

LOVE LINGERS HERE: INTIMATE ENDURING RELATIONSHIPS

XIX: THE INGREDIENTS OF ENDURING RELATIONSHIPS

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In this book we have listened to the stories told by men and women who have lived together with other men and women for many years. We will turn shortly to a summary of the important lessons to be learned from these stories. Before turning to these stories, I thought might be informative to listen to the advice and life experiences offered by very long-term couples—for there are many couples in modern history with a much longer history than the couples we interviewed. What do these Methuselahs of Coupledome have to teach us about how to stay together as a couple? We turn first to the stories of these very long enduring relationships.

Voices from the Past: Lessons to Be Learned About Enduring Relationships

Certainly, in olden days there have been many couples who have supposedly lived together for very long periods of time. The Bible provides us with, the story of Abraham and Sarah. Given that Sarah lived to the grand old age of 128 (Genesis 23:1) -- surviving war, intrigue and a very late child birth -- we can assume that she was married to Abraham for at least seventy or eighty years, although we can't be sure about their longevity.

We can be relatively certain., however, that their long-lasting relationship was due at least in part to their shared sense of value and purpose -- and, in particular, their shared, devotion to Jehovah. They built a nation together, as well as raising a family together. Abraham and Sarah certainly exemplify the power of our fifth plate (Creating Something of Lasting and Shared Value). They also came from (and helped to establish) the same culture and shared many values. Finally, the adversity in their life may itself have brought them closer together as many of the couples we interviewed taught us. It is almost trite to say that adversity either destroys a couple or brings it to a new level of trust and. support.

But what about more contemporary times? Are there marriages that have lasted this long and survived the equally as traumatic events of war, social change and domestic strain in our own century? If so, how have they managed to live together for such a long period of time? In order to answer these questions, we decided to comb the major newspapers published in the United States over the past hundred years. We found, many wonderful and often amazing stories about very long-term relationships.

First, we kept bumping tip against the yearly stories in the *New York Times* of the 1960s regarding a celebration hosted each year by the Family Life Bureau of the New York Catholic Archdiocese. A dinner and dance was held at St. Patrick's Cathedral for couples who had been married for fifty years. Each couple renewed their marriage vows at this long-standing ceremony. In 1964, Cardinal Spellman hosted 300 couples. The Rev. Hugh Curran noted on this occasion that: “. . . in a culture that is hostile to many of the values in marriage which we hold sacred, we must work even harder to achieve . . . the loyalty and mutual assistance which the partners of a marriage give to each other.”

By 1966, the number of fiftieth anniversary couples celebrating at St. Patrick's Cathedral had grown by 350 and by 1970 to 400. At these ceremonies, the inevitable question was asked of the celebrating couples: "what kept your marriage together?" Mr. and Mrs. Frank Konieki noted, that a husband and wife should "just be kind and grateful to one another." Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Baccaglioni offered no advice at all: "not in this day and age!"

The Grand Street Boys Association also hosted an anniversary party for those couples in New York City who had been married for at least fifty years. Many of these couples lived on relief, others lived in homes for the aged. At the twenty-ninth annual festival in 1965, Harry Jacobs noted that he and his wife have "been married 50 years and we haven't stopped fighting yet." Mrs. Jacobs countered: "the secret of a happy marriage is to remember the good things and forget the bad. Remember the ups and forget the downs . . . That's the only way." This may have been very sage advice, especially if Mr. Jacobs was correct in observing that they have been fighting for fifty years. At this time the longest lasting marriage was recorded by Mr. and Mrs. Julious Maier of the Bronx, who had been married 60 years.

A decade earlier (1945), at the end of World War II, the Grand Street Boys Association hosted the eighth one of these parties. The longest married couple were Mr. and Mrs. Marcus Kay, who lived together for 62 years in the Bronx. A year earlier, Mrs. David Nierel reported, after 59 years of marriage, that: "I have my first husband . . . that's why I'm happy." William Witz identified hard work as the key ingredient in marital bliss, but it was not clear whether he was referring to making a living or building a happy home. We suspect that he meant hard work in both domains of his life. Most of the couples apparently didn't want to comment on the key ingredients in a successful, marriage. They just wanted to eat and dance. Perhaps, this is the reason for their success as long-lasting couples.

These were the largest gatherings of long-term couples that we discovered in the newspapers of America, but these certainly were not the longest lasting marriages. In 1966, Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Washienko of Yonkers, New York celebrated their seventieth anniversary. Yonkers proclaimed "Nicholas M. Washienko St. Day." We don't know what Mrs. Washienko's reactions were to this civic oversight. When does she get her day? Another pair of New Yorkers, Anton Gustafson and Borghild Anderson were born overseas, but married in Brooklyn and celebrated their seventieth anniversary in 1965. Mrs. Gustafson declared that: . . . nothing excites me anymore. . . You get so used to big and beautiful things that nothing impresses you anymore . . . We've lived in the same neighborhood all our lives . . .that's why we've lived [together] so long. And we've loved through the best times – between the Spanish American War and World War I. It was peaceful and friendly and ever since there has been excitement.”

Borghild goes on to observe that modern women "always seem to be spending money and going out -- they expect too much, busy keeping up with the Joneses. I say the heck with the Joneses!" In her defiance and in her commitment to community and continuity, Borghild echoes the sentiments expressed by many of our long-term couples. Like many of our successful couples, she is committed to finding a distinctive way in which she and Anton live their life together. Yet, she does not want to remain isolated. She wants to remain in her community and recognizes that her relationship with Anton is sustained, in part, through their mutual commitment to their local community. What about Anton'? Well, he has been deaf for many years and refuses to get a hearing aid. He still has his own views on the matter,

however. According to Anton, Borghild is "the best wife they don't come any better." Case closed.

Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Baskin of Brooklyn, New York celebrated their seventy-fifth anniversary in 1949. Mr. Baskin was quite forceful, in his support of marriage, after all these years: "there is no question that there should not be any bachelors or old maids. After seventy-five years of marriage, I think I am qualified to recommend it." Mrs. Baskin added that: "marriage should take place while the people are young. The earlier, the better. I was married at the age of 13. The companionship of marriage is what makes life worthwhile." Both Mr. and Mrs. Baskin agreed that to be happy in wedded life: "you have to make the best of things, good and bad." The Baskins were second cousins who were married in 1874 in their native village of Stolin, Russia. Mrs. Baskin came to the United States in 1908. Mr. Baskin remained in Stolin to dispose of property, then emigrated to America in 1909. Mr. Baskin was a mason in the east side of New York. At the age of 94 he still got up at six o'clock in the morning to attend religious services.

Mr. and Mrs. William Cook of Santa Rosa California give us some advice upon celebrating their 75th anniversary. Mrs. Cook suggests that wives "learn to cook a good meal and you'll keep your husband." Mr. Cook likewise had some advice. He urges husbands to "learn to eat the cooking and not complain and you'll keep out of trouble." We don't hear from the Cooks after this year (1953), but trust that their cooking (and conflict avoidance) arrangements held up for at least a few more years. We also know of one couple from Hornell New York (Mr. and Mrs. Charles Cadogan) and one from New York City (A. H. and Maria Ames) who celebrated seventy-five years of marriage. Very few couples are heard from after this "watershed" seventy fifth anniversary. The attention given to this anniversary may encourage them to assume a lower profile in future years.

Beyond the seventy fifth year of marriage, we find Mr. and Mrs. Aaron Blumenthal of Atlantic City, New Jersey (formerly of Pomeroy, Ohio) who celebrated their seventy sixth anniversary in 1935. They were both born in Germany and identified the secret to long term relationships as "friendship and understanding and not taking life too seriously." Like many of the couples we interviewed a sense of humor seems to have contributed to their longevity,

along with some interpersonal skills. A letter from President Roosevelt capped off their day of celebration.

In the shadow of World War II (1941), the *New York Times* took notice of another couple who were married seventy-six years: Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Rockwell of Danbury, Connecticut. Joseph was a prisoner of the Confederate Army during the Civil War, returned to Danbury and married his childhood sweetheart, whom he had courted since she was fourteen years old. The Times also noted their seventy-seventh anniversary in passing. We lose touch after 1942. An even longer marriage was recorded by Mr. and Mrs. James Pratt who were married seventy-eight years before he died in 1946. As of 1944, the Pratts were supposedly the longest married couple in the United States (according to a national survey conducted by a flour company). In subsequent years, however, we find several couples that have established even more impressive records of longevity. Mr. and Mrs. Francis Miller of Madison Indiana celebrated their seventy-ninth anniversary in 1956. They received a congratulatory message from President Eisenhower (who was himself one half of a long-term relationship, having been married to Mamie for more than fifty years).

In the western United States, we find two marriages that lasted for seventy-nine years. Peter and Celestrina Peterson of Fairview, Utah commented on their seventy-nine years together. In 1957, Mr. Peterson suggested that "plain living and very fair health" contributed to their longevity. He also credited God and the fact that neither he nor his wife have ever smoked or imbibed. These latter factors certainly contributed to the lengthening of their individual lives and may have contributed to the longevity of their marriage -- but did these factors make their time together more pleasant? Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Peterson commented from this perspective. Drusilla Keith and Ben Hartley were both sixteen years old when they married in (London County) Tennessee in 1875. Seventy-nine years later they celebrated their anniversary in Sagle, Idaho. Like the Rockwells of Danbury Connecticut, they grew up near one another, living on adjoining farms. Dursilla and Ben had more than one hundred descendants at the time of their anniversary in 1954.

One of the three longest lasting marriages in North America can be jointly claimed by the United States and Canada. Mr. and Mrs. John Henkel were married for eighty years as of

1947. They were both born in Brooklyn, New York and moved to St. Marguerite in Quebec Canada in 1872 after they were married. On the day of their eightieth anniversary, Mr. Henkel observed that: "all of our troubles are behind us. We had a lot of problems, but we overcame all of them. Our greatest problem right now is how to blow out the 80 candles our grandchildren are putting on the cake for the party tonight." Once again, a bit of humor sprinkled in with a generous amount of honesty about the problems they confronted in their lives together. None of this "lived happily ever after." Rather, they learned to acknowledge and confront their inevitable conflicts and difficulties in life.

The only reliable instance of an eighty third anniversary is reported in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. Ed and Margaret M Holler celebrated their eighty third anniversary on May 7, 1972, having been married in Kentucky in 1889. A longer United States marriage, however, has been reported in the *New York Times*. Otto and Annie Shipp of Sylvester Georgia observed their eighty fifth anniversary in 1976, having been married in 1891. At the time of their wedding, Annie was fourteen and Otto was eighteen. When asked about the ingredients in a successful marriage, Annie Shipp stated that "there are no secrets. Just do right and treat him as he is . . . a man." Otto proclaimed that "every day I live with her, I like it better and better." Words to live by.

Very few marriages elsewhere in the world have matched Otto and Annie Shipp's record in terms of either longevity or grace. Only four have been reported that rival the record of the Shipp's. Sir Temulhi Nariman, an Indian physician, and Lady Nariman, were married for eighty-six years, although she was only five years old when they were wed and was a cousin of Sir Temulhi. Two Serbian marriages of extraordinary length have been recorded in modern times. In 1932, two Yugoslavian peasants claimed to be celebrating their one hundredth anniversary. More than one hundred descendants were present at the celebration. We don't know their names. In 1934, a second couple, Stoyan and Yelka Dimitriyevitch, were reported to have observed their one hundredth anniversary. Stoyan was 123 years old at the time and Yelka was 119. They were married in 1833. A third couple, Mr. and Mrs. Akmed Adamov also reportedly celebrated their one hundredth anniversary (in 1956). He was a 121-year-old farmer who lived with Mrs. Adamov near the Caspian Sea in what was then the Soviet Union.

None of these marriages have been formally acknowledged as world records, though they speak to a remarkable span of time during which two people have lived together and observed and coped with profound social and cultural change. Imagine living together from 1833 to 1934! Or were the changes really so great—given that these men and women lived in small Eastern European villages? Could longevity on the part of any of these couples be dependent at least in part on the absence of major change in their world? To what extent are we likely to see long-term relationships of this length in contemporary times? Despite advances in health care, we may never again see 80 to 100-year relationships, given the inability of virtually any couple in the world today to remain sheltered from profound, turbulent change.

In addition to this dimension of stability and continuity in the world around them, what seem to be the key ingredients that make for a very long, successful marriage? Obviously, the first ingredient is the physical health of both partners. But there are other factors that clearly contribute to not only the physical well-being of both partners, but also the well-being of their relationship. The long-lasting American and European marriages we just identified would seem to point to not only the influence of cultural and social stability, but the role played by religion (blessed by or at least held together by God) and communality of experience (growing up near one another).

The success of these relationships also can be attributed, according to one or both partners, to such factors as love, mutual respect, humor or the avoidance of conflict. Several of the long-term partners spoke of the need to accept (or ignore) the foibles of their partner, or to accept traditional marital roles (we noted that the wife's first name was rarely given in newspaper articles). Will these strategies still work with the present day challenging of traditional sex role expectations? Perhaps Mr. and Mrs. Baccaglini were right in refusing to offer any advice "in this day and age."

Several studies have been conducted that concern the ingredients of long-term relationships. Many of these studies yield the image of "golden sunset" relationships: partners who have lived together happily for fifty years or more. These golden sunset mates tend to look more and act more alike after many years of living together. The Duke and Duchess of Windsor offer a classic (or should we say royal) example of the "golden sunset" couple. A full page

spread in the *New York Times* (June 1, 1962, p. 30, col. 1) devoted to their twenty fifth anniversary indicated that "after twenty-five years of togetherness, they have seldom been separated except for illness or emergency. The Duke and Duchess present a picture of affectionate solidarity and upper-crust domesticity. . . . Whatever they appeared to be in 1937, the Windsors seem to be more so in 1962 -- he more friendly, more wistful, she more regal and fastidious." There seems to be an indefinable symbiosis that grows between two people like the Duke and Duchess who have created a golden sunset relationship. This type of close, long-term relationship often suggests that neither partner can die because they are so much intertwined with one another.

The sociologist, James Peterson, has identified many stable, long-lasting relationships with little overt conflict: "who gives in to whom had been resolved a long time ago." One is reminded of Mr. and Mrs. Cook's complimentary comments about cooking. She always tries to cook him a good meal and he never complains about what she does cook him. Peterson noted that "there [is] very little excitement in these marriages." He did find some creative marriages "but unfortunately [there are] not very many of them."

By contrast, Marcia Lasswell describes the "survivor" couple: two people who are not happy and feel trapped in their relationship. Their marriage is filled with conflict and, in many instances, either many unsuccessful remarriages (to use the concept introduced in this book) or no attempts at trying to revitalize the relationship. They feel like they never had a chance to get out, given social pressures, children, economic constraints and so forth. In her extensive research on contemporary marriages,

Lasswell found a small number of "golden sunset" marriages, a larger number of "survivor" marriages, and a vast number of marriages that fall in between. We probably can expect fewer survivor marriages in the future, as the option of divorce becomes more viable in our society. We might also expect fewer "golden sunset" marriages, however, as the pressures surrounding long-term relationships increase.

What then can we conclude about the reasons why couples are able to stay together for a long period of time? We will turn back to our interviews to see how they complement (or

contradict) the observations made by the very long-lasting relationships we just surveyed.

The Nature and Dynamics of Enduring Relationships

As we reflected back on the stories and lessons provided by the men and women we interviewed for this book, one very strong theme emerged: enduring relationships are built on a strong commitment to remain together, despite adversity experienced by the two partners and by the couple itself. At the start of this book, we described two different models of intimate relationships, one defining intimate relationships in terms of happiness and the capacity the relationship to provide joy in our life, the other defining intimate relationships in terms of the learning and growth that can occur in this very difficult type of relationship in our society. As we listened to the people we interviewed, we found ourselves leaning toward the latter model. The enduring relationships that were described to us seemed to be the vehicles not for happiness, but rather for learning and growth. In many instances, the partners we interviewed have chosen to remain in and work on their relationship not because they wanted to be happy, but rather because they wanted to build a life together and find meaning in their life through their enduring, intimate relationship.

The first model seems to be the product of marital counselors and psychologists, who are in the business of helping to alleviate pain. Just as physicians will soon be out of business if they can't alleviate their patients' pain, as well as treat the physical problem that precipitates the pain, so marital therapists must help troubled partners find a way to feel better about themselves and their relationship. It is understandable, therefore, that therapists who write books about couples try to help their readers alleviate the pain in their relationship and that they tend to view intimate relationships as contracts to be modified and even dissolved if the relationship isn't a source of happiness for both partners.

The second model, by contrast, seems to be the product of religious leaders and other people involved in the business of personal and spiritual growth. They are not in the business of alleviating pain, but rather in the business of "soul work" or, stated in secular terms, in the business of encouraging hard and often painful maturation of one's sense of life purposes and personal destination. This difficult work is only likely to occur within the context of the

relationship if the two partners establish a firm commitment, which we have identified as a "covenant." Within these constraining boundaries, a couple can take risks and come back together again and again through remarriage processes.

In previous times in most Western societies, this covenant relationship was perhaps easier to establish, given the pervasive role of formal religious institutions in our society. Couples were enduring in large part because church-based societies would not allow partners to break up their relationship. Contemporary relationships no longer are sustained because of strong social or religious taboos; rather, they must be sustained through the personal commitments of each partner to the relationship.

This is a much more difficult commitment for anyone to make, yet it is also a more authentic commitment than was made in the past. It is a mature commitment that allows for personal and collective growth, rather than just the grudging and often destructive incarceration of both partners in a sterile and dehumanizing relationship. Obviously, we base our conclusions in this book on a very distorted sample, for we have focused on enduring relationships, which are not necessarily "typical" in our contemporary society. We interviewed men and women who have chosen to remain in a relationship for many years, rather than those who have chosen to move in and out of relationships. We should anticipate, therefore, that our couples describe mechanisms for sustaining their relationship, such as covenants, remarriages and retelling of founding stories.

Given this central theme of commitment of enduring relationships, what are some of the essential characteristics that surround this theme? Ironically, we didn't really have to go very far to find these characteristics. When asked what they would say to other couples about the lessons they have learned, Alice and Fred identified four lessons that captured the essence of most of the lessons cited by other couples. First, no matter what kind of problems are likely to confront this couple, Alice and Fred indicate that they are "still able to talk," if not immediately, then very soon thereafter. Communication is critical to the continuation of Alice and Fred's relationship as it is for most enduring couples. Alice and Fred were able to overcome these differences, by honoring a variety of different modes of communication. Many men like Fred express their feelings primarily through modes other the overt

description of their feelings. They express their feelings through actions and through offering assistance to the person they love.

Second Alice and Fred cite their commitment to the third entity (the couple). Their relationship stands strong, no matter what the individual disappointments or wavering in their commitment to each other may be. Through their relationship, Alice and Fred have an opportunity to "create something bigger" than themselves through various kinds of investments in their relationship. They share financial investments, emotional investments and two children. Thus, if they are conflicted regarding one of the developmental plates, they have other plates, in which they are currently performing in a satisfactory manner.

Most importantly, they keep a healthy perspective regarding these conflicts. At the heart of the matter is their somewhat detached perspective on and humor regarding the domains in which they are in conflict. Throughout our interviews we found that humor was often absolutely indispensable in keeping the partners from taking each other and their areas of conflict too seriously.

Third, Alice and Fred share a vision of the future and their future and their own growth together as a couple and individually as two maturing adults. Their values plate is mature and stable, serving grounding for their own life plans as they prepare for their senior years and their final stage of development as a couple. At the heart of their shared commitment to a specific set of values (and their own relationship in particular) are a set of simple ceremonies and rituals that they perform frequently in their relationship. These ceremonies and rituals serve as symbols and reminders of the special nature of their relationship.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Alice and Fred have a shared memory of the past. They can recall events that they have enjoyed' together and hardships they have endured together. This "community of memory" serves as glue for their relationship and provides the substance for this third entity and their commitment to it. In essence, we must tend to the unique character of the relationship we have constructed, as well as the broader culture(s) that we bring to the relationship from our own societal upbringing.

Our interviews suggest that we can tend to this unique character—what Moore (p. 85) calls a “cultural hearth” in part through telling stories. These stories provide continuity as well as the celebration of our unique relationship. We found that the very process of asking men and women like Alice and Fred to tell us stories about their relationship was an insight and confirming experience for them as well as those of us who conducted the interviews. We join with Alice and Fred in encouraging partners who read this book to spend time together sharing and talking about their own favorite stories. Storytelling may be particularly important for partners who are seeking a breakthrough in their own relationship or even a remarriage.

Summary of Findings

In bringing our study to a close, we reviewed our own findings and reread the stories that were told us by the men and women we interviewed. Following are major conclusions that we reached. First, we found that founding stories of our couples played a significant role throughout many stages of their relationship. They used their founding stories to help fight old "ghosts" from previous relationships and to help set the context for restructuring their current relationship.

We found that enduring couples purposefully retold their founding stories to help sustain their relationship through difficult times. They seemed to relish describing early, passionate images of their partner. Couples in enduring relationships tend to view their partner as the epitome of what they need to fill their lives with hope and meaning. They reach a point where they recognize that the person they have become today is in part a product of this enduring relationship and their intimate interactions with their partner over the years. Thus, the retelling of the founding story in some way reignites the initial passion and romance. This serves to remind the couple of why they began and may, in fact, serve to remind the couple of key reasons to keep working on the relationship through troubled times.

We discovered that frequent retelling of their founding story seems to occur in part because this story contains important truths and core commitments that have been made both implicitly and explicitly. Such core commitments can be seen as a covenant the couple enters

into at some critical point in their relationship. Initially, this covenant often has a magical quality and is assumed to be fixed and almost sacred in nature. Covenants, however, are developmental in nature. The couple continually works on the maturation of their covenant by looking to other couples (even parents) for models and inspiration to adapt their initial covenant. The covenants of enduring couples typically contain four key elements: stable patterns of interaction, trust in one another, clarity regarding who gets to start and finish conversations about particular issues, agreements about the way differences will be honored.

Because of the power of the covenant, enduring couples spend little time reviewing or debating their commitments and underlying assumptions about what is of value in the relationship. Basically, they establish their own rules, which enable them to effectively manage their disagreements and conflicts. Long term couples exhibit considerable respect, trust and acknowledgement of each other's position and worth in the relationship. They accept confusion and conflict as a vital part of all human interaction. At an advanced point in their relationship, an enduring couple sets aside or at least supplements their covenant with a more flexible and consciously negotiated set of statements about what each individual and the couple needs for personal nourishment and growth.

Our study suggests that sexuality is more important than specific sexual acts with long term relationships. Enduring couples describe sexuality in terms of very special moments together often not even involving sex. They tend to treat sexuality as a meeting ground where mutual needs are addressed. They find each other desirable at specific moments in their lives together, often moments that revolve around issues of power and acceptance. Couples in long term relationships maintain at the heart of their relationships, affection and shared interests and the capacity to honor and build on their differences. Marker events (either one special event or a series of small events) are experienced by long term couples, as examples of mutual commitment of both partners to not necessarily agree about separate marker events. Marker events help to create an identity for the couple which becomes part of the couple's covenant.

Four developmental phases are repeatedly traversed in long term relationships. Using the concepts of Bruce Tuchman, we have labeled these four phases: "forming," "storming,"

"norming" and "performing." During the forming phase, enduring couples decide whether or not to establish an intimate relationship involving some level of commitment. They simultaneously experience intense communication and guardedness during the forming of their relationship. They learn to roll with the inevitable disillusionment after the initial magic and intensity of the relationship wears a bit thin. Each time an enduring couple confronts a crisis that leads them to a new developmental task and places them on a new developmental plate they engage in forming activities again. Couples act to protect and even feed the deep fantasies each partner holds about their forming experience. They also establish boundaries that allow each other to get on with their individual lives as well as allow the couple's life to grow. Mature couples clearly present their own personal needs within the boundaries of the relationship.

We discovered that virtually all long-term relationships face a storming stage as a normal part of the couple's ongoing development and maturation. Storming cyclically reoccurs throughout relationships with movement to various stages and when two developmental plates collide. Unabated storming typically results in either a remarriage or recommitment from two partners to make the relationship work or to divorce. With each remarriage or restructuring of the relationship, the enduring couple develops increased resiliency to brave new storms inevitably ahead.

Once a couple has weathered a storming phase, they set norms or implicit rules by which they can live and work with one another in an effective and interpersonally-gratifying manner. Norms of mutuality and dominance between the two partners are set that usually differ from the old patterns followed by their parents and families. Boundaries are established regarding discussable and nondiscussable issues both with each other and with other people about themselves. Enduring couples frankly and honestly discuss without each other's weaknesses without serious consequences. They seem to view the maintenance of their relationship with their partner as more important than the maintenance of any other relationship in their lives.

The men and women we interviewed generally suggest that the performing phase is typically established once norms have been set. Enduring couples find their own special ways to reaffirm the power of their long term, intimate relationships. They tend to do so with small

rituals or habits rather than major events or major celebrations. During the performing stage, enduring couples frequently readjust and experience one or more remarriages with their partner. They wrestle with issues of enmeshment and disengagement between them and eventually achieve a balance between these two. During this phase, they struggle with interconnectedness between the couple and the outside world, and eventually identify as either an open or closed couple.

The four developmental phases just described occur cyclically throughout a couple's movement through five primary developmental plates. We identified these plates as: (1) establishing a home; (2) producing socio-economic viability; (3) selecting values; (4) raising children or conducting a mutual project and (5) preparing for old age and major late life challenges (including the loss of a partner). Successful long-term couples balance each plate as it exists in close interaction with one or more of the other plates. These plates collide just as the Earth's continental plates shift and create explosive volcanoes and earthquakes. Enduring couples are able to deal with the stresses caused as their developmental plates collide.

Enduring couples effectively resolve separation from parents or blending of two households as they establish a home. Their founding stories are evoked specifically to help them through stormy times as they divide household duties, purchase a house, or recognize their individual differences. Enduring couples take solace in the fact that small daily rituals help to cement and reaffirm relationship. As couples wrestle with issues about careers and producing economic viability they accept that their intimate relationship requires some restrictions in social interactions. Attention is paid to issues of income and allocation of funds.

Our interviews suggest that enduring couples effectively combat the tension and rifts over marker events in this developmental plate, particularly when the marker event is shared between two developmental plates (such as economic viability and purchasing a home). The couple has evolved to a point where both partners can see their relationship as "in process"—an ongoing series of events that continuously defines and redefines itself. They exhibit an increased level of tolerance and allow their partner to shift basic values and find a way to blend in new values to their daily functioning as a couple. Conflict (or at least the

force of the conflict) about money or career is reduced by use of a conscious review of the problem, willingness to accept, use of humor, and a strong desire to remain in the relationship.

The third developmental plate finds couples choosing value life structures that reflect their own distinctive life experiences rather than those imposed by society, friends or family. Enduring couples hold deeply rooted, commonly shared values as a core of their relationship. They are able to negotiate with their partners over the priority or importance of their individually held values and their joint values. The relationship itself is clearly a top priority for most enduring couples. The long-term couple is able accept their individual differences in values and is fond of such varying characteristics each other holds. They find the best in each other and find ways to use these strengths in their survival as a couple.

We included child rearing and shared projects in plate four and found that enduring couples engage in extensive discussions about how their relationship may accommodate children or mutual projects. Substantial negotiation of child-rearing responsibilities occurs. Some couples choose to devote time, energy and dollars to mutual projects instead of child rearing. Our couples shared moments of mutual admiration for the important job they are doing when bringing up a child or successfully conducting a project in this complex world. Naturally, child rearing or sharing a joint project can severely test the relationship, thus remarriage tends to occur several times as they out new ways to structure the relationship. Long term couples have a history of seeking help to resolve conflicts from some outside party (counselor, friend, relative, religion, psychic, horoscope, etc.)

Some of the most heartwarming stories we were told come from couples in the fifth developmental plate which deals with growing old together or facing a major life crisis (such as the death of a partner). We found that enduring couples prepared for major changes in the ways they relate to each other as a result of major life transitions like retirement or illness. They respond to major intrusive events by finding new ways to work together to accomplish joint goals. Enduring couples grapple with core issues about potential loss of loved ones, where they are headed, and why they are focused in a certain direction. They find new things to talk about, new ways to occupy their shared time together, and new ways to budget their

static or diminished income. These people cherish recollections of life experiences. They openly savor their relationship with one another.

There is a point when long term couples reintegrate, both consciously and unconsciously, the male and female side themselves learned from their partner (whether a heterosexual couple or a gay or lesbian couple). Individual differences are respected and even enjoyed, and a deep appreciation of each other's unique qualities is demonstrated. Often, they help their partner face the death of a parent or other cherished friend or relative. In countless ways, enduring couples demonstrate in their daily behaviors their commitment to their partner and to their relationship as a couple. In short, they embrace the love that lingers in their life together.