

If you put your spouse's interests ahead of your own; Well, they will appreciate that and they most likely will do the same back to you, and it strengthens the relationship and it leads to a happier marriage.

## Happily Married - a Tunnel of Light and in that Tunnel I am Creative

When I think of marriage, I think of planning and preparing Christmas dinner only to learn on Christmas Eve that the boys were all going to their mother's. I guess someone forgot to tell me. My husband, an avid racquetball player, was also occupied on Christmas. I remember sitting alone on the couch, wondering where I was, why I was there, and how in the world I was going to survive.

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The first Mother's Day came and I was filled with anxiety. We went to church, where a gift was given to the mother with the most children. I prayed the number four wouldn't turn up.

Wasn't I a mother?

Do stepmothers count?

Fortunately, a mother with more children happily knew she was a mother and stood up to receive the gift. Later, at lunch, a close friend, who knew of my desire to be part of a family, toasted all the mothers at our table. Several couples had gathered at a restaurant after church, and as he went around the table lifting his glass and naming each one, I felt the anxiety build. Sure enough, he came to me, passed me over, and went on to toast the next mother. I guess that answered my question. No, stepmothers don't count.

I had noticed that. I had also noticed that I did most of the motherly things-the cleaning up, taxi service, grocery-buying, food preparation, teacher conference, birthday-celebration-planning kinds of things. The boys were glad I ran errands for them and provided extra money for things they wanted, but they weren't interested in me as a confidante, they weren't



Married people were more likely to rank high in altruistic love than the unmarried. But altruistic love was a boon for everyone -- no wedding band required.

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interested in me as a mother. I never got the hugs and the times of joyful remembrances that even teenage boys are willing to grant their mom, at least on rare occasions.

I wanted so much from my marriage. I wanted to be part of a loving family. I wanted to be accepted and valued as a friend, realizing I would never be a mother. I also wanted the fun times of courtship to continue. I had a fantasy of what life could be

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like. There was lots of evidence my fantasy would never materialize, but I didn't pay attention to the evidence. I wasn't clear about what I wanted and expected. My husband wasn't clear about what he wanted and expected, and the boys were just hopeful it would be good but probably had lots of concerns that were never voiced and addressed.

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It should be obvious that marriage, especially a stepfamily situation, is going to be hard work. But somehow it wasn't obvious to us. My husband and I lived very independent lives. We each had our careers and we spent lots of time apart. The problem was that there was such loneliness, such lack of connection. Instead of closeness there was television. Hours and hours of television. In the first year of our marriage, we never had one night alone in the house, and the evenings we had enjoyed before marriage were gone.

My spiritual life was both a help and a hindrance. I would turn to prayer, meditation, and spiritual reading for solace. I would move into a larger perspective and seek to surrender myself to a high spiritual good that might be served through my presence in the family. The problem was, instead of really transforming the pain and anger; I was repressing it in the name of a

misunderstood spiritual humility. I was sacrificing myself physically by failing to recognize that God didn't want me to be treated as a doormat. The children were precious to God, but so was I.

Now I realize how careful women must be not to take such positive values as spiritual humility and service to others and misapply them. Motherhood, whether biological or not, requires sacrifice. But to allow Spirit to move in our lives on behalf of ourselves and others, we must be healthy. We must take care of ourselves, physically, mentally, and emotionally, to have the strength to sacrifice some of our personal preferences and choices to meet the needs of others. We have to learn how

to establish appropriate boundaries for ourselves and respect them. By taking care of ourselves, we model healthy behaviors for our children, too.

I'm no longer in this family. We finally went through a very civilized divorce. No angry words. Only recognition on both our parts that it wasn't working. We weren't prepared for the challenges, and when the challenges came, our coping mechanisms were sadly deficient. We tended to avoid conflict, be gone longer from home, spend time with friends outside the marriage, and stay very busy. Whenever there were good times, and there were many, we pretended all of the bad times were resolved. Not only did we not deal with the issues, we failed to teach the boys how to deal with issues. Now they're in their own marriages, and I feel sadly sure they're repeating our errors.

When I think back on those long years, I remember very little. But the pain and anger are still in my body. I gave ten years of my life-critical, childbearing years trying to create a family that was not to be and forgoing the opportunity to form a healthy partnership with a man and raise a family of my own. The opportunity for me to have children is now gone. The opportunity for a happy marriage is, however, still mine.

My hope is that I can find ways of unearthing the pain and freeing the rivers of love and joy that have been dammed up by my efforts to ignore the truth about myself and my marriage. The work is hard, but the possibility of what can come from it motivates me. At the end of the tunnel is light and I thinking the light am life-creative, joyful (though not conflict-free) life.