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Acknowledgments

First and foremost we wish to thank our students and clients who have believed in us enough to put their faith and trust in us over the years. Thank you also for the courage you demonstrate in taking on the practices that committed partnerships require. You have been our teachers and our inspiration.

To our children, Jesse, Sarah, and Eben: thank you for your patience with us over the years, particularly during the early years when we were still struggling with our own unlearned lessons. You taught us forgiveness and self-forgiveness, over and over again.


To our friends and teachers, Stephen and Ondrea Levine, we have a special debt of gratitude. Thank you for reminding us that we are so much more than our emotions and

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

desires, for teaching us to keep our hearts open in hell, and for helping us to awaken and strengthen the spirit that infuses our lives and our connection. Thanks also to Jack Kornfield for teaching us the practice of mindfulness, and to Thich Nhat Hanh for the “How can I best love you?” meditation, and for being a living embodiment of compassion. Thanks to Barry and Joyce Vissell, who helped to pull us back from the edge of the well on more than one occasion.

We also have a deep sense of gratitude to Nancy Lunney, who believed in us and our work and who invited us to teach at Esalen Institute, our second home. We cherish our dear friends who supported our dream of writing this book: Seymour Boorstein, David Kerns, John Amodeo, Claire Bloom, Susan Campbell, Connie Zweig, Lewis Engel, Kim Karkos, Lynn Gallo, Mary Melkonian, Sharon Savage, Monica Dashwood, and Grace Llewelyn. Without your belief in us, we couldn't have kept going with the project.

To Marc Allen and the wonderful staff at New World Library, especially our gifted editor, Kristen Cashman, and Georgia Hughes, Cathey Flickinger, Monique Muhlenkamp, and Munro Magruder: thank you for your enthusiastic support and expert guidance, and for creating a publishing house that is truly committed to service.



Foreword

Most of us, when we fall in love, simultaneously stumble into a multitude of myths, such as being “meant for each other” and “living happily ever after.” Take a deep, forgiving breath and acknowledge any of the romantic movies you’ve conspired to create in your own life. Many of us awaken, as Dorothy did in *The Wizard of Oz*, in an unfamiliar land, discovering smoke and illusion behind passion’s curtain, rather than what we most need to sustain real love. Relationships look pretty easy in the movies and on television, where most of us have learned what little we think we know about partnerships. The reality, we quickly learn, is different. The statistics about divorce are sobering, but they don’t unearth the source of the problem.

We have surveyed many groups of seminar participants who confirm that most people have more training in driving a car than driving a successful relationship. No wonder people have

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such a hard time sustaining love! We have traveled the equivalent of thirty times around the world sharing stories and skills with couples. Everywhere we go, we hear the same question: How can I create a relationship that really works? Linda and Charlie Bloom have confronted that question squarely in their own partnership and in their seminars. What they share with you here is real — real knowledge about the real skills; that's what *101 Things I Wish I Knew When I Got Married* is all about.

“If only. . .” is a phrase we have all heard countless times. “If only I had known her better.” “If only we had a chance to learn something about making love work.” “If only we knew how to listen to each other.” This illuminating book erases “If only.” Here you'll find practical ways to connect and reconnect. You'll find the skills and the support to step into the unknown areas so that your relationship can flourish.

What's really delicious about Linda and Charlie's book is its bite-sized format. You can open the book to any page and find a nourishing morsel. As you digest theme after theme, you'll find that your relationship blossoms without the necessity to work hard or struggle. What a novel idea!

There is profound wisdom here that couples really need in order to succeed. The Blooms address the questions people ask most frequently in a way that will make you breathe easier and see your partner in a new light. Imagine having a relationship map with all the bumps and detours clearly illustrated. Imagine learning a new language for relationships gently, alongside a good friend. Linda and Charlie Bloom are insightful guides, and we're delighted to recommend their work to anyone seeking to take relationships to a new level.

Kathlyn and Gay Hendricks
Authors of *Conscious Loving* and *Lasting Love*



Introduction

CHARLIE: In February of 1999, my sister, Claire, called me from Los Angeles to inform me that she and her boyfriend, Mike, were going to get married. She asked me if I would be willing to pick out a passage related to marriage and read it at the ceremony. Of course, I accepted her request and immediately set out to come up with the right piece. I found lots of great quotes, poems, and stories, any of which probably would have worked fine. The problem was that none of them fully expressed what I wanted to say. They all spoke about aspects of a marriage — devotion, commitment, the benefits, the joys, the challenges — but each addressed only one facet of the whole.

What I wanted to give Claire and Mike was a more complete picture of all that marriage can be and what is required

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to realize that potential. Linda encouraged me to stop seeking other people's words and instead come up with my own. So I began listing some of the things I wished I had known when I got married. By sharing the lessons that Linda and I had learned through being together for thirty years, I hoped to spare Claire and Mike some of the suffering and struggling that we had experienced.

I came up with over fifty one-liners, but for time's sake, I cut it down to twenty-five. The ceremony was beautiful, and I got to share all of my insights, while the nods, winks, chuckles, and elbow pokes of the congregation punctuated my delivery. Afterward, several people, including the minister, asked me for copies of my notes. A few suggested that I expand them and think about getting them published. On the eight-hour drive home, Linda and I came up with more one-liners. By the end of the trip, we had eighty. Two weeks later, we had over a hundred. Eventually we came up with nearly two hundred. (I guess that says something about how much we *didn't* know when we got married.) We picked out what we considered to be the best of the bunch and ran them by a few of our friends who were either writers or therapists or both. The response was very favorable, but practically without exception our readers had one recommendation: include a couple of paragraphs of commentary with each one in order to flesh it out.

We decided to use a combination of anecdotes from our own marriage and those from clients, friends, and students, being certain of course to disguise the identities of everyone except ourselves. Having shared many of the details of our

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struggles with workshop participants for nearly twenty years, we have learned to use our experiences, mistakes, and discoveries as a means of helping couples to avoid — or at least extricate themselves from — some of the pitfalls, breakdowns, impasses, quagmires, and other difficulties that inevitably arise during the course of a marriage.

Though Linda and I are both trained marriage counselors, each with over twenty-five years of experience, the vast majority of what we present in this book comes from our personal experience, not from what we learned in graduate school. Our qualifications are not hanging in framed certificates on our walls, but rather are the scars and wounds that we have experienced, endured, and subsequently learned and recovered from.

“That which doesn’t kill me,” Friedrich Nietzsche said, “makes me stronger.” So it seems to be with marriage: we either learn to grow through the inevitable challenges of a committed partnership, or we risk being broken by them. Linda and I have probably experienced as much stress and struggle as most of our many friends who have divorced. Our clients and students have presented very few problems to us that we haven’t endured ourselves. We have come close to losing our marriage on several occasions, and each time we managed to pull back from the edge, rather than going over it. It’s been several years now since our marriage has experienced one of those near-death experiences, and at this point it seems unlikely that it will again. There are, however, no guarantees even for the best marriages, and the surest way to jeopardize a great relationship is to take it for granted and put it on cruise control.

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LINDA: Both of us feel blessed to share the partnership we have today, but it hasn't come easily; our mature love was hard-won. When Charlie spoke at Claire and Mike's wedding, I felt proud of what we had accomplished together. We had survived enough crises and endured enough ordeals to be able to speak with some authority about the possibilities and pitfalls of marriage. Charlie was offering his sister and her new husband what we both wished had been offered to us. It would have saved us a lot of suffering if we had learned and embodied these truths earlier. There were so many times in our relationship when we had floundered, when I wished I'd had a wise relative to whom I could turn for advice and who could help us out of the confusion. Not having such a family member to consult, I turned to spiritual teachers, workshops, tapes, authors, therapists, and friends and tried to figure it out on my own. I hope to provide guidance for people seeking it, as I was.

During our first few years together, Charlie and I knew what kind of relationship we desired, but it took more than vision to bring it to fruition. We were up against conditioned patterns and lifelong habits. Neutralizing them would take practice, devotion, and time. Determined that we could do it, I held fast to my vision and commitment.

Many factors contributed to the difficulties we experienced, particularly during the early years of our marriage. We were both only twenty-one when we began our relationship, and quite immature. Each of us was looking for someone to provide us with emotional security, since neither of us had developed any real sense of wholeness within ourselves. We had very distorted pictures of what love is. We weren't

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equipped to participate in a healthy relationship; neither of us had seen examples of them in our families or been very successful in any of our previous relationships. We were each looking for someone to help us get free from the pain of our pasts. Our first child was born less than two years after we got married, when we were both full-time graduate students, saddled with debt and both out of work. The stress level was almost unbearable at times.

And then there were all the vast differences between us. Although most couples tend to complement each other with their differences, ours have always seemed inordinately extreme. In most personality traits, we represent opposite ends of the spectrum: I am detailed-oriented, Charlie is a generalist; I favor strict parenting, Charlie doesn't; I am an outgoing, social person, Charlie is more of an introvert; I go to bed early, he stays up late; I like to get to the airport with hours to spare, a fifteen-minute wait is too much for him; I believe in planning and preparation, Charlie favors spontaneity; I seek connection when I am stressed, Charlie solitude; my strength is commitment, Charlie's is letting go; when we teach, I use notes, while he prefers to wing it; I'm a talker, he's a thinker; I manage money, he spends it. The list goes on, but you get the idea. Over the years, people have asked us countless times, "How did you guys ever get together? And how did you *stay* together?"

In the early years of our marriage, because neither of us knew how to deal with our differences, we frequently found ourselves in conflict. It wasn't the differences themselves that kept getting us in trouble, but our reactions to them. Like many couples, we attempted to do away with our differences

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by trying to change each other or ourselves. Homogenizing our personalities, and thus eliminating the sources of conflict, seemed at the time to be a good idea. This strategy, we were to eventually discover, doesn't work. Instead, it produced further conflict, both within ourselves and between us.

There was, of course, more to our relationship than suffering and struggle. Had there not been, we could not and would not have stayed together. From our earliest days, a deeply loving connection has sustained us through the ordeals, the power struggles, the disappointments, and even the betrayals. We shared experiences as a couple and as a family that were joyous beyond measure.

Even the strongest bonds, however, are not immune to the toll that ongoing struggles can impose on the relationship. For us, the turning point came in 1987, after fifteen years of marriage. Conflict and frustration had worn us down to the point where we both were questioning whether it was worth it to go on together. As much as each of us wanted to preserve our marriage and our family, the strain of dealing with irreconcilable differences was getting to be too much. We reached a point where we could see why couples who love each other choose divorce. For both of us there was sadness and relief in that recognition; we were grief-stricken that we seemed to be about to lose our marriage but simultaneously relieved that the struggle might be coming to an end. Fortunately, facing the reality of divorce led us to realize what we stood to lose and how much we both really wanted to preserve it. We knew there had to be another way, and that helped us make the leap from tolerating our differences to appreciating them.

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Attempting to dissolve our differences hadn't worked, so we began trying instead to meet them with acceptance, gratitude, and appreciation and to see if we could find the hidden gifts in them. We knew, at least intellectually, that it was these differences that had drawn us and made us attractive to each other. At the same time, they were the primary source of what triggered our reactive patterns. Thus we discovered that what drove us crazy about each other and what we were crazy about in each other were one and the same thing. The challenge was neither to try to change the other nor be willing to change for them, but rather to honor our own uniqueness while strengthening the bonds of loving respect between us. Learning to see our differences as tools for becoming more loving and fulfilled, rather than as obstacles to be overcome, denied, or eliminated, has profoundly altered how we relate to each other and everyone else in our lives. In our work with couples, we have found that while it does require effort and intention to adopt this orientation, it need not take as long as it took us to do so.

The experiences that brought us to our knees made us the people we are, and the learning and recovery that went along with each one have shaped our relationship into the treasure it is now. Through the many unskillful ways we treated each other, we learned the meaning of true respect. Because we were hanging by threads so many times, at risk of separation and divorce, we learned to truly care for each other, the relationship, and ourselves. From having come so close to the edge, we have learned to love with an enormous sense of gratitude. Although the lessons we have learned in this process have not come easily, the rewards of our efforts

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are sweet: an abundance of harmony, ease, and joy. We hope that this book will not only help you to appreciate the power of this perspective, but also assist you in applying it to your own relationships.

101 Things I Wish I Knew When I Got Married is for anyone who is, has been, or will be in a committed partnership. It is for anyone who has ever sensed that marriage can be much more than an arrangement of convenience for the purpose of managing obligations, responsibilities, and personal needs. It is for anyone who is unwilling to settle for less than the full measure of riches available in a life of true partnership, and who trusts that the prices of this undertaking, formidable though they may appear to be, are insignificant in comparison with the indescribable benefits to oneself, one's family, and the world that stand to be gained.

We are two ordinary people who, through a combination of good luck, good help, hard work, commitment, and a steadfast faith in a shared vision, made it through the ordeals of marriage and learned from our experiences. We are no different from anyone else, and if we can do it, so can you. We don't tell you what to do in these pages, but we offer you our confidence in the power of your own intention and our trust in the human capacity to heal from a wounded past and, in so doing, to become even stronger. As we have both discovered, it is the wounds themselves that enable us to develop the qualities that bring joy and love more fully into our lives.

We have both been inspired by our clients, students, and teachers to create this series of guidelines that distill down to essence the principles that have allowed our relationship

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to flourish. For young couples just starting out in their marriages, may these lessons save them some trouble. For long-established couples, may our advice provide a new perspective on the ingredients of a successful marriage.

From our experience, the deepest satisfaction that life has to offer comes from our most intimate relationships. By taking on the challenges of a committed partnership we are prompted to realize the fullness of our being. More than any other relationship, marriage has the potential to awaken our deepest longings and needs, as well as our deepest pains and fears. In learning to meet all of these powerful forces with an open heart and with authenticity, we can grow ourselves into wholeness, maturity, and compassion. In one of his workshops, Stephen Levine, the author of *Embracing the Beloved*, called marriage the “ultimate danger sport.” People can, he said, learn more about themselves in a week in a relationship than by sitting in meditation in a cave for a year. Having tried both marriage and meditation, we’d have to agree. The development of self-awareness and self-knowledge is both the means to and the end of a good marriage. The process is simple but not easy. Our hope is that this book will more fully open your heart and mind to the inexpressible treasures available on the path of relationship.