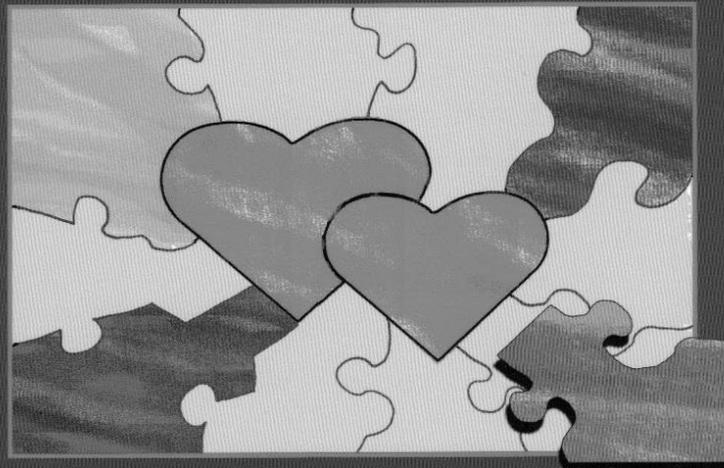


HOW TO STAY MARRIED & LOVE IT!



**Solving the Puzzle
of a SoulMate Marriage**

Nancy Landrum with Jim Landrum

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& LOVE IT!

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of a SoulMate Marriage**

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Library of Congress Control

Number: 2002 190004

ISBN: 0-9719314-2-9

Printed in the United States of America

Illustrated by Nancy Landrum

Second Edition, 2012

To Jim

Our story would have had a very different ending without your courage, the workshops never would have existed without your vision, and this book would have remained a dream without your belief.

Thank you for asking me...I'm so glad I said, "yes!"

And to our children,

Teri, Karen, Steven, Peter and Jimmy

You suffered with us but continue to humble and delight us with your willingness to forgive, learn and love.

[The term SoulMate™ is a
trademark of Nancy Landrum. **]**

About the Authors



Jim and Nancy Landrum have been awarded Masters Degrees in their respective fields—Nancy’s in Psychology and Jim’s in Church Music. Since 1994, Jim and Nancy have been teaching SoulMate skills to personal clients as well as hundreds of couples in their workshop, “How to Stay Married & Love It!” They continue to read and incorporate the most recent research findings and concepts into their presentations. The Landrums are frequent guest speakers at marriage functions and stepfamily support groups.

After surviving the deaths of their first spouses, Jim and Nancy were overjoyed to find each other. Their inability to resolve frequent and escalating conflicts, however, was bewildering and exhausting. They were stunned to find themselves on the brink of divorce. They sifted through mountains of material gathered from seminars, books, tapes, and counselors to find the specific communication and conflict resolutions skills that were needed to save their marriage.

The Landrums believe that SoulMates are not “found” but created by learning and using these simple, couple tested skills that produce thriving marriages. That belief has proven true in their own relationship as well as hundreds of marriages that have learned and used these concepts. Couples with adequate marriages as well as those in great conflict have elevated their relationships to SoulMate status by following the path mapped out by Jim and Nancy.

Although their faith is a vital part of their journey of healing and is gently reflected throughout their message, their primary emphasis is on teaching the powerful skills that enabled them to create the intimacy, safety, and romance that is characteristic of a SoulMate relationship.

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PREVIEW OF “How to Stay Married & Love It EVEN MORE!

A Note from Jim Landrum

The very successful workshop on which the *How to...* books are based is taught by both Nancy and me; however, unless clearly noted, these volumes were written by Nancy. I have watched with amazement as Nancy has given birth to this labor of love and I believe it is a significant part of her life's work.

As we became friends in 1980, I found that Nancy was a woman of substance, wise beyond her years. Even then I said to her, "You have a book in you." Little did I know that the book would be about us and our struggles to have a great marriage!

As you read you'll see the depth of her heart, sense her compassion for those who are hurting, and understand that she brings to this work a richness of experience gleaned from her own journey of healing.

It is my hope that these concepts and skills will help you solve your own puzzle of *How to Stay Married & Love It!*

Sincerely,

Jim

Chapter 1

Divorce!



Divorce! The word shattered the space and hung in the air between us like a red fog. Even after all the conflict we'd experienced, we were both stunned to silence by the introduction of that possibility. How could our relationship have come to this? Why wasn't it enough to love each other? We'd always heard that love and commitment were all it took to have a great marriage. We *did* love each other. We were *very* committed to each other and to our marriage. What was wrong? We'd both been through so much and were so happy to find each other. We were in our forties. Adults. Why couldn't we resolve the conflicts that were eating away at our love and commitment like a deadly cancer?

Jim: "I was born in Oklahoma. As I grew up I learned how a man is supposed to act by observing the men in my life. By their actions, my dad, uncles, grandfathers, and male friends all showed me that *real* men don't talk about their feelings. If a man gets angry, he just clams up. If he gets his feelings hurt, he doesn't let anyone know. If his wife wants to talk about her feelings, he doesn't pay much attention, because women are too emotional. When it all gets to be too much, a man explodes verbally or physically, then everything calms down again. Some marriages survive this lack of communication, but there is very little closeness.

"For example, a few years ago, my mother, who is in her 80s now, told me an interesting story about herself and my dad. They had been married a few months and she thought everything was wonderful . . . in her words, 'hunky dory.' One morning she burned the toast and my dad exploded about five or six things he had been angry about but hadn't mentioned. Needless to say, she was devastated.

"In 1957, I married my high school sweetheart, Dixie. I worked part time in local churches while finishing college. By 1963 we had two little girls, Teri and Karen. I was awarded my Master's Degree in Church Music from the seminary and began working full time as a Minister of Music. In 1966, when Dixie was only 27 years old, she became very ill with pancreatitis. After 13 weeks in the hospital, she returned home but her health remained fragile."

"In 1969 our family moved to California. Dixie continued to be ill occasionally, each event threatening her life and requiring hospitalization and often surgeries. We learned that one of the things that triggered her illness was emotional upset. I avoided conflict with her by sweeping any issues under the rug. In fact, my motto was, 'Peace at any price!' The circumstances reinforced my pattern of not talking about my feelings and leaving conflict unresolved.

"In 1979 Dixie died, leaving me with two teenage girls, Teri and Karen, and our 7-year-old son, Jimmy."

I was born and reared in a small farming community in Southern California. My parents were very active in our church and they, my three sisters, and I were there whenever the doors were open. They loved God and were wonderful models of integrity and generosity, but there were also patterns of chronic conflict. Soon after high school, I married a man who I was sure would make me happy forever. Within six months I realized we were developing the very relationship struggles that I had been determined to avoid. I didn't know how to do things any differently! We worked very hard at our relationship and eventually felt ready to have our first son, Steven. Eighteen months later a second son, Peter, followed. In 1968 my husband left home to pitch in a softball game and dropped dead from a previously undiagnosed heart problem. I was 23 years old. I didn't have the inner resources to handle this trauma. It took several years to even begin to recover.

I wanted to remarry, but considering the future of myself and two little boys made me very choosy! Twelve years passed as I sat through many Little League games, enjoyed camping with extended family, and began to develop my love of teaching with the young people of my church. As the boys approached middle-school age, I decided the teen years were a terrible time to complicate their lives with the changes a marriage would bring. I felt a surge of strength and confidence, and so turned my attention to starting a small business.

In the Fall of 1980, I met Jim through a mutual friend. We began dating casually and became good friends. My determination to postpone remarriage until the boys were grown gradually dissipated as we fell in love. Our many friends and family members celebrated our wedding with us in the Spring of 1981. We had each survived the loss of a spouse, were responsible, caring persons, and were sure that we were due for some better times. We had no doubt that we were meant to be together. We were soul mates! We blissfully left for a two-week honeymoon.

Teri had married the previous summer, so there were four children waiting for us at home, Karen, (17) Steven, (14) Peter, (13) and Jimmy (8.) The day we returned from our honeymoon, the conflicts began. We had very different styles of parenting. We couldn't agree, and the children did what all children are born knowing how to do, divide and conquer! At first it was easy to kiss and make up, but the same old issues erupted repeatedly to hammer the bruised places in each of us. Every recurrence made our pain deeper and we became more sensitive. After a few years, we saw the areas of safety between us shrinking as the areas of conflict expanded. It became impossible to share the same space peacefully. Each of us secretly feared our marriage had been a terrible mistake. The decision was made to live in separate households until all the children were on their own. That arrangement wasn't much fun, either.

In spite of our disenchantment, we didn't want to give up. The memory of the bliss we'd experienced in the beginning tantalized us. Although we knew the unique stage of honeymoon-euphoria never lasts forever, we wanted to rekindle and learn how to maintain the quality of soul-mate-love we had believed would characterize our marriage.

Finally, we seriously began to seek help.

Jim: "Times have changed, but when I first entered the ministry, it was the kiss of death to your career to admit you had marital, financial, or any other problems. Besides, I was convinced that Nancy was the real problem, not me. Although she had been seeing a counselor on her own for a few years, it took the stunning realization that our marriage might not make it, before I was willing to get help. Together we saw several counselors, (finally settled into working with one) read books, listened to tapes, and attended seminars. We prayed desperately, asking God for help."

Our patterns had driven us to such extremes that we found it difficult to implement most of the material we read or heard. Our response to a general instruction such as "Always treat each other with respect," or "Never go to bed angry," was, "HOW?" We agonized with the frustration of trying to put together the puzzle of a happy marriage while it was obvious we were missing some important pieces.

During those years I remember thinking often that there are such clear laws that govern the physical world . . . nothing can be more dependable than gravity, for instance. By cooperating with the law of gravity, I can remain safe—I can refuse to jump off a roof, for example. If I try to defy gravity, I can count on a painful consequence. I believe the universe is orderly. So, could there also be laws dictating the success or failure of relationships? If I knew what they were, I would do my best to live in cooperation with them in order to avoid the painful consequences of defying them.

We began an intensive search to find the relationship rules we were inadvertently breaking—the missing pieces to the puzzle. Over a period of about five years, we gradually collected and implemented specific doable communication tools that helped us resolve our conflicts. We discovered other pieces, as well. Soon the puzzle of "How to Stay Married & Love It!" was solved.

Today the love and respect Jim and I have for each other are deeper than ever before. The security and pleasure we experience together is more than we ever dreamed we would have. Our relationship models the term, "SoulMates." The combination and capitalization of these words is not a mistake. We use this customized term to describe the elevated quality of relationship that is experienced when a couple is willing to work at building a SoulMate relationship rather than believing it is a fluke of fate.

Our family is also healing. Every time we gather, we celebrate the bonds of love that have been forged. So far, we have welcomed into our circle two fine sons-in-law, a lovely daughter-in-law and six wonderful grandchildren. We are so grateful that our choices led to the sharing of this precious, expanding family. Looking back, it is frightening to think that we nearly forfeited the rich life we now enjoy.

While we were learning in the laboratory of our own marriage, professional researchers were coming to the same conclusions as we had. Diane Sollee is the director of the Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education, a clearinghouse for all the latest marriage research and education programs. She said, “Marriage is skill-based. Like football. The way we have it set up now a couple gets married and we send them out there to win based on ‘love and commitment.’ That’s like asking a football team to win on team spirit—‘for the Gipper’—but not letting them learn any plays or signals. No skills at all—just win on love. The basis for smart marriage is exciting new research that finds that what is different about the marriages that make it—that go the distance and stay happy—are behaviors or skills. And even more exciting, they are simple skills that any fool can learn.” She added, “Love is not an absolute, a truth, or a limited substance—that you’re in it or out of it. It’s a feeling that ebbs and flows depending on how you treat each other. If you learn new ways to interact, the feelings can come flowing back, often stronger than before.”¹

If your marriage is in eminent jeopardy, get help. Find a skills-based marriage class in your area and enroll immediately. (A national registry of marriage education classes is available at www.smartmarriages.com. Some classes are held weekly. Others combine learning with a weekend away from home or even a romantic cruise.) Statistically, these classes have been found to be more effective than traditional therapy. The classes provide support and accountability for making the changes needed when a marriage is on the edge. As a bonus, a class with other struggling couples is, for some, less threatening to attend than walking into a therapist’s office—a fact that often makes the difference between getting help or waiting until it’s too late. If your spouse is not willing to go, then go by yourself. The relationship changes even when only one is willing to change.²

If you cannot attend a class, interview several therapists. Make it clear that the first appointment is for an interview and you don’t expect to pay. Ask these questions: Have you had training specific to working with marriage issues? When? With whom? (Check to see if the organization is registered at www.smartmarriages.com.) Will you tell me something about your own marriage? If I (we) came to see you, what would be your approach? What percentage of your clients are couples? What percentage of your former clients would you estimate were significantly helped and have gone on to experience a great marriage?

These questions will help you sense: (1) if the therapist has been able to establish a successful marriage of his or her own, (2) has been interested enough in couple dynamics to take extra training in marriage skills, (3) is skills-based in approach rather than traditional therapy based on analysis, and (4) whether or not the therapist has confidence in his or her marriage counseling skills.

¹ Sollee, Diane, Director of the Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education. Interview by Jon Galuckie during a Coalition conference in Washington, DC in July, 1998. www.smartmarriage.com.

² Michele Weiner Davis makes a very strong case for the powerful effectiveness of deliberate change by only one partner in her book, The Divorce Remedy. (2001). New York: Simon & Schuster.

We suggest that you ask God for help. The act of acknowledging that you need help from a source wiser than yourself opens the door to synchronous and sometimes miraculous aid. And keep on asking. Expect surprises!

In this book, we'll share the four essential elements for building and maintaining not just a tolerable marriage, but one of SoulMate quality. Looking back, Jim and I see these four elements and the skills that express them as the critical pieces that enabled us to pull our marriage back from the brink of divorce. They are the foundation that supports the great marriage we now enjoy. These are: (1) accept your partner's points of view as valid, (2) use communication and conflict resolution skills that get the desired result, (3) always treat yourself and your spouse with respect and (4) be fully committed to this partnership for life. Just as solving a complicated puzzle is easier once the four corners are in place, these four elements and the skills that demonstrate them are the ones you need in place first. One or more chapters are dedicated to each of these corner puzzle pieces and specific skills are taught to infuse these elements into yourself and your marriage.

Completing the rest of the SoulMate puzzle is easy once these four are in place. Even if your marriage is not in jeopardy these corner pieces are still the "frame" of any well-functioning marriage and must be consistently demonstrated before a SoulMate marriage can be assured. If your relationship is relatively stable use this book as a checklist to identify anything that could use improvement.

In the next volume, *How to Stay Married & Love It Even More!* we define the other six pieces that complete the puzzle of a SoulMate marriage. Those six elements took our marriage from "communicating, able to successfully resolve conflict, no danger of divorce," to "deeply in love, treasuring emotional and physical intimacy, grateful for each day together—SoulMates."

It isn't that we exclusively worked on the first four puzzle pieces, mastered them, and then moved on to puzzle pieces #6-#10. Life just isn't that neat. Although we were integrating many concepts and skills somewhat simultaneously, the ones we had to work the hardest to establish and that made the biggest difference in the beginning were Puzzle Pieces #1-#4. Also, if we had tried to put all ten pieces into one book it would have been too heavy to enjoy reading in bed, (something I love to do) and too intimidating to take from the bookstore shelf. Therefore, the most essential parts are in this book followed by the balance of the puzzle in the next volume.

The laws that dictate the success or failure of a marriage are no longer invisible. Like gravity, they are now understood, documented, and so clear that anyone can choose from a menu of behaviors that determine what degree of suffering or love one experiences in one's marriage. The pieces are all here. You can solve your own puzzle of *How to Stay Married & Love It!* by beginning with the four essential corners.

Before you begin, however, take time to read Chapter 2 about what is missing in the old formula for a successful marriage—"What Our Parents Didn't Know . . ."

"Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now."

Goethe⁴

*"If you want better insight and discernment,
and are searching for them as you would for lost money or hidden treasure,
then wisdom will be given you."*

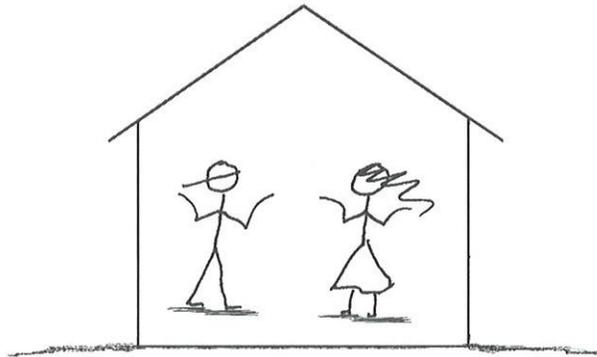
Proverbs 2:3-5⁵

⁴ Although this quote is frequently attributed to Goethe, it is actually a rather free translation of Faust by John Anster made in 1808. They're spoken by the Manager in the "Prelude at the Theatre."

⁴ All Bible quotes are from [The Living Bible](#) by Tyndale House available in most bookstores. The book of Proverbs, which appears in the Old Testament, is attributed to King Solomon, who was renowned for his wisdom.

Chapter 2

What Our Parents Didn't Know . . .



**“All marriages are happy.
It’s the living together afterward that’s rough.”
Milton Berle**

Our wedding day was magical. Because we both were involved in churches with large congregations who loved us, about 700 friends and family members came to share our joy.

Because I was accustomed to boys, I watched with wonder as Jim’s daughters, Teri and Karen, wound their long hair into topknots in the Bride’s Dressing Room. Wispy, feminine tendrils framed their faces and necks. Every movement—pulling on sheer hose, adjusting undergarments, applying make-up to themselves and each other—was accompanied by constant chatter and giggles. They were enchanting.

Jim: “As a minister, I’d married hundreds of couples. I’d always counseled them to relax and enjoy their wedding day. Nancy and I had agreed that we would not let anything spoil the joy of that day. So, 10 minutes before time to start, when 8-year-old Jimmy spilled cola on his tuxedo, I just chuckled while my best man brushed it off. We hung it outside the choir room door, hoping the warm California sun would quickly dry it.”

Through the intercom I could hear the beautiful old hymns being played as a prelude. The familiar tunes were a soothing background for all the excitement. Earlier, I’d seen my sons, Steven and Peter, in tuxes. They looked so handsome – young men, no longer boys. I knew they would be thoughtful and dignified as they ushered their grandmothers to the front row.

Suddenly, it was as though someone turned up the volume of the sound system. I heard the stately and comforting hymn ‘Great Is Thy Faithfulness’³ above the rustle of petticoats and the clicking of a lipstick cap being replaced. Tears sprang to my eyes. I was sure God was reminding me of how faithful He had been to me and my children for the nearly 13 years since

³ Words by Thomas O. Chisholm, Music by William M. Runyan, Public Domain.

their father's death. I felt rewarded for the many times of loneliness when I had refused to settle for a second-best relationship. Jim was so right for me. I felt blessed and very sure of our happy future together.

Jim: "I, too, had the experience of thinking the sound had been turned up as I heard 'Great Is Thy Faithfulness' being played. And, like Nancy, I felt full of gratitude for the 14 years the children and I had with Dixie after the first diagnosis of her illness. God had also been with me during the long, empty months of grief after her death. And now, the very air of this soft, warm spring day sparkled with celebration. Nancy and I had found each other!"

Years later we recalled the strange volume increase that brought the old hymn's tune to our attention and its words to our minds. We realized then, that God had not only been reminding us of His faithfulness to us in the past, but promising his faithfulness to us in the future—an angry, conflict filled future we could not possibly imagine on that most perfect of all wedding days.

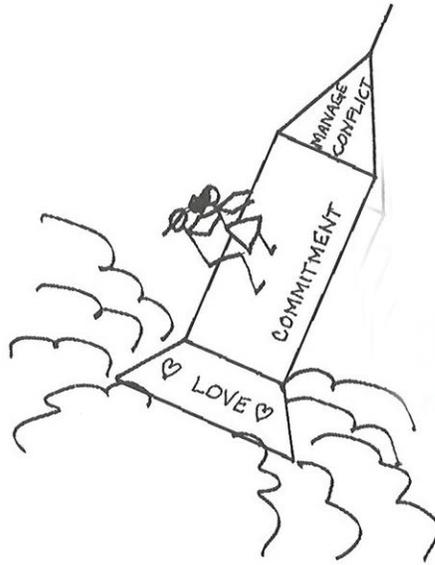
We were typical of most couples in love . . . full of hopeful plans, confident in our future together, sure that we would have a great life. As in many second marriages, we assumed that because we loved each other so much, our children would love each other, also. In spite of the war stories we'd heard, we were sure that the blending of our families would happen smoothly and effortlessly.⁴ With the benefit of 20-20 hindsight, it's hard to believe how naïve we were!

We'd been taught that if a couple loved each other and were committed to each other, a good and lasting marriage would follow. It had worked for our parents' generation. We were bewildered. Even after several years of unrelenting conflict, we still loved each other. We were still faithful and committed to each other. We wanted the marriage to work more than anything! But some essential piece was missing . . .

We were stunned to read: "Love is needed to get a relationship off the ground, but it doesn't provide enough fuel to keep a marriage flying toward success over time . . . nor does commitment. It's how couples manage conflict that makes the difference. The key to marital success is to teach couples how to talk without fighting"⁵

⁴ The unique stresses of stepfamilies are addressed in Volume II, [How to Stay Married & Love It Even More! Completing the Puzzle of a SoulMate marriage](#) by Nancy Landrum.

⁵ Notarius, C. & Markham, H. , (1993). [We Can Work It Out, Making Sense Out of Marital Conflict](#) , p. 21. New York: G.P. Putnam & Sons.



Love provides the “blast off” for the relationship. Full commitment is a necessity. But *managing conflict* successfully is the missing ingredient that determines the ultimate destination of the relationship over time.

Conflict is inevitable, even normal, in any close, caring relationship. Conflict is not damaging and can even be a powerful stimulus for personal growth. It is unresolved conflict that drains the energies of both partners, pollutes the quality of their love, and sometimes becomes the main focus of attention, overshadowing the areas of their partnership that otherwise would be rewarding.

In other relationships, conflict can be ignored, sidestepped or patched up with relatively superficial attempts at resolution. If the conflict is severe enough, the relationship can simply be abandoned. One lives, however, with one’s mate. There are only four ways that I can think of for handling conflict in a marriage: One, endure periodic or frequent arguing. With this choice, someone may appear to win in each encounter, but, in reality, everyone loses. Two, arrange the relationship so that conflict is hidden, or avoided at any cost—a choice that is often temporary, as hidden conflict always extracts a toll in the relationship and sometimes in personal health. Three, divorce. This option is deceptive because the conflict often continues or even escalates after the breakup. Often, the same conflicts resurface with a new partner. Four, be open about conflict and learn to resolve it in ways that are satisfactory to both partners.

Today’s couples expect more out of marriage than any previous generation. In the past, our legal structure and culture strongly supported marriage for life, period. Unhappy or conflicted marriages, for the most part, remained intact. It was assumed that love and commitment were all that was necessary for a lasting marriage. Since the passage of no-fault divorce laws, however, our culture no longer demands or even expects that a couple remain married for life “no matter what.” Now, when a marriage is unhappy—when there are unresolved conflicts or passive neglect—either partner has the freedom to leave. Now we not

only want an arrangement that provides a safe sex partner, financial stability, and a good structure for rearing children, we also want to be happy—to feel intimately known, passionately loved, and the development of our gifts or careers enthusiastically supported. In our current jargon, we want a soul mate!

Recent studies of the long-term effects of divorce⁶ are documenting what some of you may have experienced for yourselves. Divorce is not a simple discarding of a garment that just didn't fit well. It is a major emotional upheaval even for unions without children. It leaves lasting scars for adults in addition to devastating disillusionment and damaged self-esteem for most children of divorced parents. In an effort to prevent the emotional and financial devastation of divorce, researchers have been evaluating good marriages and asking, "Can struggling couples learn to duplicate the skills that are demonstrated in a successful marriage?" The answer is, "Yes!"

Some of you may have little conflict in your relationship, so you are reading this to make a good marriage even better. Bravo! Some, in spite of the basic stability of your marriage, may have a recurring issue that continues prevent total satisfaction. Some, as we did, may be experiencing the daily, grinding stress of constant conflict and are just hanging on by your fingertips! Although your conflicts may be about different issues than ours were, we offer our own experience as proof that the love you once shared can be recaptured, and more. In the majority of marriages, it doesn't matter what the conflict is about. The problem is that many of us never learned how to resolve conflict successfully in any relationship, let alone one as vital and intimate as a marriage.

This book will teach you the tried-and-true skills that enabled Jim and I to resolve the elephantine-sized conflict that nearly destroyed our marriage as well as dozens of less threatening ones. These skills do not work their magic for us alone, however. Their power to heal relationships has been repeatedly witnessed in our workshops and in my office.

Before we dump the puzzle out onto the table and begin the process of fitting them together into a SoulMate relationship, it is wise to note the phenomenon of homeostasis. For our purposes, homeostasis means that every ongoing relationship has a certain balance. On a conscious level, you may not like some of the things happening in your relationship (its current balance); however, the subconscious mind often has reasons for maintaining a relationship in its current state.

One husband, after attending our workshop, completely changed the way he was treating his wife. She told us later that she couldn't handle it! It was too good! She badgered him until he returned to his disrespectful treatment of her! The former quality of the relationship must, in some way, have reflected what felt normal or what she unconsciously believed she deserved. Peace or closeness may have felt unfamiliar to her, leaving her vulnerable and scared.

As in the previous example, resistance to improvement may come from without—your spouse or even other family members. Other times the resistance is from within. Have changes

⁶ See Chapter 18.

been requested that you have the power to make and yet you refuse? Why? (Tip: Beating yourself up will not remove the resistance.)

Conflicting feelings about achieving a better marriage are common. For example, one part of you may desire an improved relationship more than anything. That part led you to this book. Another part may feel undeserving of a great marriage, so it resists improvement. A third part may be dedicated to punishing your partner for hurting you in the past, so it sabotages any efforts to change things for the better. There may be a part that doesn't believe a great marriage is possible. In order to prevent a crushing disappointment, that part won't let you try. We have all had the experience of wondering why we did something so diametrically opposed to what we consciously wanted to do—eating too many desserts when we're trying to lose weight, for instance. Our hidden motivations are powerful enough to countermand our conscious choices.

You may be thinking, "This doesn't apply to me. I really want a SoulMate relationship and will do whatever it takes to make it happen." If so, you will move forward very quickly as you apply the tools you're about to learn.

For those of you who do experience resistance, however, it is helpful to talk about it to a counselor or a trusted friend. In the process of talking it out, an old distorted belief may surface or a fear that at one time was reasonable but now is unfounded. It is sometimes uncomfortable digging around below the surface of consciousness, but without willingness to examine the inner resistance and push through it, the relationship will not improve.

Once you understand why there is resistance, your more conscious self (the part that knows an improved relationship is in your best interest) can choose whether or not to allow the resistant part to limit progress toward a happier marriage. These inner parts often require repeated, firm nudging in order to move into alignment with your goal of a SoulMate marriage. It's important that this be done in a patient, compassionate way, as though one were dealing with a frightened child. Indeed, these defensive parts of ourselves were adopted in response to being hurt, often in childhood.

With many stops and starts, plenty of failures, and in ways far from perfect, Jim and I were willing to overcome our resistance to learning new relationship skills. Our marriage was once at risk, however, because I thought I was pretty good—it was Jim who needed to change! Of course, he thought he was just fine as he was. I was the one who needed to change! Just in case you may have similar thoughts, the next chapter describes the truth we discovered on our journey toward a great marriage: most SoulMates are self-made, rather than accidentally found. Read on . . .

**“Courage is resistance to fear,
mastery of fear,
not absence of fear.”
Mark Twain**

*“Honey whets the appetite, and so does wisdom!
When you enjoy becoming wise, there is hope for you!
A bright future lies ahead!”
Proverbs 24:13-14*

Chapter 3

Acres of Diamonds



“Unless you understand that *marriage* doesn’t make people happy, you will spend the rest of your life trading in marital partners for new ones. Unless you feel satisfied with your *own* life, you will not be able to determine whether your unhappiness stems from personal or relationship issues.”
Michele Weiner Davis⁷

After the deaths of our first mates, we were so grateful to have found each other. The bond we experienced was deep. We were each other’s best friend. We were passionate and joyful. We considered ourselves two of the lucky ones. We had each found our soul mate.

Our conflicts, however, would not stay resolved. They kept reappearing like obsessive stalkers. Instead of soul mates, we became hurt mates, anger mates, and fight mates. For several months we lived in separate homes. We both thought we must have been wrong about the sense of destiny and rightness we had felt at the time of our marriage. Neither of us, however, could quite let go of the hope that we were meant for each other and might still live “happily ever after.”

As mentioned before, Jim and I sought the advice of a few counselors.⁸ We also received tidbits of help from several books, tapes, and marriage seminars. We became learning mates. Saving our marriage was a huge puzzle, and we gradually became puzzle-solving mates who were beginning to see the pieces come together.

In the process of rebuilding our marriage, we slowly began discovering treasures in each other we hadn’t even dreamed existed. We became treasure-hunting mates, glorying in the riches we found. The process began to be exciting!

⁷ Davis, Michele Weiner, (2001). *The Divorce Remedy*, p. 57. New York: Simon & Schuster.

⁸ We are especially grateful to Jackie Barrile, who masterfully balanced individual and couple therapy with us. We hope this book repays her in part for the wealth of relationship “stuff” she taught us.

In 1994, Jim suggested we begin sharing with others what had taken us so long to learn and had cost us such agony. We put a rough draft of the material in little folders, and began inviting every one we could think of to come to our workshop entitled, "How to Stay Married & Love It!" After several classes, we polished up the workbook and had a thousand copies printed. We began presenting ourselves to audiences as experts in resolving marital conflict and building emotional intimacy. Because we were willing (however reluctantly!) to do the work of healing our own marriage, we were experiencing not only our own happiness, but the unparalleled joy of giving others the pieces so they could solve the puzzle of their marriages. We had become teaching mates!

Largely owing to Jim's encouragement, I celebrated my 50th birthday by applying to the University of Santa Monica. In August 1998, I donned a cap and gown to be awarded a Masters Degree in Spiritual Psychology with an emphasis in Consciousness, Health, and Healing. It was the fulfillment of a 25-year dream.

Another secret dream began to surface. Ever since discovering the magic of reading for myself, I'd wanted to write and be published. Jim kept telling me I could do it. He believed in me. One Sunday morning, we opened "The Orange County Register" to the "Home & Garden" section to find an article I had written was featured on the front page! Without his encouragement, I might never have known the incredibly delicious pleasure of seeing my words in print. I was reaping the personal benefits of having an encourage-mate and adventure-mate.

Russell Herman Conwell, a Baptist minister and founder of Temple University, is best known for his lecture, "Acres of Diamonds." He delivered it more than 6,000 times, devoting the proceeds to the education of more than 10,000 young adults.

He tells the story of a farmer in Africa who was content until he heard how rich he would be if he had diamonds. He sold his farm, left his wife and children with a relative, and went off in search of diamonds. In a few years, after exhausting his grubstake and losing heart, he drowned himself in the sea.

Meanwhile, the man who had bought the little farm happened on an interesting rock while plowing. He displayed it on the mantle. Some time later a visitor came to his home, picked it up and excitedly declared that a diamond was encapsulated in its center. As they sifted through the dirt in the field, they found others. The first owner of the farm had abandoned acres of diamonds, to die broken and destitute looking for them in some other place.

In the "Acres of Diamonds" speech, Conwell cited many other true examples of persons setting off in search of their fortunes, after unknowingly leaving hidden treasure for someone else to find.

Americans love stories that teach "hard work pays off in the end" or "faithfulness and integrity overcome!" Our universally favorite get-rich stories are about ordinary folks who turn adversity into triumph by mining the treasure found in their own back yards. We envy the computer nerd who started a company in his garage and has made billions (Bill Gates). We admire the housewife whose great tasting cookies led her from one small cookie stall to outlets in every mall in America (Mrs. Fields Cookies). We shake our heads and marvel at a man "too old"

to be seriously considered as a candidate for founding a successful business who nevertheless parlayed his home made fried chicken recipe into thousands of Colonel Sander's franchises.

There are others, less known, who quietly spend their lives mining for different treasures. My brother-in-law, C.W. Perry, started a church in a living room with just a handful of attendees. Year by year, the numbers grew. Soon a place of worship and a school appeared as housing tracts replaced the orange groves near the site. While he and my sister, Mary, were bringing up their five great kids, they also helped thousands explore their relationships with God in an up-beat, fun atmosphere. When C.W. died recently, 4,000 persons attended his memorial service to celebrate the contribution he had made to their lives. He found and mined a field of diamonds.

My husband, Jim, and his first wife, Dixie, lost one of their daughters at birth. Several years later, Dixie died. Jim knows what it means to suffer loss. He's experienced the long, lonely process of grieving. If he so desired, he could be bitter about the barren field he "owned." Instead, Jim has brought comfort and reassurance to thousands as he sensitively and compassionately ministers to the bereaved. He shares his diamonds.

When my sister, Sally's thirty-plus year marriage was deteriorating, she was determined to save it. She was devastated when she realized she had to let it go. The family in which she had invested so much of her life seemed to be in shambles. Her four adult children were hurt, angry and divided. She could have chosen to spend the rest of her life moaning "poor me." Instead, she answered the challenge with this question, "What can I learn from this experience?" Always a seeker, she now sought a path of forgiveness, dignity, and healing. She utilized this time to get her Master's Degree in Spiritual Psychology (she was my inspiration!). She says she was on a quest to learn more about how to love . . . love herself, her children, and even her ex! Today it is not unusual to find them all—her children, grandchildren, and at times, her ex-husband—gathered around her table celebrating family events and holidays. The atmosphere is one of genuine love, caring, and gratitude. She kept mining and collecting the diamonds from the yard where she lived.

When life as she knew it fell apart, another sister, Jean, put her son in the car and began driving. She was searching for a community where she and Matt could make a new life. She believed they both would just know it when they arrived. They found Red Lodge, Montana, nestled in a little valley below the Bear Tooth Mountains. She took her love of movies, coupled her bright willing mind, and with a big dose of courage, bought a failing video store on Main Street. Within a short time, the business was booming, she was enthusiastically welcomed into the town's life, and Matt was thriving. (By the time their first winter in Montana had arrived, he knew they'd found the right place! If the snow conditions are good, every Friday at noon school is dismissed and the kids are bussed to the nearby ski lift for snowboarding or skiing!) Jean and Matt found the diamonds of healthy change within themselves.

We never tire of stories like these. Every month, Reader's Digest, Guideposts, and even Money Magazine feature adversity to treasure, "lemons to lemonade" articles because they sell. We hunger for heroes.

Yet in the arena of marriage, it seems the most common solution to adversity is divorce.⁹

A few years ago, knowing that Jim and I were very happy with each other, two of my beautiful nieces asked me, “Is he your soul mate?” As we talked, I realized that they had bought into the currently popular myth that each person has only one soul mate. If I believed that to be true, there would be intense pressure to search far and wide for that one person in the world with whom I was destined to be a soul mate. If I was in a relationship that was struggling, it would be natural to conclude I had misunderstood or misjudged. So, wanting to be a soul of higher consciousness and determined to settle for nothing less than my highest good, I would leave this “mistake” and begin searching again.

Whether from a desire for higher consciousness or not, marriages are being abandoned in staggering numbers. Several sets of statistics have been published. The numbers vary a little, but, nationwide, roughly 50 percent of first time marriages end in divorce. The failure rate of second and third marriages is significantly higher. Something isn’t working here. Could it be that the treasure we seek is not “out there” after all?

Recently, a charming man named Hans called and said, “We need help.” (Remember the recommendation in the first chapter to get help? Yeah, Hans!) This was the fourth marriage for him, and the third marriage for Janet, his wife. When they said, “I do,” they vowed this was it! They would stay and make it work no matter what! Now, after seven years, they were hurting badly. The love that had brought them together was eroding at a frightening rate. The prospect of another failure was unbearable, but the conflict was devastating. They were tired. Neither of them wanted to look for a solution “out there” again, so they signed up for our workshop.

In the first two sessions, Hans and Janet leaned forward on their chairs to be sure they heard every word. They asked questions. They devoured every concept and practiced the exercises. In between weeks two and three, they called me. They were having a huge fight. Would I see them? Together we probed deeply into their pain. We mined for truths they had overlooked. I shared a few concepts with them that they had never heard before. They examined their differing perspectives. They left exhausted but hopeful. By the time weeks three and four had passed, and after one more personal session, their relationship made a gigantic turn around.

Their marriage began functioning much better because both Hans and Janet were willing to assume responsibility for their own contributions to the problems. Hans accepted that he was seeing old ghosts in Janet’s face, blaming her for the “stuff” he’d brought with him from his past. She realized she was playing out her own lifelong habits of martyrdom and peacemaking to the detriment of herself and this marriage. He refocused his attention on his attitudes and behaviors. He accepted that it is his choice, moment by moment, how he functions in relationship to Janet. She realized there was no “bad guy” here. Her dysfunctional relationship habits were engaging perfectly with the issues Hans brought to the marriage. She determined to change herself.

⁹ As we said in Chapter 1, there are certainly marriages where the abuse is so severe and the partner so undeniably unwilling to participate in growth, that the only sane option *is* divorce. In that case, the partner willing to do the work of mining will find the treasure buried even in this situation.

A few weeks later, Hans called to say they were paying for some friends of theirs to come to our next workshop! The leader of a marriage support group they attend told us that Hans and Janet were transformed! They were enthusiastically sharing with others the concepts they'd learned that were restoring their love. In Janet's words, "We like each other again!" Their marriage has become a springboard for profound healing and personal growth. They are mining the field of diamonds in their own back yard!

What changed? Hans, as do most men whose marriages become troubled, had been focused on changing his wife. After all, she was the problem. Janet, as do most women who are with "hopeless" men, was sure Hans was the one who needed changing. After all, he was the problem! (Sound familiar?) If they divorced, however, instead of leaving the "problem" behind, they would each carry with them the same relationship baggage as they had brought into this marriage. When Hans changed the focus of his attention from Janet onto his own behaviors and when Janet began to concentrate on changing her own patterns, magic happened. They are becoming the SoulMates they had hoped for when they married!

The same process is unfolding with Chris and Erica, George and Carmen, Steve and Kathy, Tim and Julie, Steve and Dena, Eric & Debra, and many others. Like Hans and Janet, they are finding, with some surprise, that they married their SoulMates after all!

The magic isn't in my office or in the workshop. I can name others whose attention is still firmly glued to the wrongs being committed by their partners. They remain unhappy. Each one is waiting for the wife or husband to change so that the marriage can be good. Each is still convinced that his or her happiness is at the mercy of the mate. Some got tired of waiting. They have settled for a lifeless arrangement or they divorced. I wonder if they think their real soul mate is still waiting for them "out there".

It is time to expose the myth that is stealing the happiness of too many! Be it children's fairytales, deodorant advertising, song lyrics or movies, we are being bombarded with the lie that our happiness depends on finding the perfect mate. The repeated soul mate theme creates a cultural belief system that causes many to question their choice of spouse and others to be even less confident of making the "final" commitment to marriage. But success in marriage does not primarily depend on the partner chosen. Although my choice is certainly important, finding my SoulMate is less dependent on the person I choose and more dependent on who I am in that relationship. There is a greater chance of success when most of the elements are within my own control. Everyone is capable of changing himself or herself. No one is capable of changing another.

This means there are many men with whom I could build a successful, SoulMate marriage. There are many women with whom Jim could be blissfully happy. (Well, maybe just happy. I choose to reserve "blissfully" for his relationship with me!) One of the things that causes SoulMate love to thrive, however, is the commitment between one man and one woman for life. When SoulMates are emerging from the fertile soil of this marriage, why should I look elsewhere?

You may be thinking, "Why don't you tell me how to change George? (Shirley?)" I'm sorry if you're disappointed, but hear me out. Most embark on a journey to find their soul mate in

another person. Many of us begin marriage believing a soul mate has been found . . . someone to deliver happiness “‘til death do us part.”

The persons who have the greatest chance of success, however, are those who begin the journey with this understanding: “I am responsible for my own happiness. I will use every event, every encounter, and each hurt as an opportunity to learn about myself. I will be fully responsible for my own feelings and behavior. I am willing to be taught by the circumstances of my life. I will learn from others whose lives demonstrate the success I seek. I will become my partner’s SoulMate, and in the becoming, trust that I will also discover my SoulMate in my spouse. The diamond mine in my own back yard will deliver the riches I seek. I choose to mine the treasure for myself, rather than leaving it for someone else to discover.” Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks¹⁰ said, “The most creative and evolved people we know are those who use every situation as an opportunity to learn about themselves . . . with a strong commitment to inquiring into yourself, the universe does not have to use catastrophe to wake you up.”

You’ve no doubt noticed I’m emphasizing the point of personal responsibility quite heavily! The process of becoming SoulMates is, first of all, a journey of self- discovery and self-growth. For the journey to SoulMate love to be successful, it is essential that you be fully responsible for yourself, whether or not the marriage ultimately succeeds. Should the marriage have to end for reasons beyond your control, you’ll have much less baggage to carry with you by fully using the opportunity for personal growth. And, the outcome may surprise you!

It’s never too late to begin this journey. We wasted years being upset that we hadn’t arrived at the destination—a SoulMate relationship—before we had even begun the journey of assuming responsibility for self-change! The conflicts we experienced in the beginning years, however, served as wise messengers, pushing us to find the puzzle pieces that enable true SoulMate love to flourish. Over and over again, SoulMates have been miraculously discovered in previously barren or war-zone relationships as one or both partners chose to begin the journey at the starting point: his or her own contribution to the marriage.

Jim and I savor our life together. We consider ourselves wealthy because we have the great privilege of living, working, and loving together. Our prayers were answered. The work paid off. Our home is full of peace. Our favorite times are just before we get up in the morning and just before we go to sleep. At those times we spoon. Or Jim gently says, “Come here.” (This is his invitation to put my head on his chest with his arm around me.) We talk about our day. We share our feelings. We plan our goals. We support each other’s dreams. We make each other laugh. We enjoy sweet, passionate lovemaking. It is rare for us to be even mildly irritated with each other; but when an issue pops up between us, we are confident that it won’t last long. We will work it out respectfully, fairly, and quickly. We have a low tolerance for anything that disturbs the loving intimacy between us. Neither of us would even consider doing anything that would jeopardize the depth of loving we share. We are truly SoulMates for keeps.

It may seem as though we’re asking you to launch out into space, not knowing where the journey might end. Angre’ Gide said, “One doesn’t discover new lands without consenting to

¹⁰ Hendricks, Gay & Kathlyn, (1992). Conscious Loving, p. 6. New York: Bantam Books.

lose sight of the shore for a very long time.”¹¹ If you haven’t already, I challenge you to begin the journey. If you are willing to learn, to grow, to replace broken down relationship tools with gleaming new tools, and willing to stop demanding that your partner change and instead assume responsibility for changing yourself, you are about to embark on the diamond mining adventure of your life! Welcome to the growing number of couples who are staying and finding that the completed SoulMate puzzle reveals a romantic photo of the two of them embracing, surrounded by a field of diamonds!

**“A great marriage is not when the ‘perfect couple’ comes together.
It is when an imperfect couple *learns* to enjoy their differences.”
(Italics mine)
Dave Meurer¹²**

*“If you won’t plow in the cold, you won’t eat at the harvest.”
Proverbs 20:4*

¹¹ Hallmark Cards, Kansas City, MO.

¹² Meurer, Dave, (2000). Daze of Our Wives. New York: Bethany House.