



PSYCHOLOGY FOR
LIVING
FALL 2007

Also In This Issue:

- **Resolving Conflict
In Marriage**
- **The Sandwich
Generation**
- **The Too Perfect
Marriage**

**In Memory of
Melodie Narramore Yocum
1953 - 2007**

Thanksgiving While Grieving

This has been a year and a half of losses for my wife and me. First we lost Kathy's mother, Mildred Dean Rice, a wonderful woman who blessed people around the world as well as in our own family. She was ninety-three and ready to go home and be with the Lord. Nevertheless, we miss her encouragement and her enthusiastic and Christ-centered presence in our family.

Then we lost my brother, Don Narramore, to cancer. Don was a great brother and one of my very best friends even though as adults we lived in adjoining states. He ran the family farm where we grew up in Arizona until his death and was widely known and appreciated throughout the state. For many years he served as a trustee for the small Baptist church in Palo Verde, and as a Board Member and Past President of the Irrigation District. Don and I could talk about anything and he was the only person in the world who had known me from the day I was born. He was my deepest and best remaining connection with my childhood and adolescent roots and I was always encouraged and renewed after visiting with Don and his family on the farm. I feel like his loss has left a hole in my life and I often want to call and talk with him, only to remember that is no longer possible.

Now we have lost my cousin, Melodie Narramore Yocum, a vibrant, talented and loving soul who is deeply missed by many. We are lovingly dedicating this issue of *Psychology for Living* to Melodie. You will find a brief overview of her life and a number of photos of her and her family on pages on pages eight,

nine and ten. Then we have included a short article that Melodie wrote for *Psychology for Living* back in 1983, and a poem, "Beyond the Darkness," written years ago by her mom, Ruth Elliott Narramore, but so timely in the light of Melodie's homegoing. These pages will give you a view into Melodie's unique life and her use of drama to impact people for Christ. On page fifteen you will see a reminder about the Narramore Endowment Fund for Pastors and Missionaries. We are encouraging those who want to make a memorial gift in Melodie's honor to dedicate it to this endowment that will enable us to serve more missionaries and pastors and their families.

As I was reflecting on our losses this year, and realized that we would be honoring Melodie during this Thanksgiving season, I was struck with the irony of giving thanks during a time of mourning. But then I realized that the ability to give thanks during times of loss is one of the distinctives of the Christian life. Those of us who know Christ as our Savior "grieve, but not as those without hope." At the same time that we mourn the loss of our loved ones, we are grateful that they are with the Lord. We are grateful for the impact they have had on our lives and the lives of others. We are grateful that we had them with us as long as we did. We are grateful that they suffer no more. And we are grateful that we will see them again in Heaven. While these truths don't wipe away our tears, they mix them with deep gratitude toward God. Our grief is carried out within a safety net of love, hope and assurance for wonderful days ahead with Christ and our loved ones for all eternity.

This blessed hope is our deepest comfort and consolation. I pray that the remembrances of Melodie in this issue will remind each of you of your own blessed hope and be an encouragement and comfort to those of you who have lost those closest to you.



Bruce Narramore, Ph.D.

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Resolving Conflict In Marriage

by Robert Whitcomb

*M*y first introduction to Steve and Joan left me wondering if I should retrieve my old soccer referee uniform ... I could blow my whistle to get their attention and indicate whose turn it was to talk. It seemed like every time one of them started to explain, the other would talk over his/her spouse with pressured speech as if their point would be missed if not made immediately. So as the referee I would make the call and point out to them that it was extremely difficult for them to listen without arguing or attacking. They nearly had to bite their tongues to hold back from a barrage of self-justification and defense.

Steve and Joan express a common problem in our marriages ... poor conflict resolution skills. Marriage can be hard work even when you have good conflict resolution skills. But without that it is nearly impossible. Fragile self-esteem triggers fierce and harsh retorts. Poignant wounds come from words gone astray. And once the "bleeding" starts it is difficult to stop. Leftover scars from the battles of poorly handled conflicts create impenetrable fortresses of psychological defenses and hopes of intimate partnership vanish. Fortunately, there is hope.

IT ALL BEGINS WITH LISTENING

Like Steve and Joan, many of us react before we really hear what our spouse is saying. Quick answers, laced with contempt, or self-defense erode our mates' motivation for understanding and hope for resolution. Mates who have been attacked or not allowed to express themselves fully either throw up their hands and angrily "give up," or feel such despair they withdraw to avoid more pain. "It's no use," they wearily conclude. But then come words of scriptural wisdom. "He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him" (Proverbs 18:13).

Responding before we hear our



spouse completely is contrary to God's wisdom. It leaves us without critical information. And it tells our spouses we don't care about their thoughts and feelings. It tells them we are more interested in defending ourselves than becoming a mutually supportive couple.

Steve and Joan often jumped to conclusions that were just plain wrong. They often assumed their spouse was trying to condemn them rather than be understood. They weren't able to emotionally handle the blaming. But when they paused long enough to listen to each

other they began to see that both wanted the same thing – respect and understanding. They wanted someone to care and understand the way they felt and demonstrate that by sensitive listening.

THE INCREDIBLE POWER OF SOFT WORDS

Effective conflict resolution requires an atmosphere of safety where touchy issues can be discussed without fear of rebuke or retribution. Provocative and attacking words stir up anger and

Conflict, continued on page 22 ►

That's Incredible: Whe

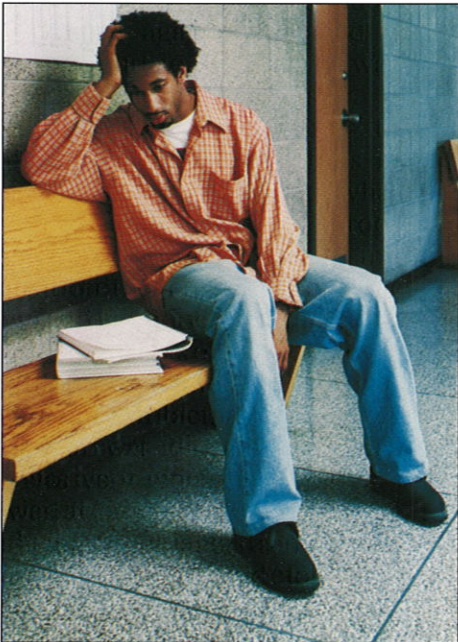
"We have seen wonderful and strange and incredible and unthinkable things today!"

— Luke 5:26 (AMP)

by **Annetee Budzban**

I found myself sitting at the table of a "Tough Love" meeting. I was here following the advice of a friend who thought that maybe the support of a group might help me, as a single parent of three teenage boys, be tough in the places where I lacked being strict.

I sat nervously looking around the table at other parents. Some were in couples, but there were



others who were alone as I was. As parents started to tell their story I was thinking how it would soon be my turn to speak. What exactly would I say?

I had recently been praying about an issue over one of my sons who had been through an ordeal with drugs. I thought this demon was well behind us when all of a sudden I started getting hints of the problem returning. But I needed some harder evidence to get my son to confront his own sin.

My suspicion began to arise as he started receiving more phone calls than normal. Each time I would confront my son or the caller on the other end they would just say they were a friend of a friend. So I went to God in prayer with this issue and asked that he would somehow lead me to some cold hard evidence to confront my son with and prompt him to admit to needing help.

Confronting this issue alone was not easy. One day a friend of mine suggested that maybe I should try the counsel of a support group. I was uncomfortable with the idea for a while. One day while pondering the idea again, I decided it would not hurt to see what it was all about. Hence...here I was.

My turn had now come to speak. Ignoring the butterflies in my stomach I simply said what was on my mind. I needed proof and support in confronting my son. I don't even remember the responses I received at the time, only that each one there was empathetic. But the meeting was not yet over. In fact, as soon as we heard the next two parents finish their stories it would begin.

I tried to get my mind off of me and listen attentively as the next two ladies who would tell their tales. One was an update of what had happened since the week



before. But the next speaker, two seats down from mine, was also new to the group. As she opened her mouth to speak, I was about to receive some incredible news.

This woman was distraught and her story was very much like mine. Her son was also into drugs and she had caught him red-handed on the phone speaking to someone that could lead him to a source. She was out to get the perpetrator on the other

n "Tough Love" Works



end of the phone whose name was... I looked over at her in amazement and interrupted her as I said to her, "That is my son!" the whole group gasped. It looked as though I now had my proof. How could this coincidence have come about?

I don't recall much of the rest of that meeting other than afterwards exchanging numbers and information with that mother.

With the help of the Lord, the rest

of my story went well. The next day I laid out the evidence to my son and he relented to me. That day we went for drug rehab.

Today he is a responsible father of two children, has a stable job and a changed life. All due to the answer to a prayer, and my willingness to step out for some much needed support. To this day I still stand in awe as I remember the hush at the table as everyone stared

in amazement at what happened, and our expressions saying... "That's incredible!"

Annette Budzban is a mother and grandmother. She was a registered nurse, but when unable to work due to an illness, she founded the writing ministry "Writings From the Heart". Many of her writings have now been published in her book *Life Changing Inspirations*.

Caught In The Middle: The Sandwich Generation

by Lettie Kirkpatrick Burress

Sometimes God's plan includes detours. Sandwich Generation families, caught in the middle of caring for both their children and their elderly parents, know that detour all too well. They also know that the Sandwich Generation is NOT about hamburgers.

Of the 22.4 million Americans caring for aging parents, 40 percent of them are also caring for children. Three out of four of these caregivers are women. It is estimated that these women will spend 17 years caring for their children and 18 years meeting the needs of their parents. The result is a uniquely intergenerational family mix that can bring with it lifestyle complications of major proportion.

Wendy and Andrew are slightly younger than many of those sandwiched, but their circumstances may be even more dramatic. Their family unit includes five generations. Wendy gave birth to twin girls. At the same time, Wendy's mom, who was caring for HER mom, had a stroke. They also brought a struggling teenage niece with special needs into their home.

Wendy's dilemma: "I struggle to find balance between caring for grandma and mama without losing our own family in the process."

Judy represents the multitude of members of the Sandwich Generation being pulled between her job and her young children at home and the needs of a parent living miles away. Her dad had a stroke, but can remain home if someone monitors his care. Judy agonizes, "My dad is nowhere near needing a nursing home at this stage. If I lived there, I could help with chores or watch Dad so his caregiver could go out. So, I'm really torn and frustrated."



Diane's family is watching her dad fight cancer. Luckily, her mom is able to care for him and her siblings are nearby. So they take turns driving him for treatments, consulting the doctors, and offering constant moral support. But, for her, this is "sandwiched" between the demands of a fulltime job, her nine-year-old's sport pursuits, a graduating senior, and a married daughter.

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES

Biblical instructions point us to compassionate care for aging or needy parents.

Exodus 20:12 calls on children to "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you" (NIV).

1 Timothy 5:4 (NIV) tells us, "If a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family..." On a harsher note,

1 Timothy 5:8 (NIV) declares, "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." Meeting these needs can take many forms.

CAREGIVING CONSIDERATIONS

Decisions must be made about the care environment. A primary caregiver will need to be named and sibling involvement solicited.

As often as possible care recipients should be included in choices regarding their care. One writer on this topic has indicated that one of the worst thing an adult child can do is to sweep into a parent's life and take over everything.

CONSIDERING CHILDREN

Judy isn't willing to move closer to her dad yet because her teen wants to graduate with her class. Wendy knows that meeting the needs of her mother, grandmother, and niece have sometimes denied her little ones the routine and structure they need. Still another mom recalls how her 16-year-old rebelled when his grandmother moved in.

Conversely, children also learn great lessons in compassion and selflessness as they see their parents extend nurture and support to others. Pat struggled with the possibility that her responsibilities for her

mom (who had Alzheimer's Disease) might be robbing her little ones of time and attention. Yet, she came to see that "the very character that I was praying for God to work in the lives of my children, He was developing in them as they watched me care for my mom."

SPOUSE INVOLVEMENT

Marriages can easily get lost in the time crunch of multiple responsibilities.

Poor or infrequent communication can contribute to resentment and misunderstanding.

Yet a spouse can also be a lifesaver in coming alongside a primary caregiver. Wendy sees Andrew's most helpful roles as those of "listener, child-care helper, and home maintenance provider." They know team effort is necessary for their family to thrive in this season of their lives.

SURVIVAL FOR CAREGIVERS

The health of families caught in the middle in the Sandwich Generation will be very much related to the emotional, physical, and spiritual strength of the primary caregiver. Consider these caregiving tips.

LET go of the guilt at being unable to be all things to all people. Some of us are natural nurturers and will work to exhaustion. Others want to "get it right" to make up for past relationship difficulties with our parents. Sometimes being needed becomes a dependency in itself, so do a motive check occasionally. Give yourself grace and acceptance, recognizing your limitations.

LOOK after yourself. Find a way to have free time, eat well, exercise, and participate in activity that brings energy and joy. Time with God is also a must. Schedule fun time with friends or date night with spouse or an outing with your children. Get a massage or a manicure. Slip away to a park for a lunch or some pleasure reading. Feed your soul and spirit.

LET others share the load. Reveal clearly to immediate family and church family what your specific needs are. Take the initiative in locating support groups and resources. If income allows, hire a surrogate caregiver for timeouts, help with appointments, chores or errands, and

Middle, continued on page 10 ►

POINTERS FOR PARENTING PARENTS

Speaker Grace Chavis¹ cared for her mother-in-law and parents in the last years of their lives. She offers these pointers for those caring for elderly family members.

❖ **Allow them independence as long as possible.**

❖ **Give them private space wherever they live.**

❖ **Give them responsibilities.** There is a dignity to contribution. Ms. Chavis's parents washed dishes. My grandmother treated us to a meal out and prepared simple meals for herself. She also gave my children lots of hugs!! Some seniors can be powerful prayer warriors.

❖ **Give them patient, loving care.**

❖ **Accept conflicts as normal and inevitable.**

❖ **Accept the required role reversal.**

❖ **Give them your prayers.** One daughter writes, "I wake at night and ask God for one more day of grace that will enable Mom to feed and care for this child-man Dad has become."

❖ **Be willing to relinquish them when death beckons.**

❖ **And, I would add, give them hugs!** Physical touch is a desperate need for our seniors. David Oliver states, "A kind touch transmitted through the holding of knowing and understanding hands can often be a sufficient expression that God still loves us." ☪

¹Audio tape from Focus on the Family, Grace Chavis, 1997.

Remembering Melodie N

Melodie Lee Narramore was born on January 12, 1953, in Pasadena, California, the firstborn child of Dr. Clyde and Ruth Narramore. She passed away September 14, 2007 after a nine-month bout with cancer. Melodie was a vibrant, happy, and highly verbal child. She was intellectually gifted, possessed a great zest for life, and was an adventurous and uniquely creative individual. At the age of five Melodie accepted Christ as her personal Savior and she loved and served Him throughout her life.

Melodie attended elementary and secondary schools in Pasadena, graduating from Blair High School. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from Biola University with majors in Art and Bible.

At Biola she had her first experience in drama when she was cast as Lucy in *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown*. She was hooked for life on drama and went on to earn her Master of Arts degree in theatre from California State University, Los Angeles. At the encouragement of her mentor, Bobbie Valentine, she returned to Biola to teach and serve as assistant director and then director of the Drama program.

During the mid 1980s Melodie toured the U. S. performing a one-woman show that she wrote entitled *They Beheld His Glory*. She portrayed the lives of The Woman at the Well, Peter's Mother-in-law, and Mary Magdalene. Her costumed portrayal of these women whose lives were changed by encountering Christ brought them to life for audiences throughout the United States. Melodie also recorded three vocal albums and for two years she assisted her father in his radio and TV ministry.

In 1986 Melodie met Rev. Paul Yocum who was soon to become the love of her life. Paul was the Food Service Manager for the Lake Yale Conference Center of the Florida

Baptist Assembly, where the Narramore Christian Foundation held annual conferences combining biblical and psychological teaching, preaching and personal growth opportunities. While it was not love at first sight it was very close to that. In July 1986 Paul and Melodie married. Their son, Byron, was born in 1993. Melodie also had three stepchildren, Tamara Yocum, Doug Yocum, and Bobbie Ann Brown. Melodie and their children had a wonderful life together. They freely shared their love for the Lord and each other, and their friends.

That same year Melodie performed *They Beheld His Glory* at California Baptist College (as it was known then) for the

Women's Guild. She went up to the then President Dr. Tuck and said, "You have a beautiful theatre here; you need to have a drama program." Dr. Tuck replied, "Yes we do, let's talk." Soon after, Melodie was asked to join the faculty and head up the Drama Department. She accepted and for the next 21 years directed two plays a year and during the early years taught every course in the department at California Baptist University!

Also in 1986 Melodie put her belief that drama can be used as an effective tool for reaching people for Christ into action by creating Celebration, a Christian drama group. Each year Celebration performed in 50-75

churches and other venues.

As a gifted actress and director, Melodie performed in many plays (including Charles Dicken's *A Christmas Carol* and directed more than 80 plays including *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Crucible*, *The Miracle Worker*, and *Music Man*. Melodie was a spiritually and emotionally deep and sensitive person who saw potential in others and helped them draw it

Peter's Mother-in-Law
So what does my daughter do? She brings home a fisherman!

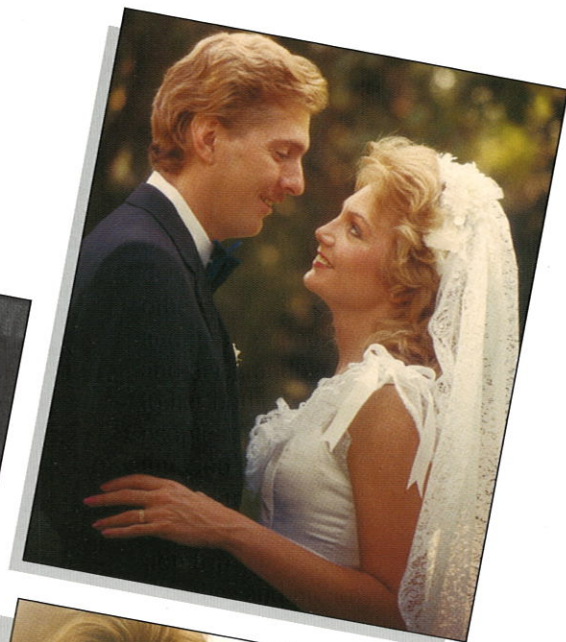
"This Peter," I told her, "he's no good; he'll never amount to anything."

"And just how will you make a living fishing for men?" I asked him.



arramore Yocum

out. She was an encourager. She listened deeply and shared freely of herself with others. She was a loving, appreciative and giving daughter to her mom and dad and her grandparents and a loving sister to her bother. She had a heart for seeing people reached for Christ and for serving God's people. In fact, in the middle of her bout with cancer she led a group of students on a short-term mission trip where they performed in churches and prisons and saw a number of people trust Christ as their Savior.



For the past several years, in addition to her responsibilities at California Baptist University, Melodie sang with the Desert Carolers in Palm Springs and acted and directed plays at Riverside Community Theatre. Her last acting performance was this July in CAT in Corona, California where she portrayed M'Lynn in *Steel Magnolias*.

Melodie was an unusually well-rounded and special person who loved the Lord and served Him consistently. She loved life and wanted to take it all in. For several years she purchased annual passes to Disneyland so that she could go there often with her husband and son and meet her mom and friends for lunch! Melodie entered deeply into other people's experiences. She knew how to "rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15).

Melodie, continued on page 10 ►

Beyond The Darkness

by Ruth Elliott Narramore

Beyond the finite grasp of my insight—
Surpassing human dreams in spatial flight,
The dark, star-studded canopy of night
Exceeds all comprehension of God's might.
In vast extravagance of breadth and height
Great galaxies, unnumbered, holding tight
To chartless orbits of celestial right—
God made them all, and not one star is trite!
Then Lucifer, the Evil One in white—
Refusing to concede God won the fight—
Hurls curses, hitting stars which once beamed bright,
Till sinister black holes evolve from blight.
But faith dispels the vestige of all fright
And knows, beyond the darkness there is Light! ☞

Melodie, continued from page 9

She was a wonderful wife and mother who created a warm, inviting, joy-filled home. She was an outstanding professor who was loved and respected by her students, many of whom became life-long friends after they graduated. And she was an accomplished yet humble woman whose ultimate goal was to glorify God. "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men" (Colossians 3:23) was one of her favorite Scripture verses.

Her memorial service was an incredible testimony to the Lord and to Melodie's widespread impact on countless people. For more than two hours friends, family and former students shared in word, drama and song, how Melodie had touched their lives.

More than twenty of Paul's co-workers attended the service and afterward one of them sent Paul a few of the comments made by his colleagues. One said, "I have never known someone who affected such change in others." Another, remarked, "I need to go do something with my life." And a third asked, "Are there really people that good?" Melodie was continuing to impact people even after she had gone to be with the Lord!

Melodie leaves behind her husband,



Rev. Paul Yocum; a son, Byron James; three step-children, Tamara Yocum, Douglas Yocum and Bobbie Brown, three step-grandchildren, Casey and Aaron Yocum and Bryanna Brown, her parents, Dr. Clyde and Ruth Narramore; her Uncle and Aunt Rev. Gordon and Othella Elliott, her brother and sister-in-law, Dr. Kevin and Barbara Narramore and a sister-in-law, Linda Yocum.

Melodie's radiant personality, charming smile, and love for life and the Lord will be sorely missed by all who knew and loved her. "Well done thou good and faithful servant." ☞

Middle, continued from page 7

personal care.

LOOK for the blessing (and the smiles). Humor and a positive attitude go a long way toward emotional survival in difficult days. My grandmother lived in our home for three years. Her hearing difficulties often provided some hilarious moments. She once told our pastor that we had taken our children to see *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*! We had actually been to an outdoor production of *Fiddler on the Roof*!

LET God love you all. Sometimes surrender of circumstances can bring real victory. When Pat was sandwiched

between her mom's Alzheimer's Disease and her three young children, her victory came when, "I quit resenting the interruptions and accepted my circumstances. At some point I ceased striving so much and began resting in Him. . . . At some point I began to trust His sufficiency for my life, for the lives of Mother and Daddy, and the lives of my husband and children as well."

Pat's own long journey has ended. Her parents are with the Lord. But her wise words offer hope to those still "caught in the middle": "I believe that after time and seasons are no more—eternity will prove that the challenging

trial of sandwiching the care of parents at the same time as meeting the needs of a young family was what really made us a family, after all. So, I suppose I would have to say that two decades of caring for my Mother with Alzheimer's disease was a gift." ☞

Lettie Kirkpatrick Burress has written articles for numerous books and magazines. She is a graduate of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and has also taught writing at conferences and the college level. Ms. Burress is available to speak on topics such as discipleship, spiritual growth, prayer, and family living.

Tribute Gifts

Would you like us to join you in honoring your loved one? You can send a Tribute Gift or Living Memorial Gift to the ministries of the Narramore Christian Foundation.

Gifts in the Memory Of:

Presented by:

Melodie Narramore Yocum	Lee & Gloria Bendell
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Austin & Lora Mae Lent
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Bruce & Kathy Narramore
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Florence Kinsley
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Gene & Barbara Byron
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Dick & Joan Steussy
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Sheldon & Blanche Schmucker
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Arthur Olsen
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Marie S. Olsen
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Gene & Marilyn Narramore
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Clyde & Ruth Narramore
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Chris Perry
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Dean & Lois Zartman
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Mary Frances Carlson
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Verla Barber
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Paul & Beverly Woollett
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Oma Northamer
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Cassandra Wegener
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Lily Chin
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Sue Cady
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Dorothy Degnitz
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Charles & Corabel Morgan
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Donald & Lois Hoffman
Melodie Narramore Yocum	Ethel Mumaw
Ruth Olsen	Arthur Olsen
Martha French	Co-workers of David French
Martha French	Jeanette Davis
Martha French	Jim & Ruth Mahony
Martha French	Russell & Marjorie Jin
"Buddy" Conrad Reed	Charles & Corabel Morgan
Brandt Elliott	Clyde & Ruth Narramore

Clip out and return with your loving gift.

In Memory of:

Amount: _____

Given by: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Send acknowledgment to:

Name: _____

In Honor of:

Mail to:

Narramore Christian

Foundation


Address: P.O. Box 661900

Arcadia, CA 91066-1900

NCF IN ACTION

Staff Member Completes 20 Years With NCF

One of NCF's faithful long time employees, Mary Manthorne, recently completed her twentieth year of service. After working nearly 20 years in the Tax Department of Sears, Mary started her career with NCF in August 1987. She was asked to fill in for a staff member who was going on vacation. When the staff member injured herself Mary was asked if she could stay a few more weeks, which she did. Not wanting to lose a great potential employee, Mary was asked to join the staff full-time.

During her 20 years Mary has worked with NCF's Personal Enrichment Clubs and Classes, MK Reentry and seminar ministries, and with many of NCF's administrators. She now serves as Administrative Assistant to Dr. Bruce Narramore where her thoughtful and efficient work impacts nearly every area of NCF's ministry. Congratulations, Mary, and thanks for 20 wonderful years of faithful service to the Lord and His people through the Narramore Christian Foundation! 

WORDS OF WISDOM

"Reflect on your present blessings, of which every man has many; not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some."

— Charles Dickens

"Nothing makes us so lonely as our secrets."

— Paul Tournier

"The basic question is not how much of our money should we give to God, but how much of God's money should we keep for ourselves."

— J. Oswald Sanders

"The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires."

— William A. Ward

"Everybody can be great ... because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love."

— Martin Luther King Jr.

Happily Ever After

by Annette Budzban

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” Romans 8:28 (NIV). I

had the same aspirations many women share, of getting married to the near perfect man and living happily ever after. On Valentine’s Day evening of 1997, I started my journey toward a happily married life. I walked down the dim, can-

delit aisle, toward my husband to be.

As the festivities of the evening were winding down (a small cake and coffee reception in church), my new husband and I sat in the dark sanctuary praying to God as we wondered where this new adventure of marital bliss would take us.

The first year of our married life was like that of most couples. We spent time getting acquainted with each other’s living habits. We asked each other questions such as, “What kind of toothpaste do you like?” “What’s your favorite brand of soap?” We thought we were breezing through life when we managed the disputes about who would sleep on the outside edge of the bed without nightly arguments. But toward the end of that first year we started to face the biggest challenge of our wedding vows, In sickness and in health.

My health started to decline. At each doctor’s visit my husband, Jeff, sat dutifully at my side, as we listened with hope to each report.

Days turned into weeks, and weeks turned into months, and months turned into years. We were in our third year of marriage, and found our hopes dashed when my symptoms continued to worsen. Our marriage was not turning out as we had envisioned it. We had expected fun and vacations. Not sickness and discouragement.

Soon I was forced to quit my job as a nurse. Before long, I was unable to do any of the dusting or cleaning in our house. Jeff was forced to pick up the slack. He was doing the laundry, grocery shopping, and cleaning. Then our savings started disappearing from our pockets and ended up into those of the many doctors who tried to help.




Happy, continued on page 14 ►

We faced ridicule from people who didn't understand. It was discouraging and we often fell asleep at night with hearts full of despair.

But through all our pain and suffering we did learn to turn to God. We found the strength to carry on as we prayed together each morning before getting out of bed, and each night before closing our eyes in sleep. When one of us had a bad day and frustration set in, we learned to be honest and open with each other and listen to each other, even if we didn't feel like it.

Oftentimes, we stretched ourselves to try and discover ways to enjoy each new day. I attentively watched the things that brought Jeff happiness and learned to enjoy them too. He has a great sense of humor, so I watched videos and TV shows with him, so I could catch and join in with his spirit of humor.

None of this may sound like true marital bliss to most. But God has a way of working all things out for our good, if we obey Him. Jeff and I have truly found it a time to be thankful. For God has given my husband and me a love, grace, and understanding for each other, that many married couples never experience. He has grown our marriage and our love far beyond its years. He has shown us that happiness is not living without circumstances, but finding life and joy within them.

We still pray that I will overcome my illness. But we hope to never overcome the knowledge we have been given the true marital gift of learning how to live happily ever after. 


Annettee Budzban was a registered nurse until she could no longer work. After her illness she founded "Writings From the Heart".

Teen Suicide Rates Rise

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently reported that suicide is the third leading cause of death among people ages 10-24. Only car accidents and homicides take more lives annually in this group.

For more than a dozen years, until 2003, suicide rates had been decreasing. But between 2003 and 2004 there were major increases. The suicide rate among 15-19-year-old boys rose 9 percent and the rate among girls of the same age was up by 32 percent!

What made the difference? We

don't know for sure, but the sudden sharp rise coincides with a major change in the rate that teenagers are taking anti-depressant medications. Because there had been some suicides among teenagers taking anti-depressants, the FDA required a warning on the labels. Many parents were reluctant to let their adolescent take these medications and physicians started prescribing them less frequently. But the precautions may have backfired, leaving many depressed teenagers already at risk for suicide without a medication that has been proven effective. 


Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Among 9/11 Disaster Workers

According to the American Journal of Psychiatry, September 2007, recent studies indicate that the unthinkable trauma of the 9/11 tragedy continues to impact not only the immediate families and friends of those lost on 9/11/01 but the rescue and relief workers as well. Approximately one in eight of the thousands of rescue and recovery workers still suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

PTSD is an anxiety disorder resulting from experiences of severe trauma such as war, terrorism or other life-threatening events. Symptoms include recurrent dreams, emotional numbness, sleep disturbances, avoiding events that trigger memories, memory loss, depression and anxiety. People suffering from PTSD can generally be helped through counseling and appropriate medications. However, PTSD can be extremely disruptive and lead to family and work problems as well as substance abuse problems.

Recent data comparing the impact of various types of 9/11 helpers (firefight-

ers, police officers and unaffiliated volunteers) share several important differences that may help reduce rates of PTSD in future emergencies. In general, the unaffiliated workers and non-emergency workers had higher rates of PTSD than did better prepared workers affiliated with organizations such as fire departments, police departments and Red Cross. Unaffiliated workers likely did not have preparedness training nor did they have previous experiences with emergencies. There were also higher rates of PTSD with those who were first to the sites and those who spent more time at the sites.

These findings support the belief that less experienced workers should probably work in shifts or take more breaks in order to reduce the rates of PTSD for future trauma helpers. The studies have indicated that providing mental health services to the less experienced workers would also reduce the rates of PTSD. 

American Journal of Psychiatry, 164:1385-1394, September 2007.



Serving God's Servants

Dr. Clyde and Ruth Narramore have served missionaries and pastors around the world for more than 50 years. To honor and extend the Narramore's faithful, visionary ministry the Directors of the Narramore Christian Foundation announce the creation of the

Narramore Endowment Fund for Pastors & Missionaries.
You Can Help Establish This Lasting Endowment.

Please join us in funding this vital endowment and honoring the Narramore's through a current gift of cash, stock, real estate or through your will, trust, or charitable gift annuity. Our initial goal for this ministry fund is \$1,000,000.

YES, I want to help perpetuate this ministry to God's choice families in ministry for years to come and honor Dr. and Mrs. Clyde Narramore for their faithful ministry.

Here is my one time gift of \$ _____
I am committing \$ _____ annually
for the next three years.

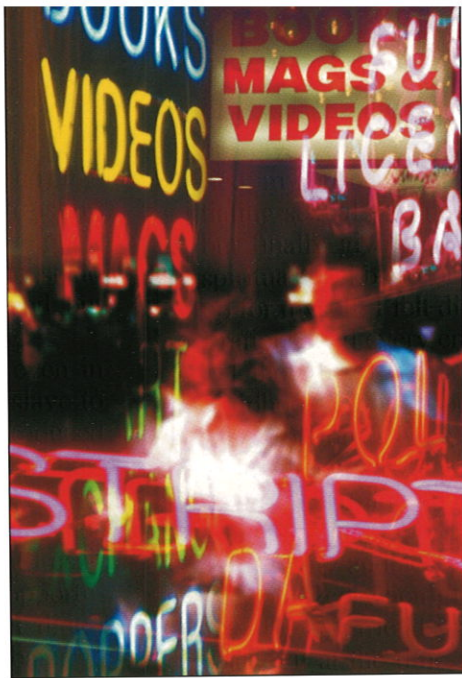
I would like to make a gift to the endowment through:

- My Will
- A Living Trust
- A Gift of Stock or Property
- Other Assets
- A Gift Annuity

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____

Mail today to: Narramore Christian Foundation
P.O. Box 661900, Arcadia, CA 91066-1900
or phone us at 800-477-5893 if you would like additional information on making a deferred gift.





Deliverance from Pornography

by Sierra McAllay

I was dusting the top shelf when I found it. A brown paper bag resting neatly on top of a row of theology books. Ironic in hindsight. Intrigued, I lifted the mysterious bag off the shelf and examined its contents. I froze in horror, gazing at a scantily clad female in a provocative position my mind will never forget.

I knew my husband had entertained a minor preoccupation with pornography in the past. He had openly confessed his temptation with me. Even though I was disgusted by his lust, I often humored him by playing along with his sexual fantasies, requests, and activities such as viewing sexual technique videos with live models or creat-

ing our own nude videos with me as the star. I always felt uncomfortable and degraded, but rationalized the whole thing by telling myself I was doing it for my husband because I loved him and desired his love in return. And besides, our activities were just between the two of us. We weren't hurting anyone else—or were we?

I stuffed the magazine back in the bag and placed it on the top shelf. My young children were napping. I didn't want them to wake up and ask questions.

Destructive Patterns

Rather than immediately confront my husband about the magazines, I pondered the situation over the next few days. I thought about the destruc-

tive sexual patterns we had created for ourselves even before we were married: my husband (then boyfriend) initiating sexual advances and I resisting but finally giving in, without enough spiritual backbone or esteem to stand up for myself. I felt dirty and used, but I rationalized every encounter.

I thought of years earlier—even in childhood—when I became a slave to masturbation, having been introduced to the practice by a girlfriend. Lack of a close, affirming relationship with my parents created unmet emotional needs for security and acceptance that I easily eroticized when given the opportunity by my friend. Although I didn't realize it at the time, I masturbated to ease feelings of loneliness, to escape reality, and to gain a measure of control over my world—at least in fantasy.

My boyfriend had a similar story. Lack of one-on-one relationship with his father, except for punitive contact, helped create low self-esteem and perfectionism. Masturbation accompanied by a pornographic picture provided an artificial relationship that he could control and made him feel temporarily better or more manly. After receiving Christ as his Savior in high school, he wanted to talk with his church youth leader about how to manage his sexual urges. He asked the leader if he could bring his girlfriend over for a meal hoping to talk, but the leader never responded.

Now, with Bible college and seminary under our belts and my husband working for a prominent Christian college, I thought we were past that conflicted phase of our lives. We had both received the Lord in our youth, had chosen to serve Him with our lives, and knew what the Scriptures taught about sex. We were a good family; I didn't realize we were both still trapped in lust. The sinful roots ran deep. We had really done nothing to extract the poison that threatened to ruin our relationship and our family.

Confrontation

We had planned a trip over the weekend, so I rehearsed how I would confront my husband about the magazines. It was time to take a decisive

stand; I would not let sin destroy our family. I knew in my heart that we were hurting as a couple because sexual sin had affected the healthy relationship God desired for us.

One evening, while we were away, my husband and I took a drive by ourselves. In the stillness of the night, I blurted out from the passenger's side, "I found the magazines." I glanced over at my husband. His face was red. He'd been caught—something he had been so good at avoiding in the past. But somehow I got the feeling he was almost relieved this time. I had shined a flashlight on his darkness.

Honest Words

He said nothing, so I continued. "This has got to stop. You know that, don't you? We claim to know and live for God. We're trying to rear godly children. Besides, do you know how it makes me feel when you look at those girls? Threatened—like I have to compete. Like you don't love me. Like I have to be and do like them for you to be pleased. Well, I've had enough. It's either them or me; it can't be both! When we get home, I want you to dredge up any and all magazines and burn them!"

The remainder of the weekend was spent in studied silence, both of us processing the situation in our own way. I

yearned to get home to bring some resolution to this long-standing issue. I was scrambling to correct our family's dysfunction in the best way I knew how—confront my husband, which cracked the door for healing.

Sweet Surrender

Finally, the night came. With the kids safely tucked in bed, I unearthed the pornography problem again. I knew in my heart that my husband wanted to repair this area of his life, but needed help. I encouraged him to take the first step.

We went outside in the blackness and stood before an open campfire we had prepared together. We had done this many times before as a family for fun and devotions. It seemed fitting now to stand before it as a couple offering ourselves and our sin to God. Having collected all the magazines, we slowly threw each one into the fire and watched as the flames consumed them. With heads bowed, we stood hand-in-hand, exposed before God, alone in the black stillness. Our sacrifice (and I say "our" because in many ways I contributed to my husband's preoccupation with sex) flew heavenward as sparks floating on the breeze. There was a sweet surrender to the moment—a beginning.

My husband realized that his strug-

gle with pornography resulted partly from deficient relationships with other males. He began to pray that God would show him another man with whom he could share his struggle and who would hold him accountable. God provided that person in a colleague who also worked at the college. This was a Christian man who my husband could trust to keep a confidence and who provided a support in the healing process. They met once a week for coffee, prayer, and an accountability report. This safe one-on-one relationship was the missing ingredient in the recipe for healing that already included daily Bible reading, prayer, and church involvement. It helped my husband develop a pattern of choosing to live differently and his feelings gradually began to change.

Later, I started a weekly prayer group for women. I was drawn to one of the ladies in particular because of her honest confession before God. She was real. She was determined to embrace God's healing for her life. As we talked and got to know each other better, I sensed that she was a person I could trust with the deepest hurts and sins of my life. When I confessed my faults to her in accordance with James 5:16, I felt a burden lift. I also discovered that I was not the only one

Pornography, continued on page 23 ►



The Too

by Jill Richardson

Soon after we moved into our new house, our neighbor stopped me on the lawnmower and offered to instruct me on the proper lawn mowing technique so that I could make pretty patterns on my lawn just like his. He also suggested that until I learned, I leave the area between our houses to him to mow the way he liked it. I happily let him mow that easement for seven years. On more than that one occasion, my neighbor behaved like a perfectionist in offering “instruction” that was really criticism. In a neighbor I can laugh it off, but in a spouse — not so easy.

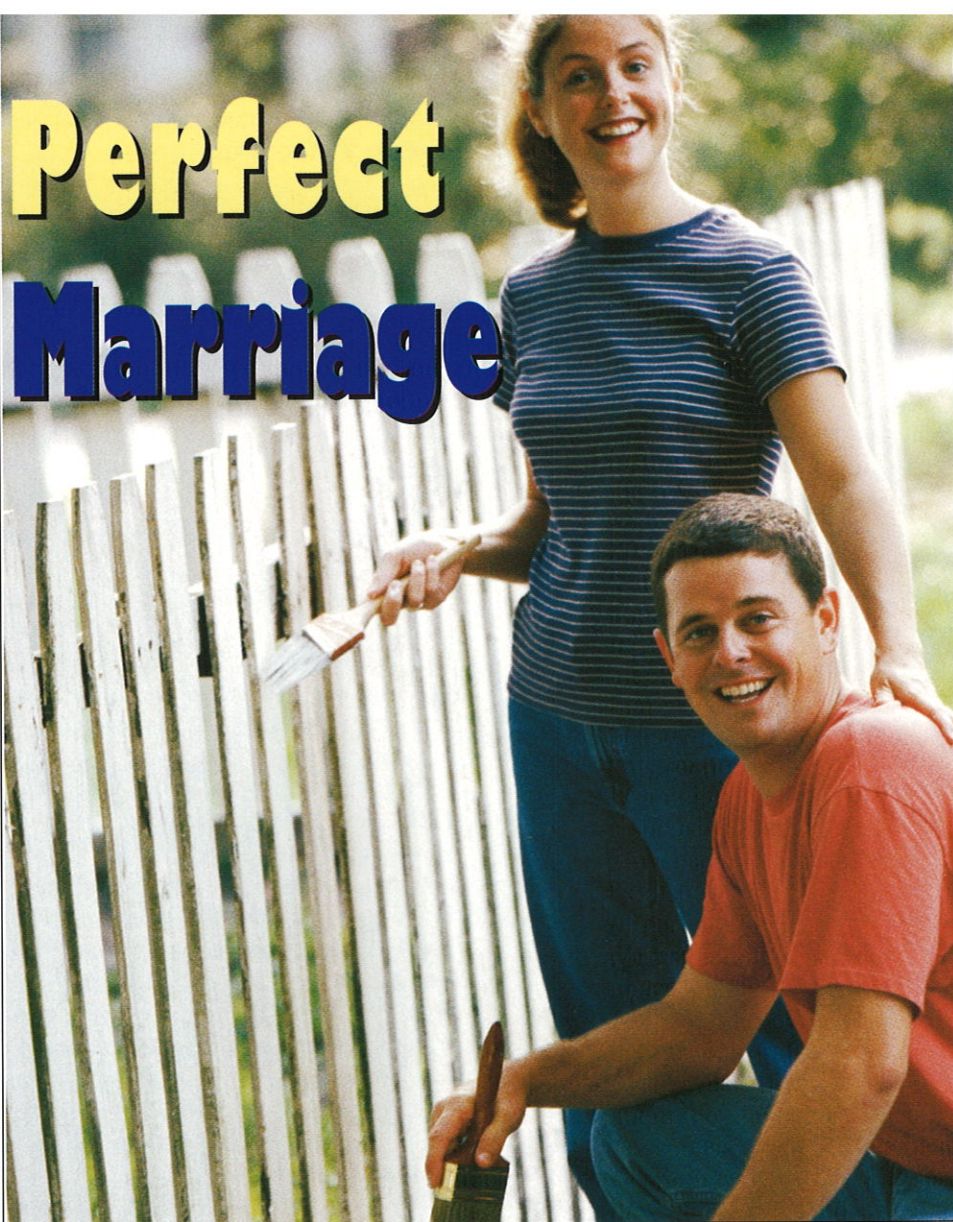
Webster’s defines perfectionism as “a disposition to regard anything short of perfect (being entirely without fault, corresponding to an ideal standard) as unacceptable.” In short, measuring yourself, and everyone else, by a standard of performance no one can attain.

So what if I’m a little particular about the kids’ appearance. So what if my spouse must load the dishwasher in a certain way. So what if I have to track down the best sound system equipment at the best price in the free world. Does that really make me a perfectionist? And perfectionism may be an annoying trait, but it’s not a sin or anything. Is it?

I am a perfectionist. I married a perfectionist. Together, we gave birth to three daughters who share our genetic tendencies. Far from “just annoying,” sometimes the critical mass of all that negative thinking under one roof gets downright ugly. For perfectionists like us, just facing that reality rocked our “happy face” world. The hardest truth to accept is that the trait we want to make us a perfect family really unleashes more damage in a relationship than any possible benefit. Here’s just a partial damage assessment.

Perfectionism causes procrastination. Does that seem oxymoronic? Yet for a perfectionist, a thing isn’t worth doing unless it’s done right. If a person can-

Perfect Marriage



not ever be satisfied that anything is right, she postpones doing it until it can be. A perfectionist may put off vacation year after year because he can’t plan the perfect getaway (let alone the job won’t be done perfectly without him). A perfectionist might have a house that qualifies for federal disaster aid because she couldn’t keep it perfectly clean, so she quit trying.

Unfortunately, the things in my life I put off till tomorrow when they can be “done right” my husband has to live with today. Our unfinished business makes us both feel we can never “catch up” with life. Instead, I’m learning Marla Cilley’s (Flylady.org) mantra —“housework done incorrectly still blesses the family.” It works for all of life, not just housework. Refusing to procrastinate, even if the

job doesn’t meet standards, relieves that hovering stress.

Perfectionism causes insecurity. I suppose dinner’s late again. You’re wearing that? I would do it this way. A person who never can be pleased erodes the self-esteem of a spouse. Simply an impatient sigh or a roll of the eyes communicates—failure again. My husband suffers from this whenever I sit in the passenger seat. I will prepare for a left turn three miles ahead of time by getting in the proper lane. “Perfect” driving means being prepared for all contingencies, in my book. My husband, however, is one of those people who merges onto the highway at the last possible second before the lane disappears. As I sit and wait for him to do what I would have done a mile back, the subtle sarcasm and body language can get not so subtle.

In an acquaintance we might laugh off the barbs, but not from someone we love. So often we internalize it, beginning to believe the message : — I just can't do anything right. The more one spouse criticizes, the more likely the other actually will move farther away from what the critical spouse wants in order to avoid failure. Psychologist and author Dr. Sylvia Rimm explains, "Giving others continuous unsolicited advice seems to reassure perfectionists of how intelligent they are. The perfectionistic spouse, in his or her effort to feel best, may cause his or her partner to feel inadequate or less intelligent."

As a substitute for the perfectionist's "slings and arrows," God instructs : "Encourage each other and build each other up" (1 Thessalonians 5:11). My husband and I both want to be like the Proverbs 31 gentleman—"Her husband has full confidence in her . . . and he praises her" (31:11,28).

Perfectionism causes emotional detachment. My daughter took freshman honors physics and quickly saw that it required math power beyond her capacity. Soon, she found it difficult to battle the "I'm going to fail anyway so why try?" outlook. Those who live with perfectionists often feel the same way. I can't cook well enough for him so why bother? I can't do laundry her way so why try? It goes beyond housework, though, to discouraging a spouse from pursuing hopes, dreams, and giftings because he or she has learned that hoping for success leads to disappointment. Emotional detachment can follow, as a spouse disconnects emotionally so she won't be hurt again by criticism.

Humans naturally respond to attack by defense. A few years ago, we walked along the Great Wall of China. A gargantuan fortress built for one purpose—making sure nothing ever got through to hurt the Chinese people. It makes a great tourist attraction—but do you want a Great Wall in your marriage? It's a spouse's natural human defense, too, when the other spouse's perfectionism threatens to invade her emotional equilibrium.

Perfectionism causes conflict over children. All spouses have different viewpoints on child-rearing details. Perfectionists, however, presume theirs to be the only correct viewpoint. There is only one way to diaper, feed, or discipline children. The spouse who constantly hears (especially in front of the children) that he's chosen the wrong way has few options. A—He can engage in battle. B—He can pull away from parenting responsibilities and leave the kids to the perfect spouse. C—He can continue to try harder and bury the resulting resentment. "None of the above" would be the correct answer, but the perfectionist spouse hasn't left room for that response.

Another area of conflict over children arises from parental expectations. A perfectionist parent who pushes the kids to overachieve may find a spouse pushing back. A parent who over-schedules kids in an effort to have the perfect Little League pitcher or the perfect Bible verse memorizer may battle with a spouse trying to maintain a saner family pace and healthier expectations. Scaling back the expectations can scale back the stress—for everyone.

Recovery from perfectionism is like

"Giving others continuous unsolicited advice seems to reassure perfectionists of how intelligent they are. The perfectionistic spouse, in his or her effort to feel best, may cause his or her partner to feel inadequate or less intelligent."

— Dr. Sylvia Rimm

recovery from an addiction. The tendency always remains—but a new point of view and a willingness to be accountable can change everything. When I'm feeling the need to remake my spouse "my way," I ask myself a few questions.

Why must it be done my way?

We perfectionists have carefully thought out our ways of doing things and come to some thoroughly tested conclusions.

That our way is the most efficient method may well be true. But that does not make it the only way or the best in every situation.

I once had a "proper way" all the glasses were to be returned to the cabinet. I mean precise placement here, people. As I got frustrated with my husband for not putting them away in their assigned seating arrangement, I realized—who really cares? Are the plastic glasses going to maliciously chip the glass ones while we sleep? Will the tumblers stage a hostile takeover of the juice glasses if they're too close? Why must it be done my way? I didn't have an answer good enough to justify my ingratitude.

We need to reprogram ourselves to think "different" rather than "wrong" when we see our spouse doing dishes or mowing a lawn not our way. It seems simple semantics, but training our minds to change that one word changes our annoying tendency to correct a spouse.

Why is this so important to me? Why do I care so much about how the dishes are stacked in the dishwasher or how the closet is organized? Our family went to see the stageplay *Wicked* a few months ago. In one scene, Glinda hears Elphaba (the Wicked Witch) obsessing about the ruby slippers and urges her, "They're just shoes — let it go!" Now, when someone in our family obsesses over having something "right," I'll put on my best Glinda voice and entreat, "It's just (fill in the blank)—let it go!" Often, we can get some humorous perspective on what's getting us so tense.

If you stand back and ask yourself why is this so important to me? you might find some rotten reasons lurking behind your perfectionism. Usually, we insist on our way because we feel out of control or insecure. Control and fear don't set the tone for a healthy marriage. Let it go.

How can I keep my focus small? Perfectionists tend to see the big picture. We have mapped out the perfect landscaping, the perfect home décor, and the perfect education plan for the next 16 years. We're not so good at

Marriage, continued on page 23 ►

Trust **B**aby

by Clifford E. Denay, Jr.

My mother worked a lot of financial miracles rearing us five boys. She drew a lot of strength from her faith in God. My folks had no medical, dental or vision insurance. I'm not sure long-term disability insurance existed when I was growing up in the early 1950s. Usually, my parents worked even when they were ill because financial and family needs required them to do so. Mom was a "stay-at-home" mother. She ran the household— she cooked, cleaned, did laundry, mended clothing, attended school functions, cleaned up after animals, grew our family's fruits and vegetables— and took care of both sets of aging parents. Dad brought home the money, what there was of it. Even as kids, though, we knew we could trust Mom completely for the things we needed. Most importantly, we knew we were loved. And we never went to bed hungry. Ever.

Mom was also the resident money-manager. One time when my father had a trailer hitch installed on the family car, Mom felt that the owner of the installation shop, a cousin of my father's, had cheated them by charging more than the originally agreed upon price.

This was the time before repair shops were required to provide a written estimate of costs for work to be performed. Mom encouraged my reluctant dad to call and request a refund of the over-charge. Dad was a barber with a very modest income. And although he was an excellent communicator with his customers, he found it difficult to speak up for his rights in the marketplace, especially when it came to money. Mom managed the family funds. So, Mom made the call. The overcharge was refunded. The farm girl with an eighth grade education and a college-like educated attitude had come to the rescue again.



But one of Mom's greatest accomplishments in the eyes of this child, was the birthday present she surprised me with the year I was in fourth grade. Until then, I had dressed in hand-me-downs. Being the fourth of five sons, I had plenty of good if unexciting clothing presented to me, serviceable stuff that my older brothers had outgrown. I didn't mind. Mom's washing machine

ran continuously. Our clothes were always clean. I looked like most of my classmates and never felt like an outsider. But I always longed for a new jacket, a brand new jacket (one with the price tag still attached).

Still, I had no reason to expect that the box I unwrapped on my birthday would have anything exciting in it. I was wrong! I pushed the white folded

tissue paper aside. There lay the most amazing black leather jacket I had ever seen. Three zippered pockets graced each side of the supple surprise. A full-length zipper opened and exposed the red quilted lining. A "secret" pocket lay quietly on the inside where, if I had been older, I might have stuffed my wallet. Four silver metal stars were riveted to each shoulder.

A wide belt with a chrome buckle wrapped itself around the entire affair. I couldn't believe my eyes. I glanced up at my mother. She was beaming.

"Well, try it on," she said. "Let's see if it fits." She watched me slip both hands into the sleeve openings, lift it over my head, and wrap it around me. I pranced across the dining room toward the bathroom mirror. Who knows how long I admired myself? I looked at my reflection from every angle. I thought I would burst with pride. I was thrilled to be wearing such a fine jacket. And, best of all, it was new. And mine.

I've thought of this gift many times in my adult life. But it was only after I became a parent myself that I began to wonder, How did Mom do it? Financially, I mean. With relentless money worries and seven mouths to feed three times a day, seven days a week, how did my mother save enough money to buy that leather jacket for her fourth son? It must have cost a fortune. I was one of five boys; Mom never got her girl. Was I singled out for this special gift? If so, why? Or, did Mom buy something extraordinary for each boy, each in his own turn? I never asked her, never thought about it until after she died. I only know that my mother, who also endured two miscarriages, loved each of us boys in amazing ways. She was selfless to a fault, always trusting that God would come through for her family at just the right time.

In 1953, in my folks sixteenth year

of marriage, Mom received a special gift from her own mother, my beloved Polish grandmother, my "busia." Those were the days before "daily meditation" books were popular. But that's exactly what my busia gave to her daughter. *Mother Love*, a book of prayers for mothers, never left my mother's bedside from the day she received it until the day she died. The imitation leather cover is now faded and worn smooth, the binding cracked and split open in

***"Perhaps a new
definition of "trust baby" is
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show their children how to
trust in Him."***

several places. Small pieces of the cover fall off as I examine it at my desk. The clear tape mom used to repair several loose pages at the front of the book is yellowed and curling up at the edges. She used the same tape to reinforce the top of pages marking her favorite prayers. Oil from her skin has darkened each beloved page.


Mom's prayer book is proof of her faith and trust in God.

Perhaps a new definition of "trust baby" is a baby lucky enough to be born to parents who place their trust in God and also show their children how to trust in Him. My mother lived her faith. Is there a greater gift a mother can give her children? Mom never had a daughter, but she trusted that God would provide sensitive sons. She never worked for a paycheck, but trusted that God would provide

enough money for her family's needs. She never graduated from high school. A college degree was an out-of-reach dream. Still, she taught us the importance of education by patiently sitting at the dining room table with us as we worked our way through the day's homework. She taught by example. Mom's entire life was her prayer.

A Roman centurion sent some Jewish elders to Jesus to ask if he would heal his sick servant. As Jesus drew near to the centurion's home, the centurion sent friends to tell Jesus that he didn't actually need to come into his house, "But (to) say the word, and my servant will be healed" (Luke 7:7).

"When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, 'I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.' Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well" (Luke 7:9-10).

My mother trusted in God the way the centurion trusted in God, fully, freely, and faithfully. Like all of us, she prayed from a distance. But the proof of her trust in God's love and care often presented itself within arm's reach, in real, practical ways. In my eyes, the black leather jacket, in all its glory, was a symbol of Mom's trust and another lesson for me: God provides in unexpected ways. So this "trust baby" trusts. Thank God! Some lessons are easy to recognize. Especially when they're wrapped in a black leather jacket. 

Clifford E. Denay, Jr. holds an M.A. in counseling and a specialist in education degree. He is an adjunct professor of psychology and a licensed professional counselor at North Central Michigan College. He writes for numerous publications and is a contributing writer in the book *Stories of Inspiration: Lessons and Laughter in Student Affairs*. He and his wife Jane have two grown children.

trigger exasperated volleys of retaliation. Even non-verbal communications like a look, rolling the eyes, frowning, or a big sigh of frustration can stir up anger. Steve and Joan began to feel so victimized by each other that neither one felt safe enough to make any efforts toward a peaceful solution. In some ways, who can blame them? They both felt bombarded by angry and hurtful comments. Fortunately they began to learn the truth of another life-changing biblical passage. "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1). Once they sought out professional help and began to find the emotional space and safety they needed to hear each other out without fear of condemnation they began to break this cycle of blame and retribution.

SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

Once we have learned to listen and speak softly we are ready to take the next step, "Speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15a). There is a time to share our needs, feelings and perspectives but that comes after good listening and soft words and when we speak, we need to speak in love. Truth that is spoken lovingly, even hard truth, opens the door for real dialogue.

For years Joan felt that every time she risked genuine openness, Steve would find a way to remind her of her weakness and speak the truth as a weapon to hurt her. She began to withdraw in order to protect herself. She even began to compromise the truth to avoid his criticism. On the other hand, Steve came from a home where ridicule was often the tool to punish and force compliance. He recalled how mistakes were routinely used, by his older siblings and even sometimes by his parents, to manipulate and shame him. Though this was very painful for him as a child he began to see how he had become somewhat like his siblings. This realization motivated him to be careful how he used what he knew to be true about Joan

to lovingly deal with conflict rather than punish.

STOPPING THE BLAME GAME

Matthew 7:3 graphically reminds us of our tendencies to see the speck in our spouse's eye and have almost no sense of the log in our own. It's nearly always easier to see someone else's problem than our own. Some of us were so often criticized or wounded as children that we can't take anymore. Others have so much guilt already that we can't take responsibility without feeling crushed by further self-condemnation. But whatever the cause, we defend against our sensitivities by finding fault with our spouse. This is a disaster in relationships.

Giving up our self-defensiveness is a powerful way to disarm ourselves and our spouses. Becoming less defensive and accepting our part in the conflict immediately allows for a less antagonistic dialogue. Even angry and sensitive persons can gradually be persuaded to risk a cautious dialogue under these conditions.


During our counseling Steve and Joan were gradually able to develop an environment where they each began to feel valued and understood. This loving experience eventually enabled them to deal with hard truths while being able to maintain confidence in the loving foundation of their relationship. They were able to minimize their fears of loss of relationship or self-esteem in the midst of difficult dialogues because they each became more open and less defensive.

ACCEPT YOUR DIFFERENCES

We all have different temperaments, likes, dislikes, and interests. God made us different to make life interesting and to serve different parts of the body of Christ. But sometimes these differences trigger conflict. Joan enjoyed getting ready to go places; she liked choosing her clothes, putting on her make-up, jewelry, and planning on how she would wear her hair. For her, leisurely preparation was almost the best part of

going places. Timing wasn't very important to her. Steve was punctual and valued getting to places on time. Joan's pleasure at getting ready often made her late, and this too frequently spoiled what could have been a pleasant outing. Steve and Joan eventually acknowledged, after many arguments, that neither person's way was better than the other; they simply represented a difference in their personalities. Rather than quash the "different" mate, they gained an ability to appreciate each other's differences.

In Philippians 2:3, 4 the apostle Paul encourages us to "do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."

I never did get out my soccer referee uniform with Steve and Joan although I must admit I was tempted at times! Eventually they began to respect each other's opinions and see that the concerns of their spouse were not simply derogatory criticisms. They were trying to communicate some important feelings and thoughts and perspectives. As Steve and Joan gave up their defensiveness and learned softer approaches to problem-solving they learned to dialogue instead of blame. This did not make everything in their marriage perfect, but it provided some tools to help them resolve their differences amicably. Each of them was increasingly able to trust that his/her partner was willing to listen and not just react. They found that no matter the complaint, each of them could see their part. They developed an ability to resolve conflicts and work toward mutual understanding instead of judging and condemning each other. Regarding each as "more important than" themselves was no longer a dreaded position of weakness. It became the attitude that demonstrated the most love and respect to each other. 

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who struggled with these kinds of sin and problems.

Also during this time, my husband and I were learning from books, such as *Search for Significance* by Robert McGee, that our value was not based on performance but on our position in Christ. Because His blood covered all our sin, our identity as children of God was firmly fixed in Him, as taught in Ephesians chapter one. When the Father looked at us, He saw the perfect righteousness of His Son. We were completely accepted, unconditionally loved, totally forgiven, and fully pleasing to God. We were beginning to apply the Bible knowledge we had accrued in all our years of training to address the loneliness, poor self-esteem, and perfectionism that we had unknowingly been managing through masturbation and pornography. We were beginning to live according to our biblical belief system.

Accountability and Safeguards

Now my husband allows me to hold him accountable every day to live a pure and faithful life. He checks in with me by phone to tell me he loves me and me alone. He refuses to use gas stations that sell pornography. He asks me to preview magazines coming in the mail in case they may have any offensive material that might tempt him unnecessarily. When we are traveling and he sees a billboard with a provocative image, he begins to pray for the person represented. He says that praying for the person and her family helps him view her as an individual God loves, rather than simply an object to covet.

Furthermore, my husband surrounds himself with other men who pray for each other regularly and ask each other how they're doing in this area. He meets once or twice a month with one other accountability partner to give updates. He attends Promise Keepers every year to renew his commitment to God and me. He has lowered his sexual expectations of me, and I have worked harder to

meet his needs, with a new appreciation that the sexual union represents God's mysterious and beautiful love for me as His child. We are careful about the television programs and movies that we watch, and we block porn on our computer.

A Better Way

I no longer worry about my husband viewing pornography. I turn my concern into prayer.

Almost 25 years have passed since the burning ashes of porn flew heavenward in sacrifice to a better way. The security and assurance of a greater love and freedom replaced porn's shackles for both my husband and me.

Overcoming Pornography Addictions

1. Acknowledge that the addictive behavior is rooted in a love hunger for God (1 John 2:15-17) and childhood issues relating to relationships within the family, self esteem, and feelings about one's masculinity/femininity and sexuality.

2. Get help from a trusted pastor or professional counselor (Proverbs 15:22).

3. Confront your offending spouse with love and honesty (Ephesians 4:15).

4. Confess your sins to each other and forgive one another, each owning up to your part (James 5:16).

5. Learn to enjoy each other; date each other weekly (Proverbs 5:15).

6. Be accountable to at least one other trusted same-sex partner (Proverbs 27:17).

7. Allow a local church to restore and help you (Galatians 6:1).

8. Minimize temptation by purging your home of offensive materials (Psalm 101:2-4). 🚫

Sierra McAlly is a pen name. An earlier version of this article was published in 2006 in the online magazine, *Now What?*

accepting that the big picture may not all be accomplished today. That makes us perennially dissatisfied people, which our spouses don't find uplifting.

Focus instead on one area of your current project. Decide: Only the living room will get thoroughly cleaned this week. Just this file drawer will get organized. Only one outdoor project this summer. Then work at it fifteen minutes at a time until it gets done, and don't get distracted by all the other things that need doing. Refuse to let the big picture overwhelm you but rejoice in the one thing that you've done the way you wanted it. Eventually, the big picture gets accomplished, and meanwhile you've sent procrastination packing (along with its stress).

When was the last time I was God? Really. Remembering your own faults and imperfections helps you deal gracefully with those of a spouse. First, Jesus said to take the log out of your own eye to see others clearly. You're not perfect, and you know what? God loves you anyway, and so does your spouse.

Perfectionists put people—including themselves—on pedestals and then can't forgive them for falling off. But God never placed such expectations on any of us. Remember—your spouse is God's masterpiece (Ephesians 2:10)—His to sculpt as He sees fit. Ask yourself when God turned the universe over to you to be Master sculptor and painter. Then, act accordingly.

My neighbor retired and moved elsewhere a couple years ago. I never learned to mow the lawn to his satisfaction. Nor did we ever eliminate the dandelions, woodpile, or dead tree limbs he found offensive. We tried, but we were just different people. What we perfectionists on this side of the fence are coming to realize is—different is not wrong. It's just different. And who wants to live with someone exactly like me, anyway? Now that would be annoying. 🚫

Jill is a writer, speaker, and ordained minister who lives with ten pets, three daughters, and one husband. She is also a (recovering) perfectionist.



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