

TESTIMONIAL ABOUT RETROUVAILLE - AUGUST 29, 2006

After skulking to the information session held at the library about the program, hoping desperately not to see anyone we knew there, we decided it was our last chance at saving our marriage.

When it came time to book our weekend, the dates of an out of town program worked best which gave us great relief again because of reasons of anonymity. The Retrouvaille program (the weekend AND the follow up sessions) were incredibly timely. In our mid-late thirties, we had two children under three, two demanding careers, an active social and extended family life and all the correlated stresses. Our sense that our post secondary educations, enlightenment about psychology and therapy that our parents' generation missed, inspired an extremely misguided belief that we'd weather tough times, and work through it no matter what. We had so sorely underestimated the degree to which our family backgrounds (divorce on both sides) and divergent communication styles, religious beliefs and values would make for such an unhealthy and unhappy union.

By Spring of last year, we could barely speak a civil sentence to each other in private, but were playing the role of the reasonably happy couple in front of our kids and others. We laughed along with everyone else at cocktail parties and dinners at the cute and not so cute stereotypes of male-female relating issues, but thought that all these nice people couldn't possibly be as troubled in their marriages as we were.

We'd had incredibly unhealthy approaches to conflict resolution, which had inspired something I'll call a polarization of feelings about the other spouse. Everybody knows the feeling of being incredibly angry at their spouse over this or that, having harsh words, and then stomping off to cool off. During the stomp off, one tends to demonize the other guy (I can't believe that jerk thinks this or that, "what an asshole" or "what a bitch"), then think it all through more carefully and examine one's own failings and return to have a more balanced review of the "issue" or source of the conflict in the first place. However, we were having so many of these issues so frequently that we'd gotten into a sad place of only seeing the demon of the other, rarely reviewing our own failings, and disaster forecasting the prognosis of the marriage so regularly that we rarely felt anything remotely close to familiar feelings for one another. On top of this incredibly shaky foundation, there were still the day-to-day negotiations of who'll make dinner, pick up dry-cleaning, get groceries etc. Needless to

say, by the time we ventured off to our RV weekend, we were barely able to conceal our unhappiness and frustration with each other to our extended family and close friends, all of whom had begun to worry about us.

Being the only two people who had front row seats to what we had begun to feel was an imminent tragedy; we were feeling even more worried, scared, sad, hopeless and helpless. We'd tried traditional marriage counseling, and bought several "improve your relationship books", but hadn't had any success at putting any serious changes into place. We both acknowledge now that we shared the same private feelings about Retrouvaille prior to making our first weekend, which was that this was our last chance.

The program starts light and easy with personality issues on Friday evening and builds up to dealing with heavier challenges and elements of marriage. Despite going through the segment presentations with so many other couples, we had never felt more connected and in our own world than we did that weekend. On Friday and Saturday, all but the program presenters were almost invisible to us, we were so engrossed in how well we were reconnecting and reengaging with each other that we kept thinking this program was some kind of miraculous gift delivered at the most essential time in our life.

By Sunday, we were much more knowledgeable about why weren't making a success of our marriage and incredibly more DEDICATED and COMMITTED to making each other and our relationship the most important priority of our life. Also by Sunday, we'd started to emerge from our own little world as to the other couples and the kindness and love exhibited by everybody and the increasing confidence and optimism many of the couples were feeling. The shift from Friday to Sunday is so incredible you have to see it and live it to believe it.

As we started to be more aware of the other participants on the Sunday, we realized we were among a small minority of the "youngest" couples there. We found it so sad that many of the older couples had struggled for years and years, and years in intermittent states of bitterness/resentment and mediocre truces either to get through until their children left home or the mortgage was paid off etc. We'd always thought that unhappily married people got divorced, so most people who were still married at 55 or 60 must be happily married. We were so surprised that couples of this age group are equally struggling and equally embarrassed and ashamed about it.

We also wondered why so few younger couples were involved in the program. We know that many of our friends joke and make veiled references to the challenges and difficulties of being married, especially those in the most challenging years of family life with one or more really young children and/or babies to take care of. Prior to RV, we'd never been that up front about the true state of our situation either, but now in light of the program's incredible improvement of our relating skills and care for each other, we are increasingly confident and consequently less ashamed about our past difficulties and the work we've invested to address them.

Now, when our friends delve and hint around about how hard marriage is; we're not surprised that they too are incredibly discouraged, worried and anxious about the prospect of their marriages lasting if this is how hard they are now at only the 5-10th anniversary. We are so thankful that there is a program called Retrouvaille out there that we can tell them about and always so hopeful that it will be as beneficial for them as it has been for us.

We are so grateful for the program especially in light of our responsibilities to our kids. They are so young and we are so appreciative of RV now that we're more confident that their incredibly important developmental years will evolve in an environment of emotional security and love.

This is not to say that Retrouvaille is some miraculous marriage saver in a box. It really is an education that we had to work very hard to implement in our daily lives with some very demanding changes in how we think and act and communicate. The chapter on "conflict resolution" is incredibly dog-eared and most often referred, to help us through some of our tougher frustrations with each other. We think that probably some couples are really well suited and naturally happily married, but we know many others like us, are comprised of two very unique individuals to which easy bliss doesn't come so easy, but love each other and wouldn't want anyone else even if it is a little more work. Thankfully for us and for them, there's Retrouvaille.

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