

1952

To a Bride

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Recommended Citation

Hearst, Salli (1952) "To a Bride," *The Iowa Homemaker*: Vol. 32 : No. 2 , Article 2.
Available at: <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/homemaker/vol32/iss2/2>

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Happily Ever After

by Donald C. Charles

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IN ROMANTIC fiction and in the movies, the happy ending usually closes on an embrace, with the implication that the couple will marry-and-live-happily-ever-after. In reality, marriage is a beginning instead of an ending. It is of course the end of one phase of life—the growing-up phase—but in terms of a lifetime its importance is greatest as the beginning of a new, mature kind of life. In courtship, *loving* was the important relationship; in marriage the emphasis shifts to *living with* the other person. The relationship of two persons in marriage is a new one, and not just an extension of the old one of courtship.

Success in adjusting to a new situation depends psychologically on how well old learning and experience is reorganized and adapted to the new situation. The popular, over-romanticized picture of married life causes many couples to enter their new state with unrealistic expectations and with little understanding of the kind of adjustments necessary for mutual happiness.

Intimacy

In engagement and courtship, feelings are intense and concentrated. After marriage the intense emotion is replaced by an on-going, permanent state of liking and affection. The engagement period is lived with the promise of fulfillment in marriage. From childhood onward, fulfillment is often not up to expectation, or at least is different from expectation. This seems especially true in the physical relationship, where many couples find that a mutually satisfying relationship is not achieved for many months.

The relationship of continuous intimacy, the prospect of which seemed so delightful in courtship, may seem after a time oppressive and irritating. Personal habits which were amusing eccentricities in dating days become powerful irritants when lived with constantly. It is probably safe to speculate that more day-to-day conflicts are based on seeming trivialities than on profound differences between mates. Cigar ashes on the rug, hose drying in the shower, the daily paper left unfolded, the lack of a shave on Sunday, shoes kicked off in the living room—out of such inconsequentials comes marital discord.

Individuality

While it is true that the two become one in marriage, it is equally true that they are and remain two different and distinct persons. Individuality, while it may be altered, is not destroyed in marriage, nor

should it be. It is a happy couple who realize early that they are going to remain pretty much the same kind of persons they have been, and that the same thoughtfulness and courtesy which makes for happy relations outside the home is even more important within it. Getting along happily with a mate requires the same skill and effort required in getting along with people in general—only more so, because of the continuous contact.

The new bride, without an inkling of bigamy, marries three mates: the romanticized and unreal husband whose stereotype grows from dreams and is fed by fiction and the movies, the idealized man who meets her at the altar, and the real human being whom she learns to know and understand only imperfectly through the years of married life together. The process of replacing the romanticized and idealized figure with the real human being can be a delightful experience, or a shocking one, depending on her attitude toward life and her understanding of people and human relationships.

Romantic ideal

Occasionally, the adjustments required in marriage seem too great to the couple, and they blame their inadequacies on their failure to find the "right" mate. Since over half of all married couples have grown up within a mile or so of each other, it seems highly unlikely that there is one ideal "soul-mate" for every person. Successful marriage results from working at learning to live with the person married, and not from a continuing search for the romantic ideal.

Problems

There are many problems to be faced together. Many couples report finances to be one of the major difficulties. Before-marriage planning and continuing realistic revision of money problems usually can keep this from being a source of emotional up-set. Sometimes one mate finds it difficult to give up friends of the opposite sex. For others, breaking away from parental domination or dependence is a difficult step, especially if the parents want to keep their "child." This is all a part of growing up. Understanding that these are common problems and working at them together is the surest way to solve them. The new bride and the new husband should not expect the ceremony of marriage to make them at once into mature and independent persons if they were not

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mature and independent before the ceremony. It takes time to think in terms of "we" instead of "I," "ours" instead of "mine."

Children

The addition of a child into the home adds new pleasures, and adds as well new stresses and adjustments. Most new parents at some time or other feel consciously or unconsciously some resentment toward the child. Romance is ended, freedom is gone and work and worries take their place. After getting used to being husband and wife, the couple now has to get used to being mother and father. Even if they consciously avoid it, they find themselves calling each other "mama" and "daddy" instead of the first names or pet names used before the child came.

Increased financial burdens and less recreation and amusement add to the tensions. Too, children are not always bundles of joy. They cry and get sick and are disagreeable and demand attention when parents want rest. Even so, few parents feel that the problems are

as great as the rewards. Admitting the resentments and disappointments does not diminish affection for the child, but makes the problem easier to handle. One of the joys of marriage is the freedom to share feelings that may seem unworthy. Exposed to the light of day and the mate's view, they do not rankle and fester.

Adjustments

This is true of all problems in marriage. Adjustments are inevitable and problems are normal. All living beings have problems. Brought out into the open, most of them can be solved and the rest can be lived with. Problems in marriage, as in other aspects of life, are not as important as the way people feel about them. In the market crash of 1929, a stock-broker committed suicide because he had only seven million dollars left. Applications for divorce are filed because the husband is noisy when he eats, or because the wife runs the vacuum at five in the morning.

If a couple recognizes problems of adjustment, discusses them, and works together, happiness is almost inevitable. Couples *can* live happily ever after. Marriage in reality is not less happy than in the romanticized version, but it is often different.

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