

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution,

Bittersweet Lessons

Couples who are just starting lives together
can learn from others' hard-won wisdom

BYLINE: HELENA OLIVIERO

DATE: June 4, 2006

PUBLICATION: Atlanta Journal-Constitution, The (GA)

EDITION: Main; The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

SECTION: Living

PAGE: MS1

Sometimes failure is the best teacher.

Often, we seek marriage advice from those couples together for decades -- but what about the husband and wife who stumbled and didn't live happily ever after?

Many divorced people have learned how delicate a marriage can be and can share their own **bittersweet** knowledge. They've had years -- even decades -- to ponder what went wrong. In many cases, they've remarried.

During this wedding season, they are sharing some painful **lessons** in the hopes of helping newlyweds love and cherish each other forever.

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"Don't watch too much TV. . . . When you are watching TV, you are not talking and you are not probing and you are not asking your spouse, 'How was your day?' "

Denise Neill of Alpharetta

Divorced after seven years

Age: 59

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"We should have spent more alone time together. Even when we went on vacations, others came along like we were one big happy family."

Jill Stasiak of Alpharetta

Divorced after 31 years

Age: not provided

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"Be honest with your partner even when the 'whole truth' is unpleasant."

Dana Patterson Evans of Fairburn

Divorced after seven years; remarried

Age: 34

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"The real secret to a successful marriage is separate bathrooms."

Bill Rubin of Suwanee

Divorced after six years; remarried

Age: 58

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"Don't marry a person until you've spent a weekend wallpapering a room together."

Carolyn Wilder of Elberton

Divorced after 14 years

Age: 63

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"Don't go to bed angry or at least agree to table any heated discussions that cannot be resolved in one conversation. Set up an appointment to revisit it so it does not sink in and turn into resentment."

Kimberly Kirkland of Lawrenceville
Divorced after eight years
Age: 34

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"I would come home and wash up and sit down at the couch with a remote and be wrapped up in myself instead of asking my spouse about how her day was."

Richard Feliccia of Alpharetta
Divorced after 15 years
Age: 53

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"Being friends and good parents is not enough. Don't let the physical relationship die."

Tim McNally of Sandy Springs
Divorced after 12 years
Age: not provided

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"What you see with the blinders off is what you get. Decide if you can live with the things you'd like to change. If not, move on."

Dee M. Nickel of Woodstock
Divorced after 15 years
Age: 56

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"Most things like leaving socks on the floor just aren't going to make a difference in the long run. Just pick them up and go on."

Lisa Nelson of Buford
Divorced after six years
Age: 33

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"Use your senses: Your eyes to observe carefully, what she wears, what she likes . . . Your ears to listen carefully. Your nose to smell her perfume, her cooking. Your mouth to include the word 'love' every day. Your fingers to touch often, to caress and hold."

Lou Nelson of Stone Mountain
Divorced after nine years; remarried
Age: 55

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"Don't marry until you are at least 30 years old. It ought to be a law."

Richard Arnold of Atlanta
Divorced after five years; remarried
Age: 54

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"Don't think of the other person as the enemy. It's just an argument."

Christina Whitehead of Decatur
Divorced after one year; remarried
Age: 33

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"Leave your father and mother behind. This is your turn now."

Jose Blanco of Atlanta
Divorced after 25 years; remarried
Age: 60

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"He would come home from Toastmasters [a public speaking organization] with a ribbon, and I thought, oh, just another ribbon. I was too busy thinking about my son or something broken in the house. I should have said, 'Wow, that's great. Tell me how you got the ribbon.' "

Margot Swann of Marietta
Divorced after 22 years; remarried
Age: 60

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"I expected another person to make me whole and fill the empty place that my parents' divorce had created. No one is capable of doing that."

Laura Petherbridge of Flowery Branch

Divorced after two years; remarried

Age: 50

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"When you are in an argument, ask yourself: Do you want to be right or do you want to be happy?"

In a few days, you probably won't remember what the argument was about."

Lena Marie Jones of Atlanta

Divorced after six years

Age: 55

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