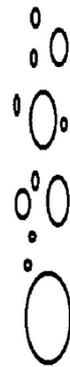
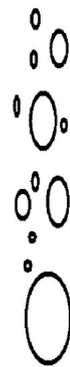
Bon Appetit! **CHANGING TIMES**

BACK WHEN (1982)

Back in the twentieth century (1982), when I walked five miles in the snow to get to my office, those of you who came for marital therapy were noticeably different from couples today. You would bring in huge gunny sacks full, and sometimes even truck loads, of irreconcilable differences! Such a nice term for “junk.” You would pack the therapy room, sometimes to the ceiling, with this “junk.” At times, I couldn’t even see you. I could only hear your voices echoing from behind the piles of irreconcilable differences.

You Wanted Out

Often you showed up with your minds already made up. You wanted out. You were coming to therapy just so you could say you had given it a shot. You were counting on me saying, “Oh my God! This is hopeless.” In your hearts, you were already standing in the courtroom waiting for the judge to declare you “divorced for reasons of irreconcilable differences.” You were looking forward to telling the entire world, “Yep, my first marriage was so bad that when we tried therapy, the therapists just rolled his eyes.”



No One Has Irreconcilable Differences Like Ours!

You never considered that this collection of irreconcilable differences was no different from all the other junk we tend to collect. You never thought of putting it all out on the curb for trash pickup. You never thought of driving it directly from my office to the local dump. You never dreamed of having the all-time all-time mother of garage sales. The ad in the personals section would catch everyone's eye (amidst all those other silly ads) and attract a large turnout, because there's something inside many of us that wants to be sure that no one has an irreconcilable difference that we don't! Or we want to be sure that no one has more than we do! Or sometimes we just have that "dark" curiosity about what's driving other couples apart.

HUSBAND for sale. Wound tighter than a drum. Great companion for someone who likes Bach. Sale, trade, obo. Ask for Eileen at 241-4666
GARAGE SALE. Sat morn. Mtns of irrec diff's priced to sale, CHEAP. All must go! 2468 Starting Over Ln.
WIFE for sale. Used to be laid back and easy going. Now is lazy and a slob. Free delivery. Dick at 241-4666

A NEW SHIFT

About ten years ago, I started noticing a shift. You were still saying things like

"We're just very unhappy....I'm miserable. I just don't want to go on like this....we just don't get along....not sure why we ever got together. It seemed like there was something there....we either don't talk at all or we fight and we fight about EVERYTHING....but you start it....and you do a pretty good job of finishing it....you got to be right about everything. You just can't let something go....you keep bringing up sh-t that happened years ago....it's just too painful to keep going on like this...."

You Wanted To Stay Together

So it was some of the same irreconcilable junk, but now you were becoming more and more "hell-bent" on staying together despite the pain. Sometimes, you had already experienced divorce, sometimes, even from each other, and you were beginning to say things like "I'm just not up to or interested in going through it again." You were even making some "far-out" statements like, "There's no doubt in my mind that I really love you."

I Could Actually See You

And you stopped lugging the gunny sacks and truck loads of irreconcilable differences into the session, and I could actually see you sitting in front of me. You expressed in your words and in your affection what appeared to be a genuine love for each other. But unfortunately, this love was always just one squabble beyond your reach. And what you were squabbling about made me wince—the same ol’ stuff Dianna and I fight about! The trivial stuff that transforms our houses into monasteries where no one talks (no sex either)!

Pulling Teeth

Since you weren’t bringing the irreconcilable differences into the session, I started having to pull teeth to get you to talk about your “stuff.” After a few sessions, some of you even began saying things like, “We’re starting to do pretty well until we come to our therapy session!” Well, of course! I was inviting you to look at and talk about all the junk that in between sessions, you were avoiding or packing away somewhere in a mental “garage” or “closet.”

Or Just Maybe

Or just maybe! Just maybe, you were getting it! The irreconcilable differences weren’t as important as your relationship. It felt better and it was better to “be” in the relationship than to be in the differences.

THREE GROUPS OF COUPLES

As I’ve been writing and reflecting on this shift, I’ve become aware that those of you who want to stay together fall into three groups. I know, I know. I hate categories myself. They’re sort of like symptoms. You start reading about the symptoms of a rare or terminal disease and yep, you got every single one! How can that be? So yes, I am aware that categorizing can be helpful or very unhelpful. But let’s give it a shot.

So I see us couples in three different groups. Some of us are **FIGHTERS**, some of us are in **PREARRANGED MARRIAGES**, and some of us are just **STUCK**.

Now, these groups do NOT appear to be in any way mutually exclusive—just like all those “silly” symptoms. As you read on about the different groups, I can hear some of you saying that you, in fact, have “membership” in all three! You insist upon not getting left out of any category! Some of you will insist that you are in only one group or the other, and some of you will insist that you fit into none of them. You are a couple all unto yourself, like no other! Ironically, that is the third category!

Obviously all of us are **STUCK**. We are not able to move forward and be in the relationship we so desperately want. But the couples who fall into the **STUCK** category are really stuck, particularly because they see themselves as so different from everyone else. They live in **NO COUPLES LAND!**

Tell Us Yes

But regardless of what group you belong to, you each have that one thing in common. You are absolutely committed to staying together and to working very hard. Or sometimes you are committed to staying together but tired of the hard work. All of you tell me that the last thing you want is a way out, or for someone to tell you to give it up. You often ask me, "Do you think we can work this out?" In 1982, couples asked that same question hoping I would shake my head and say "absolutely not." Today you courageously ask the question, secretly hoping that I will say "absolutely YES." Sometimes, one of you will repeatedly say that you can't live "this way" any longer with innuendos that you are on the verge of leaving, but for as many times as you say it, you continue to stay on board. And it doesn't appear to be codependency, masochism, or just plain stupidity. This love that I have the privilege to see seems to transcend all the pain in your relationship and all the irreconcilable differences.

Something Precious

You all hold on to a kind of a Job-like faith and hope that there has to be a way to make your marriage work, and perhaps the solution is just around the corner. Even though the music has stopped, you still cling to a hope of once again feeling what you believed was there in the beginning.

For me, as an observer, there is something very precious about your tenacious faith and hope. It rises to the level of the spiritual and perhaps an indicator that, as bad as our world appears to be getting, the world is also on a parallel path of healing.

AN EQUAL RELATIONSHIP

All of you tell me that you need to learn how to communicate. Lately, I've been responding with a little bit of a chuckle and the comment, "I won't argue that you don't know how to communicate, but I don't think that's your problem."

Here's what I think the problems is. In the last ten years, couples, like yourselves, are searching for and have a deep desire to be in, for a lack of a better word, an EQUAL relationship, or a relationship that is characterized by equality and reciprocity and less by traditional roles, traditional expectations, or traditional norms.

It's kind of exciting that, as couples, we want to be in an equal relationship, because it means that political and philosophical notions, such as democracy, are finding their way home into our day-to-day living, well beyond the voting booth and political structures of our country. Perhaps our desire and commitment to bring equality to our relationships is our own version of the war on terror! (Laugh!)

I am not an expert on gay relationships, but I would venture to say that this same movement, this same search for equality exists in gay relationships as well.

THE ABSENCE OF MODELS

And the rub or the real problem is this. As much as any of us desire to be in an equal relationship, we have no clue--no visible models--of what an equal relationship looks like. For example, there is nothing on television depicting a couple in an equal relationship.

What's It Feel Like?

And we don't know what an equal relationship FEELS like inside our body. We know the feelings that go along with falling and being in love. Unfortunately, like most feelings, they come and go pretty quickly! You might even know the feeling of being a part of a team that works together on a successful project, but what does it feel like to be in an equal relationship with our partner or spouse? Most of us are hard-pressed for an answer.

What DOES it feel like? To begin getting a "feel" of what it IS like, check out the Mutt and Jeff exercise in Chapter Five!

And then we have those most helpful folks who don't think there is such a thing as an equal relationship. They've already put the book down and are laughing up a storm!

The Big Three

Interestingly enough, most Christian religions believe in a relational God. The concept is often referred to as the Trinity, three EQUAL persons in one God. Kind of intriguing actually. And it's surprising to me how few believers ever try to take this on. I mean if you think about it for even a moment or two, it explains a lot--you know, why elephants look the way they do! Doesn't the elephant look like a product of three designers who couldn't quite reach consensus?

Sex And Grace

The Marriage Encounter movement of the 1970's had a heyday with a relational God and shook up the Christian community with its theology of marriage. They drew that parallel between a relational God and a married couple. They absolutely emphasized the importance of each partner being a whole, independent, and equal person in the relationship. The movement also affirmed the wonderful theological belief that couples receive GRACE and are holy and blessed when they celebrate their "sacrament" sexually. Whoa! That's my kind of theology! The movement celebrated it's fortieth anniversary in 2008, however, it unfortunately lacks the powerful voice it once had. In general, there's not much out there to provide us with meaningful models for living in an equal relationship in marriage or partnership.

Is Equality In Marriage Heresy?

And of course, in some male dominated cultures and religions, the notion of an equal relationship is either heretical or close to it. The fundamentalist Christian push for male dominance in marriage is really sad, because it flies in the face of the Gospel depictions of Jesus' lifestyle in general, and in particular the way he treated both men and women. He was constantly "preaching" love, and the only way one can experience true love is in an equal relationship. As St Paul wrote to Philemon, (verse 16), "Onesimus is no longer your servant but your brother" (my wording). For whatever reasons, the religions of the world often practice only those scriptures that support their authoritarian structures. As Dostoevski pointed out well over a hundred years ago, if Jesus were to pitch his tent among us in today's market, we would just as quickly nail him up again.

No Language and No Emotional Energy

Part of the bigger problem in living in an equal relationship is our lack of language to support such an endeavor and the lack of emotional energy to invest in such an endeavor. Most of the day-to-day language we learned as children, with respect to relationships, is charged with pictures of INequality. For example, when we were little and were told to share our toy, it didn't mean that we and our little "friend" were going to play with the toy together. It meant we had to give the toy to that &^%* cry baby, and go find another toy to play with ourselves!

Emotional History An Impediment

Our emotional histories are born out of an authoritarian structure where Mom and Dad ruled and had the divine right to treat us in any way they saw fit which included hurting us in any way they thought beneficial to help us grow up. In the "old" days, growing up was often synonymous with becoming tough, especially for guys. This emotional history unfortunately continues to consume our energy in the form of self protection. We have very little energy left to physically touch our partner—yes a little affection, and maybe even add a little humor to the mix and utter those "famous" words of Rodney King, "Can't we just get along, (Sweetie)?" Instead, we have just enough energy to insure that we are not going to be hurt one more time, that we are going to remain TOUGH.

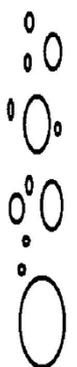
Healing and New Language

So the chapters of this book are like "prescriptions" for healing our emotional histories and creating a "new" language so we can not only speak equality but also experience (feel) equality.

Bon Appetit!
SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Where do you experience equality and Inequality in your relationship?
2. Who are the couples in real life or in the media to whom you look for inspiration?
3. What do you think it is that keeps you together despite the pain and struggle in the relationship?

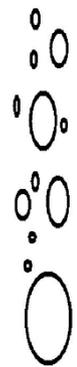




Chapter Three

Bon Appetit! **THREE GROUPS**

So, as I was saying in the last Chapter, I see couples falling into three groups: **FIGHTERS**, those in **PREARRANGED MARRIAGES**, and those who are just plain **STUCK**. Let me tell you what I know about these three groups.



DOOR NUMBER ONE: THE FIGHTERS **The Fight**

To my surprise, you are not in any way physically abusive to each other. You “simply” disagree on EVERYTHING, and once a disagreement hits the deck, neither one of you can let it go. You fight to the end which often never occurs. Instead, the fight just stops without any kind of ending or resolution.

Gotta Win!

When a fight begins, what nags at each of you is a desperate desire to WIN. Neither of you can stomach even the thought of losing. I tell you that it looks to me like a hard-hitting tennis match where no one ever scores even a point. It’s just a constant volley. Or perhaps your entire relationship IS scoring points, and you live your entire relationship at “match point.” My sweet wife describes it as a kind of competitiveness in our relationship, and she’s always asking, “Where does that competitiveness come from anyway?” Yes, we tend to be in the dark about something that insanely drives us and drives us away from what we want more than anything.



Emotional Histories

We talked above about our emotional histories. The emotional history of fighters is a chronicle of repeated experiences of Mom and Dad always being right even when they were wrong. We lost every battle with them, even those where all the evidence proved that we were “right.” This is the backdrop to our present day fights or squabbles or arguments.

Defensiveness And Self Protection

Our whole being is tuned to defensiveness. We are extremely self protective. We are so caught up in not wanting to lose one more time that we can't be open to the relationship with the person who perhaps we love more than anyone else in the universe. But that not-wanting-to-lose overpowers EVERYTHING.

Equality Can't Find A Nitch

As “fighters,” you know well the natural tug and pull of a relationship. Ironically, what both of you fight for IS equality. But since you only know win-lose, and it's the only way you know how to orchestrate that tug and pull, equality can't find its niche in your relationship. And so out the door it goes! In subsequent chapters, we will look at other ways to orchestrate the natural tug and pull of relationships in general and of intimate relationships in particular.

Sitting With You

At the risk of sounding magical or pollyannaish, when I sit with you, I sense that there IS a powerful love between you, and there IS the potential for a rich, very rich relationship. However, at the point you come to the office, the relationship and all its potential is kind of smoldering. But at least the coals are still hot, the fire is still there. I can feel it even in the way you sit together. Yes, there is affection between you. Ironically, the affection is painful to watch because it doesn't reignite the coals the way fighting does.

DOOR NUMBER TWO: PREARRANGED MARRIAGES

A Thing Of The Past

Some of you are in prearranged marriages and you don't even know it! You just assume that's a thing of the past or it happens only in certain cultures or perhaps in certain socioeconomic groups. You know the Microsoft Man has his daughter marry an Apple! Most of us would find a prearranged marriage a tad scary. It could happen that the first time you see your life partner is on your wedding day. Whoa! I can hear myself shouting, “HER?” So for those of you who are in prearranged marriages, it's probably totally out of your awareness because prearranged marriages today look a little different, but prearranged all the same!

Arranged In Heaven

Some of you are in a marriage that was made in heaven. That's really prearranged! Sometimes, marriages made in heaven are also intertwined with a conversion or recovery experience. Now I really have nothing against a marriage made in heaven. The problem is when we assume that a marriage made in heaven is not supposed to make its way to earth!

Arranged In Dot Com Heaven

The Dot Com websites that practically guarantee locating your perfect match are another form of prearranged marriage. You hadn't thought of that angle, have you? Well, me neither till I started writing this book!

These websites appeal to the ideal image in my brain of the ideal mate. When the world was a big place, perhaps too big to find Prince Charming or Sleeping Beauty, we often "settled" for the guy or gal next door. But now, with the internet, we can actually find our Prince Charming or Sleeping Beauty. The perfect mate for me, the most harmonious match possible, my soul mate is just a click away.

Crashing Down To Earth

When you find out that your Prince Charming or Sleeping Beauty or your God-chosen partner is really ordinary, like every other man or woman, the disillusionment can be almost cataclysmic. The party judged to be "responsible" for the marriage crashing down to earth not only betrays the perfect match, but often is seen as turning his or her back on God or in some cases undermining the other's conversion or recovery.

No Equality Possible

In a marriage made in heaven or internet heaven, equality is at risk. One or both partners are going to become controlling, especially when the relationship crashes down to earth. One or both partners are driven to get the marriage back to heaven or back in line with the ideal image. There is no room for healing or forgiveness. There's only room for more control.

Betrayal

There can be no mistakes in these relationships, not even the slightest error. Neither partner can stray from the ideal image of who they think they are or who they are supposed to be.

The image controls your and your partner's every move. You each become like the little kid who is told he can ride his big wheel from this point to that, but no further. And we all know how that goes!

Doomed to Stray and Betray

With such rigidity, partners in a marriage made in heaven or internet heaven are just like that little kid on his big wheel--doomed to stray and betray. You catch your hubby glancing at other women, and then you accuse him of looking at other women all the time. And then you tell him that you can't believe he doesn't realize how hurtful his wandering eyes are to you. You catch him masturbating to a porno flick that you bought for his birthday, but you can't believe he could even think about having sex with another woman, and you begin asking him what else he's doing when you're not there to keep a good eye on him.

You're convinced that when she goes out with the girls from work, she enjoys flirting and having men come on to her. You're really angry when she wants to wear the top you bought for her birthday on occasions when you're not with her. You know that top that shows a little (or a lot) cleavage! One partner decides that he or she doesn't want to go to the same vacation spot that you've been going to for the last fifty years, and the other partner feels BETRAYED. And someone is always gaining a LITTLE too much weight or being a little too non responsive, or a little too hesitant in answering probing questions! No matter how reasonable any of it might sound to some of you, there's that ugly flare and smell of CONTROL.

No Room

There is no room in these relationships for the imperfection of the match. There is no room for either partner to be the ordinary person they each are. There is no room for even small mistakes, let alone a wound or a failure. There is no room for either partner to grow up, to mature, to blossom, to grow beyond the perfect image, to be truly his or her own person. The normal tug and pull of a relationship is always unsettling and always experienced as a threat of impending disaster.

Like A Glue Stick

Like the couples described above, you're not anxious to leave the relationship. But your disillusionment with each other and your relationship is like a glue stick. Everything is stuck together--your spirituality, your conversion or recovery, your image of the perfect mate, your perfect marriage made in heaven, your mistakes, failures and betrayals, your attempts to fix it all, your inability to trust or believe in your partner like you once did--it's just all stuck together, leaving you immobilized!

DOOR NUMBER THREE: STUCK

We're Not Like The Couples You're Describing

It is amazing to me when I suggest a particular book to some of you, how you will read the book so literally that you're left feeling puzzled about why I wanted you to read it. "I

didn't run off to San Diego with another man," one woman said to me in response to my recommendation that she read the book, *Women Who Love Too Much*.

I can hear many of you saying as you begin reading this book, "this isn't us....we don't fight....we stopped fighting a long time ago. It was just too painful....We're not looking for equality in our relationship....I have no problem being the woman and he the man....we are not competitive, that's not an issue in our relationship....yes, our relationship isn't as hot as it once was, but isn't that normal?....we never fought, right from the beginning....our parents fought like cats and dogs and we just made an agreement that we were not going to repeat that. I don't know if I really want more fire. We've grown accustomed to each other just the way we are....I'm not sure why we came to therapy....There's just something missing. But it doesn't have anything to do with fighting, competition, equality, none of those things....I just want the respect I think I deserve....I just wish he could be a little more attentive...I wish she could be a little more willing to have sex, you know, once in a while, I don't need it every night or even once a week....BELIEVE ME, we both know our marriage was not made in heaven!...And we've never gone to the same vacation spot more than once!"

You're Stuck

Listen to yourselves! Look how hard you're fighting to prove you're so unlike everyone else. So you're not fighting every day or ever! YOU'RE still STUCK! You can't get even a taste of what glued you together in the first place! And neither one of you wants to budge or make the first move. There's the competition. And your simple desire to be treated with respect--M-m-m, respect? Respect? Equality? M-m-m.

Try It On For Size

So if you are still reading at this point, and you think this does not apply to you, catch and stop yourself. See what it would mean or be like to say, "we're exactly like the couples you are describing." And you will say, "but why should we say it when we're not?" So then you have nothing to lose. Try it on for size. See if it fits. Just let your self say out loud, "We're exactly like the couples described so far." It's a freebie!

Always Seeing Yourself As Different

See if there is a pattern here. Do you tend to perceive yourself as different--so different--from everyone else? Or do you have to argue about everything just for the sake of arguing or being different? Notice how limiting this pattern is. It makes it difficult for the people you love and who love you to identify with you and vice versa. Chill out and take a risk. Sell your property in No Couples Land. Be like everyone else on the face of the earth for a moment or two. It won't kill you!

The Natural Tug And Pull

Let yourselves begin to experience the natural tug and pull of your relationship the way

you did when you first got together. It will not destroy you or your relationship. It will feel unfamiliar. And you just might discover that having a good fight is preferable to being passive aggressive which is the way you have so successfully swept so many disagreements under the carpet. Let yourselves taste just how unsavory that passive aggressive stuff is.

Experts At Looking Good

You've become experts at looking good as a couple. No one really knows just how unhappy you both are. The bottom line is I'm inviting you to go for and to have the relationship that you want. Forget about looking good. Yes, it may feel terrifying to accept such an invitation because you have been so successful at pushing back the pain in your relationship for such a very long time.

Most Pain Is Old Pain

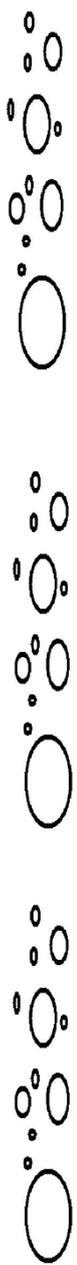
So stand up and acknowledge that you're in the STUCK group. Nothing bad is going to happen. You might hear a few cracks and creaks of your old stale relationship beginning to shift and move as you stand up! Some pain will begin bubbling up through the resultant cracks, but as we will learn in the following chapters, most relationship pain is OLD pain. It has already happened. You won't have to re-experience the painful events of your "good-looking" relationship. You'll just revisit the old pain associated with those events. And that's all it is. Old pain, worthy of being felt and grieved.

Bon Appetit!

SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What do you think about the three groups?
2. Which group do you see yourselves fitting into?
3. Do you see yourselves like other couples? How?
4. Do you see yourselves different from other couples? How?
5. What do you think about the notion of "old pain?"
6. Do you have any hunches where we're going with that notion of "old pain?"





Chapter Four

Bon Appetit! A TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

I have always enjoyed learning new pieces of information. I am indeed an explorer. For example, it was “trippy” for me to learn that there is a place in our brain where we actually have consciousness of consciousness. Consciousness of consciousness! To me, that is just wild! That place, by the way, is called the “prefrontal lobe.”

And so, I want to offer you new pieces of “trippy” knowledge that will stir up renewed excitement and energy for your relationship.

I like the image of *picking*, the way you might pick delicious-looking fruit from a tree! In many of the world’s religious scriptures, there are references to trees of knowledge. Now let’s set aside the discussion that in Genesis, God forbade Adam and Eve to eat from that tree of knowledge. Let’s assume there are other trees of knowledge that we can pick from all we want.

Twenty Pieces Of Juicy Fruit

And over the years of journeying my own relationships and having the privilege to journey with you and other couples, I have discovered that there is a “tree of knowledge” for us who desire to live in relationship. And so far, I have identified twenty pieces of juicy fruit—juicy knowledge—dangling from that tree! I am going to be presumptuous to say that all twenty pieces of fruit are good to go, good to eat, and God has no prohibition about us gobbling it all down!



And I want to make it very clear. This is not MY tree of knowledge. It's been discovered and rediscovered by many other explorers, many of them more wise than me. And there may be a lot more delicious knowledge hanging from the tree besides the twenty pieces I have picked. Maybe even you, as seasoned couples, can or perhaps have already discovered many more important pieces.

Each of the following chapters of this book will look at a particular piece of knowledge. The discussion is not in any particular order. I will again risk being presumptuous and declare it is all good "fruit." After tasting and eating these pieces of knowledge while you "work" on your relationship together, hopefully, you will be able to ENJOY the FRUITS of your labor! Sorry, I could not resist. So here it is, a tree of knowledge with twenty pieces of delicious "fruit" dangling from its branches. **Bon Appetit!**

- ♥1. **KNOW** that you are all-growed up and can't get into trouble anymore.
- ♥2. **KNOW** that you **CHOSE** your partner.
- ♥3. **KNOW** that **BLAMING** your partner is a way out, not a way in.
- ♥4. **KNOW** that the **COMPETITION** in your relationship drives both of you into a stalemate.
- ♥5. **KNOW** that gender and personality **DIFFERENCES** are absolutely mawvelous!
- ♥6. **KNOW** that you're the one who creates your juicy life or **NOT!**
- ♥7. **KNOW** that asking or demanding your partner's permission, approval, or validation creates a parent-child relationship.
- ♥8. **KNOW** absolutely everything in your life you want to say **YES** to and everything in your life you want to say **NO** to.
- ♥9. **KNOW** that your words are powerful.
- ♥10. **KNOW** that you can engage without fighting or going to war.
- ♥11. **KNOW** your precious body.
- ♥12. **KNOW** that the "big one" you buried actually buried you.
- ♥13. **KNOW** those special moments of resonance, intimacy, and epiphany and anchor them.
- ♥14. **KNOW** that you can laugh over spilled milk.
- ♥15. **KNOW** that you can create rituals for healing and forgiveness and that you can genuinely say "**I'm sorry**" even when your emotions might say you're not.
- ♥16. **KNOW** that you can marry and remarry your lover in the moment.
- ♥17. **KNOW** that someday you will each face death.

♥18. **KNOW** that you can live in abundance and gratitude.

♥19. **KNOW** there is peace in practicing humility.

♥20. **KNOW** there is a **DANCE** you can both dance.

Don't those twenty pieces of "fruit" sound yummy?

IMPORTANT ASSUMPTIONS

As you bite into the chapters of this book, I am making some important assumptions about your relationship. Please read over these assumptions.

➤➤1. I am assuming that you are not involved in domestic violence.

➤➤2. If you have been involved in domestic violence, I am assuming that you have taken serious and profound steps to eliminate violence from your relationship, and the violence has not occurred for an extended period of time, for example, a year.

➤➤3. I am assuming that you are not in a relationship where your desire is to leave but you are afraid to leave or you have been threatened with violence and even death if you attempt to leave.

➤➤4. I am assuming that if any form of addiction has resided in your relationship in the past, that both of you have taken steps to evict the addiction and that your relationship has been sober from addiction for an extended period of time, for example, a year.

What? We're Too Damaged To Get Anything Out Of This Book?

Now I do not mean to imply that, if you are involved in domestic violence or are not sober from an addiction, you are too damaged, too far gone or even too stupid to get anything from reading this material. However, I do have concerns that if violence or addiction is still a part of a relationship, then some of the information presented here could trigger additional violence and relapses.

WHAT IS ADDICTION?

How do you know if you have a problem with an addiction? A good question because most addictions have a heavy duty denial component to them. I am not sure if it is obvious to people who have a problem with heroine, cocaine, or speed. I imagine perhaps just by the outflow of cash it is obvious. But other forms of addiction, for example addiction to prescription drugs, to marijuana, or to alcohol can perhaps be less obvious.

And of course, there is gambling and sex addictions, including internet sex, shopping and eating, and even exercise addiction!

Simple Questions

Here are some simple questions. Are you consuming more than two drinks of any kind

of alcohol over the course of the evening? If yes, then consider there is a problem. Do you need to be smoking a joint in order to have sex? So what do you think?

Here are some other simple questions that apply to most addictions. Do you have very important projects to complete, but you never quite complete them? Projects that would give rise to major changes in your life including major financial changes? Do you find yourself being uncharacteristically scattered brain, but unfortunately it is becoming more characteristic? Do you spend precious time planning your addictive behavior, concealing your addictive behavior, engaging in your addictive behavior? Time that could be spent in precious relationships? These are all little or big indicators that your particular addiction is more of a problem than you want to acknowledge.

There are really excellent services available to address addictions, and until you do, no matter what else you might do to “fix” your marriage or your relationship, your day-to-day fix will continue to get in the way and undermine all of your efforts.

CONTROL FREAKS

Sometimes we talk about being emotionally abused. And sometimes we talk about one or both partners being control freaks. If the emotional abuse or the controlling behavior has not escalated into violence, then I invite you to pick the information hanging from the tree of knowledge!

Stop Taking It!

Emotional abuse and controlling behavior can shift quite readily when the person receiving the abuse or accepting the controlling behavior shifts into another gear. In other words, stops taking it! Again, if violence or the threat of violence is a part of the equation of your relationship, you may not be able to stop taking it!

Controlling Without Physical Violence

There are all kinds of crazy ways a partner can be controlling. Again the controlling behavior can be over the top, but without violence or the threat of violence. A jealous partner can call when you are not at home and leave messages asking where you are. They may ask, “Who was that on the phone?” And when you tell them, the next questions are “Who is that?” or “Why are you talking to them?” A controlling partner may attempt to restrict all of your relationships with family, friends, and even coworkers. A controlling partner may tell you how best to use your time, especially your “free” time. A controlling partner might tell you a better way to cook a dish for which you won a gold medal on the cooking show! They know the best route to take anywhere, the best place to shop for everything, and their way is always the best and the smartest.

A partner can also be controlling by being stuck in the personality or gender differences between you (Chapter Nine). For example, a husband might say to his wife, “I can’t listen to what you are saying because it is irrational.” So he gets stuck in his inability to hear anything other than left brain material and controls the relationship by eliminating any

conversation that requires an emotional connection. This is probably one of the more insidious forms of control.

But when the controlling behavior is NOT laced with either the threat of or actual violence, the controlling partner can sometimes be quickly put at ease and on to a path of recovery!

The Sinatra Approach

If you're in a relationship with a "benign" controlling partner, it is relatively simple (not easy) to shift out of the role of victim. You simply learn to say, even though sickening at first, things like, "Honey, you know so much about so many things, and I never want you to stop telling me what road to take or how to cook my prize winning dish. You are so sweet! And you know what? I'm going to do a Frank Sinatra here and do it my way!" Then you grab his cheeks and give them a little tweeking and perhaps a big sloppy kiss on the mouth! AND most importantly, you do it your way!

Or when you're dealing with gender "stuff," you say, "Wow, you're definitely a real man! You guys just can't get your brains around what we women are trying to tell you. And we're definitely hard to understand."

The more genuine you can be in making the above kinds of statements, so avoid being condescending or sarcastic, the more powerful they work in shifting you out of either being a victim or of having to fight for control of the relationship.

WARRANTY

Many of you are looking for a solution to your painful relationship that comes with a warranty. It certainly makes sense in light of all the pain you have BOTH experienced in your relationship. Yes, you each wonder if you married a lemon! And we often want a guarantee from our partner that if we change, then he or she will also change. I had a simple thought about this warranty business. For some interesting reason, we didn't ask for one when we first fell in love, so why now?

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK?

If both of you are interested in reading this book, then READ IT TOGETHER, OUT LOUD. Take turns. Read one sentence at a time. It does not matter how fast you get through the book or when you finish. What is important is you are doing something together for the sake of your relationship.

Reading the book together eliminates that competitiveness from your relationship. "I read two chapters in the book today. How many did you read? Obviously, it's not important to you!"

The thought that reading this book creates one more conflict for you is quite distressing for me! Can you tell? I am a control freak! At rock bottom, please feel free to read the book any way you want. For heaven's sakes YES!

But it could be a real gas reading it out loud together!

FUN

I assume there are parts of this book that will make you cry. But I also hope the book will give you lots and lots of laughs. Hopefully you have already laughed at least a little! If not, get a grip, and start over, because you have missed some really funny stuff!

MEASURING SUCCESS

I know some of you are very goal and success oriented. And you're already asking the question, "How will we know if we're making any progress here?" Well, we turn to baseball for that answer!

There is a number in baseball called the batting average. It is the percentage of times a batter gets a "hit." A "hit" is more than just hitting the ball. Sometimes the batter hits the ball into foul territory. That doesn't count. Sometimes the batter hits the ball on the ground and someone on the other team snatches it up and throws it to first base before the batter gets there. That's an out and not a "hit." Sometimes the batter hits a fly ball and someone on the other team catches it. No "hit." Needless to say, getting a "hit" is not easy.

Batting 300

Really top-notch baseball players bat about 300. Three hundred means that for every ten times at bat, the player gets three hits. That's thirty percent success and seventy percent failure. Baseball actually requires that you fail seventy percent of the time so you can achieve thirty percent success because baseball demands that you step up to the plate 100% of the time. Interestingly enough, with players who hit three hundred, there is an illusion that they get a hit all the time.

Baseball Gets It

Baseball really gets it. Baseball knows real life. The fact of the matter is that three hundred is about the best that most of us do. We're on our game, so to speak, about thirty percent of the time. And the key is the WILLINGNESS TO STEP UP TO THE PLATE one hundred percent of the time and risk failing seventy percent of the time. That's what makes us successful and appear to be performing better than the actual thirty percent!.

So when it comes to this precious perhaps tarnished relationship with your partner, take the risk to step up to the plate a hundred percent of the time. Humbly acknowledge YOUR seventy percent failure rate. If both partners can do this, then you can both rejoice in batting three hundred. If only one partner steps up, it triggers a momentous change in the relationship and almost always draws the other partner into also stepping up and acknowledging his or her failure as well.

OUR ESSENCE

I will invite Jack to say to Jill “Honey, it is really difficult for me to really listen to you right now. Run it by me again and I’ll really try to tune in.”

Jack will look at me all weird and say, “I’m not going to say that. I don’t talk like that. It’s just not me.”

I will respond with, “Well, I believe you that you don’t talk like that, but I’m inviting you to try it on for size and to watch her face as you say THAT instead of what you said a minute ago! AND I’m sure that talking like that CAN be you. AND if this was just some person in line at the supermarket, there’d be little or no reason to try it on for size. But this is the person you love.

So love definitely calls us beyond what we consider ME. And when I love someone, I get to be more than just ME. The two of us together become a relationship, which is definitely greater than the sum of the two of us as individuals. So it’s really not so much about change. It IS about love and accepting the call to be more. AND I believe this is the essence of who we are as human beings: to love and to be loved. When you truly love, you can’t lose who you are. You only become more.

Bon Appetit!

SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Why are you afraid to “work” on your relationship? Is one or both of you control freaks? How do each of you, consciously or unconsciously, allow gender differences to stifle your relationship?
2. Are their addictions living in your relationship? Do you ever fear physical abuse occurring in your relationship? Why?
3. What will it take for each of you to safely look at the addictions or the violence?
4. What do you think of the batting average approach to success? Do you see a way to apply it to your mutual “work” on your relationship?
5. What do you think about love calling us to be more?



