

Column

I'VE BEEN MARRIED FOUR TIMES

Sagewoman #34, Summer 1996

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“You’ve been married four times?!?” How often have I heard that astonished remark? “Yes, it’s true,” I tell them, and “each one a very different experience.”

My first marriage was what they used to call a “shotgun wedding” — though everybody pretended it wasn’t. And maybe it wasn’t! I thought I was pregnant, but as a good Catholic girl, I was ashamed to tell my mother I needed to take a pregnancy test. I preferred to be with a man whom I did not love “til death do us part” over the brief embarrassment of admitting I needed this test.

The baby actually arrived nine months after our September 1963 marriage, though he was big, and the doctor had told me April. I begged God to let it be May — and it was!

Such was the level of my thinking — and my feeling — in those days. Patrick was a Harvard-trained architect, arrogant and self-centered, and, like most husbands of that pre-feminist era, saw me as his unpaid secretary, waitress, cook, housekeeper, babytender, and a good lay too.

That marriage lasted six years — until I exploded into the wild abandon of the early ‘70s. Within the first month of my freedom, I “fucked” ten men. I use the word advisedly

here. That's what we called it. Feelings? Intimacy? Relationships? That wasn't the "trip," back then.

In 1976 I married again, this time to Dick, my "true love," the one on whom I had imprinted when we were 13 years old. Marriage in our mid-30s felt like a dream come true and I cried all the way through the wedding. Tears of joy. Tears of relief. Tears of gratitude. Finally. After 12 long years, we were back together again, now as adults, and assured of a long full happy life.

For the next year and a half we made love, over and over and over again, literally morning, noon and night. His staff at the newspaper didn't like me much since the Editor was rarely present. Meanwhile, I was already chafing within the confines of how the world saw us — Dick as "husband" and breadwinner, and me as "wife," "the little woman" who "stood by his side" — all those roles seemingly natural to our parents. (His parents lived five minutes away; mine one hour away.)

Finally, one morning deep in the Sawtooth Mountains of Idaho, on one of our beloved week-long, bushwacking backpack trips, I woke up, turned over in our double sleeping bag, and realized that I didn't want to make love. Stealing noiselessly out of the tent, I squatted by the fire, stirring its embers, stunned. *Scared*. Why didn't I want to make love? Was it really true that I didn't?

Yes.

My energy had switched; unexpectedly, all of a sudden. Now, I wanted to *understand*. I moved from feeling us emotionally to needing to understand us mentally. "Who are you?" I asked, "Who am I? What are we doing together? Now that we are adults, do we still belong together? What is your path, what is mine? Can they be combined?" Now that I was physically and emotionally satiated, my fiery questing nature had returned, with a vengeance.

What had been the “dream come true” now felt like a bubble — and I was inside it, rubbing up against the walls, feeling suffocated. I had to get out. This feeling was not immediate, but seeped in over a period of months. Meanwhile, we were talking, talking, endless discussions. Whereas before we had spent four or five hours each day and night making love, now we were re-directing that same passion into conversation.

“Is there a way we can join forces professionally?” I asked him. “Will you quit the newspaper and start something new with me? A new publication?” But the thought of working with me in public made him visibly shudder. My ideas were so radical — he was now finding out. His ideas were so conservative — I was now realizing.

I wanted to change him into somebody who could work with me, be on the same path.

“What is your path?” he would ask me. “I have no idea!” I would admit. I wanted him to leave his path to follow me, and I had no idea what my path was; all I knew was that I couldn’t follow my path and still play the social role of “wife” of a man in a public position in our home town.

I also knew that in order to complete my karma with him, I had to remain until he was willing to let me go. I was prepared to stay for as long as necessary — whether that turned out to be months, years, or lifetimes.

Finally, after nine months of continuous and wrenching tug-of-war, he agreed that it was time for me to leave and handed me the \$3000 we had in savings as “start-up” money.

So, in fear and trembling, wondering what had gotten into me that I would leave the man I loved so fully, and who was the only real security I had ever had, he helped me move into a cozy studio apartment. I started counting my pennies and began my own life, asking, “what is my path?”

That was in 1977. By 1980, I was set up as a “guru” in my hometown, working professionally as an astrologer (I had studied astrology obsessively during the two years of our marriage when he was at the newspaper), and publishing an alternative local publication that was receiving rave notices. I was on my high horse; my path, so cloudy before, now seemed clear.

Meanwhile, I was secretly smoking cigarettes, drinking, smoking dope and generally indulging in all sorts of addictions. I was also (surprise!) attracting alcoholics as lovers, men whom I would immediately stop seeing as soon as I realized they were addicts, and whom I did *not* see as mirroring my own addictions. This was the perfect setup for a con man to arrive and present me with the greatest lesson of my life.

My second husband’s name was Dick High—perfect name for my high school boy friend, the Student Body President. Phil Lowman, on the other hand, had been our high school’s most prominent “lowlife.” One man High, the other Low! I needed to learn how to integrate high and low, light and shadow, within myself. So, at the ripe age of 39, I got off my lofty perch and descended into the underworld of co-dependency with Phil’s (denied) alcoholism: liver disease, bleeding stomach ulcers, and pathological lying.

[See *LIGHT AND SHADOW: Pluto and Persephone*, for a fuller treatment of my marriage to Phil.]

I, the great shining heroine, was going to heal Phil’s body, change his mind, and save his soul. HA! I had to learn, like millions of other women, that I could not save another, that the one who needed saving was me. The descent into Hell took one year.

I was standing next to him during one of his many trips to the emergency room when, wrists and arms hooked into IVs full of blood, he pleaded desperately, “We’ve got to get married.”

What? I was furious! “This is blackmail!” I cried, and within hours, had written up a marriage contract.

I thought I was protecting myself by specifying that the marriage was to be temporary, that I would only stay with him until he got his health back, and that in order to get his health back he would promise to make specific changes in his diet and behavior. He, of course, eagerly signed on. Why not? The contract specified that I would stay with him as long as he was sick — forever, if necessary! That's what he was looking for; somebody to take care of him.

Our life consisted of ambulances, emergency rooms, transfusions, intensive care, and brief times when I was stuck alone in the tiny trailer in the middle of a eucalyptus forest in California and he was on the road, selling school sports calendars, doing what he did best: conning people into thinking he was somebody he was not.

I find it hard now to believe that, even after four decades, I was so foolish. Life with Phil finally ended one memorable night when he finally allowed me to witness his alcoholism. (The doctors had all told me he was alcoholic, and I kept saying no, he wasn't; he had told he wasn't alcoholic, and he wouldn't lie to me.)

He arrived home at 1 A.M., drunk, mean, and threatening, and went to the closet and got out his guns. In order to get out, I had to stare him down, an ordeal that lasted for four hours. I finally moved into my own power by admitting that I could not heal another. It was time to heal *myself*, change *myself*, save *myself*.

For the next seven years, my relationships were brief and far-flung. I was working on myself, facing and embracing the inner demons that had generated my addictive behavior.

I met Jeff in 1990, at a conference in San Francisco. Two months later, he pulled up stakes in Michigan, drove to Wyoming, and moved in with me. Three years later, we married. Jeff is the partner I was seeking when I asked Dick to think of ourselves as equal partners, not just "husband and wife" in the social sense of falling into the expected roles.

I thought that I could never marry again. I thought that love could not coexist with the social roles of marriage. I am learning with Jeff that love shines through the social roles and makes of them what it will.

With Dick, I longed for a true partnership, on all levels, though I did not know what that meant. Now I am learning. Jeff and I do meet each other, physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually; our educational backgrounds are similar — and both of us are both left- and right-brained. Like Dick, Jeff is conservative; I am (still) radical. Likewise, like Dick, Jeff is slow-moving like a bear and I'm a flighty bird. But we realize that these differences are in our natures, and that in combination, they are complementary. It is his *job* to be conservative and ground me, my job to be radical and teach him to fly.

Our problems come up when I try to change him. And I do; I guess I will always try to change what's in front of me, although I'm getting better at learning how to take back my projections and focus on changing myself. Over and over again I yank out the cords, let him go, move to center within. Over and over as I let him go, space opens up for him — to change, to stay the same, to do whatever *he* needs to do.

We are lucky that our needs for togetherness and apartness are similar. We have two places (a large office in Jackson, and a 20-foot diameter yurt 25 minutes away in the village of Kelly across from the Grand Tetons), so we go back and forth between them; sometimes together, sometimes apart. With Jeff I have finally found the partner with whom I can build my life on a firm foundation.

So yes, I've been married four times. Four very different experiences. Each one preparing for the next. With Patrick I learned to find my own ego in order not to be crushed by his. With Dick I found love, and discovered that love alone was not enough. With Phil I discovered my own shadow. And with Jeff I am glad for my ego, glad for love, glad for my shadow; for he too has all of these, is all of these, and together we explore them all in both of us. Our egos spar — and laugh; our love opens; our shadows lurk and then pounce, and then exaggerate, breaking into comedy. No trouble is so

serious that we cannot see through it eventually. In giving in to each other, we are delivered to ourselves.

Note: On January 4, 2003 Jeff died, of a heart attack. Our life together and the year I spent in solitude after his death are detailed in my book, *This Vast Being: A Voyage through Grief and Exaltation*.