

Perspectives: Skewed and Screwed

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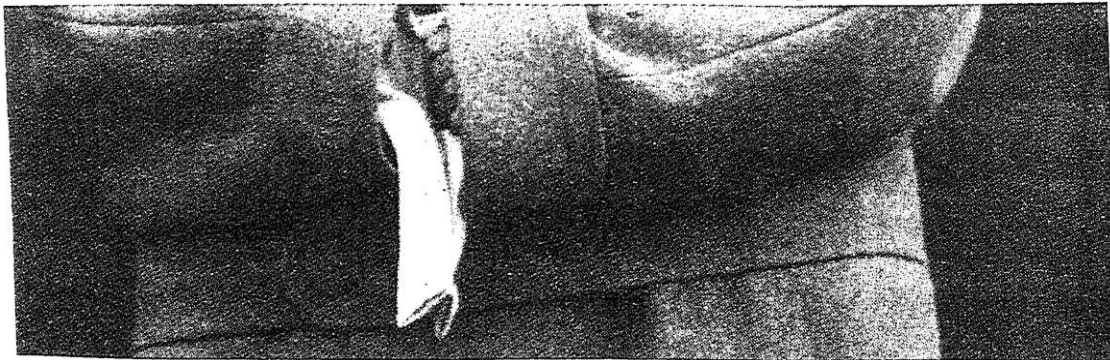
Unlike a good majority of the people I know, the concept of marriage has not been a looming factor in my experience - thankfully, there are other concerns that my family can harp upon. Most of the traditions, customs & the whole mystique of marriage are pretty alien to me; not a lot of my immediate relations have rushed out to get married & most of the weddings I've attended, I've been mostly a bemused guest & have not been privy to the inner turmoil that accompany this cherished occasion.



That's not the thing to admit to, of course - you shouldn't be that truthful and admit that you have absolutely no idea of what expected. Most of my friends' adventures in marriage don't make me want to join the tush over the cliff, either. Not everyone I know has gone through divorce or separation, but even the ones that can be called successful wouldn't fit my definition of being happy.



One friend from school (different school) who I maintained consistent contact with over the years had a crisis this year. She & her husband ended up separating for a few months - it was an ugly situation that had deep roots - suffice it to say, there was a huge threat of physical violence and a good amount of emotional abuse. I don't have her husband's side - I've only met him once & my judgment of him is clouded by earlier events in their marriage, which aren't favorable to him. I do know what lengths men will go to in order to justify their behavior & I know my friend - I remember what she was like at the time I met her & I see how these events have shaped her. So I stand by her.



We communicated through e-mail during this time. What follows are excerpts from our correspondence, reproduced with her permission and with names removed, covering the separation & attempts at reconciliation.

I have been reading lately, mostly Mexican history but I came across an assigned reading about Maslow's hierarchy & the application of it to education and how we have all been taught that our self esteem is tied to achievement rather than his idea of belonging.

Self actualization
self esteem
sense of belonging
safety security
physiological needs--food shelter

I have been thinking about how many years ago I was quite a ways up the ladder, and I have been shaken down to the lower rungs. No wonder I have been so muddled. I wonder if I will be able to forgive someone who in order to feel better about themselves, destroys such vital necessities of life as my sense of security, my sense of belonging. I wonder also just what atrocities happened in his life to make his sense of self esteem rest upon the tearing down of others. If I were not so filled with anger towards him & filled with sense of freedom with his absence, I might pity him. Maybe that is enroute to forgiveness. But for now I will work on making myself healthier, because in my current state I am too vulnerable to want to belong somewhere even if with him. Some people call it being on the rebound. With his smooth salesmanship, his ability to see my way of shopping for a good deal, he can sell me the piece of crap he calls love. Love is "taking care of his physiological needs & his needs for safety & belonging." I do not believe it is that. Love is sharing & helping people in their times of need. But it is not kowtowing or putting yourself below them: it is lifting them up to where you are. I did not realize I had been coming down the ladder so that he could feel better. Oh, I told people..."borderline verbal abusive situation"..."oh, if he could just pick one personality so I would know what to do"..."he's just having a rough time at work dght now, it will blow over soon, just support him till its over: just do as he wishes until he has less stress elsewhere." I had migraines. I had chronic backache. I ran a business. Cared for our three kids while he slept. My father became nearly fatally ill, a month after he told me that Mom gets lost in the house. My paternal grandfather became fatally ill after that and my Dad felt guilty as he grieved for not being able to help his Mother or Daddy. Where was the support I needed for my stress?? It was in washing but not folding a load of clothes. It was in clearing my paper work into a laundry basket. It was in sleeping while children vomited three feet from him. It was in his drinking or smoking pot. It was in his disappearing without saying he was going. It was in his "none of your business" if I asked about his going, or his work or his family's stresses. Nothing of my concern, yet it made him so stressed that his sense of esteem, belonging, security vanished, & he had to take mine to replace his.

Forgiveness will be a long time coming. I might even find more people to get angry with, for taking those things from him first.