

THE 20 YEAR DUMP

(Written by a SWAP participant called "Brave Heart")

This short story was written intermittently over a period of 4 years. As I grappled less with the “how” of the breakdown of my marriage and became more acutely aware of the “why of it”, I grew exponentially and so did this little story.

I met my x husband in a torrent of desire, both of us having come from unsatisfactory liaisons with others. We had instant attraction, an enormous amount of fun, liked to do the same things, loved music of all kinds and shared similar interests. We traveled, we entertained, we made love, we laughed often. He became involved in my family and I in his. Things were pretty wonderful for the first 10 years. The last 10 did us in.

In the heat of passion he told me he loved me but in other ways he found it difficult to express love. He seldom touched me or kissed me without wanting it to lead to sex. As newlyweds, he introduced me to people by my first name and not as his wife. Many times when referring to us he would say I, instead of we. That hurt but I got over it. The need to feel loved, particularly by one’s husband is a primary emotional human need.

At times when I hoped that he would stand up for me on various issues with others, he took a neutral role.

I felt that he was emotionally unavailable. I always felt he kept a part of himself hidden from me and I told him I would knock down his brick wall, brick by brick. I had unresolved issues in the area of trust with men and needed him to talk to me and reassure me that whatever insecurities I had, were unfounded with him.

“Leave your baggage at the door” is pretty unrealistic. We all have baggage.

I would like to tell my readers that this is my story – I would not be presumptuous enough to try to denigrate his.

We didn’t know how to discuss our marital problems without fighting. Issues would come up after the consumption of alcohol. He would brood from time to time and I wasn’t able to get him to talk about it. There was little give and take or understanding on either of our parts, of how the other person was feeling. After a while we both began to withdraw.

We had two methods of communication. Important issues were either dealt with in humour or not at all and then it was truly not funny.

Our age difference was a factor as well. He was 30 when I met him and I was 40. When we met I was at the height of my sexuality and our sex lives were unbelievably full and satisfying. Then I went through a physiological change in my body – through menopause. My libido dropped and my desire was not what it used to be. The lack of trust that still existed for me then became larger than life. My infrequent sexual needs coupled with the fact that my husband became even more emotionally unavailable, led to a downward spiral in our sex lives and in our marriage. Our absences from each other sealed the deal.

When we did have sex, I was no longer satisfied and after a while I felt used, taken for granted and unappreciated. My suggestion to seek counseling fell on deaf ears.

We moved out of town to where my children lived but he continued to work in the city and had a part time apartment there. Although I was shocked and devastated, and am still experiencing the emotional remains of that time four long years ago, it is no wonder that the much younger woman with whom he worked provided him with such succulent bait. Being an enthusiastic fisherwoman, I wish the recreational fishing industry could come up with something similar for catching salmon.

It was a *Foggy, February, Friday* morning and after a *four* day work week in the city, my husband was home – oh goody – how I had missed him!! We had agreed to live apart 4 days a week for the opportunity of enjoying a more rural lifestyle, closer to our real estate opportunities at the time, closer to nature, closer to my kids, closer to his retirement.

He and I were standing in the kitchen and I was about to suggest something special for dinner when he said “I DON’T DESIRE YOU”. Thinking he had read my mind about a food he disliked and knowing that wasn’t it, I clutched the kitchen counter and said “WHAT – what does that mean?” And away we went.

When I finally landed back on terra firma and was able to breathe again, I instinctively knew there was another “HER”. Hello “Divorce”.

We spent the few following weekends when he came home from work, crying and I reverted to being a child who knew she was about to be abandoned. I begged and pleaded, cajoled and became hysterical, broke things, swore and got on my knees – actually got down on my knees, pleading for another chance for our marriage. Nothing worked! I do recall though that some of our special dinner candles were missing – I wondered if he had anticipated a power outage in the city – LOL.

He was gone and I went ballistic.

After 20 combined years of living together, it was over. After 20 years of working hard to achieve what we had accumulated including getting to know one another, and what I perceived to be a small measure of our success, 2 homes, a boat, a healthy bank account, family, people who cared about us and us about them. A shared sense of humor and an occasional bolt of lightning in bed, it was over. The marriage was a bust.

We sold everything and I moved to the city where he had previously lived during the week, and I never saw or heard from him again, other than through our lawyers. Neither did my children or most of the friends we had shared our lives with. Any attempts on my part to contact him resulted in ever more personal loathing for myself, as on every occasion I was rebuffed.

For three years hence I sank into a bottomless pit of depression. I sat in the armchair I had previously sat in with joy, after choosing the fabric and having it made, and I wept and I wept and I wept. I could not listen to music with words.

I blamed myself for not doing better, not being better, not giving him what he wanted. What he had failed to give *me* was no longer credible in my mind – it was all my fault. At the same time that incredible angst took over and I was full of hate and revenge and also pity and disgust at the mess we had both made of our marriage. We were not the only ones involved. Our friends and family also experienced heart rendering sadness because of us and for us.

Ok we had problems – the “marrieds” who don’t are few and far between. It is not easy to live with another person for many years when you are not on the same wavelength, particularly if real communication had been lacking from the start. I know of one couple whose dedication to each other is unparalleled – it’s a rare and beautiful thing. So we need to work a lot harder at keeping marriages together by being more open and far more communicative. Tell each other what you need way before it’s too late - be nice about it.

Time has passed and I no longer weep in that chair in quite the same way. I am still sad when I think of what we had once been to each other, but I am also no longer devastated.

So after many disastrous months I sought help of the psychological kind.

Anything to help ease the pain and keep the tears at bay. I went to several psychologists, healers, spiritual readers, etc. I took courses on marital breakdown, how to cope, what to do next, how to rebuild self esteem, ad nauseum.

One exercise that helped immensely was to meditate. I followed the guided meditation on CD included in Alannah Jantzen’s book “The One Minute Meditation Technique” and found unbelievable relief in the way she presents her methods. This encouraged me to find answers within myself, rather than out in the world – it helped!!

One memorable attempt at reassembling my shattered life was to attend a “Boot Camp”. It involved swallowing fire, walking a plank 30’ in the air, crawling blindfolded on the floor with 200 other displaced people, in order to let our “inner child” loose. I ended up sneaking back to my car under cover of darkness and escaping at 2am.

It is not necessary for one to be insane to live on the edge of insanity. It is probably far more reassuring to be labeled one or the other. At least you know where you’re at. The only thing I knew and know now for sure is that as human beings, the need to survive is at the very core of our experience. Although I wanted to finish my life many times, I was not able to. In the end I knew it was not because of my children, not because of my mother, sisters or my best friend, not because of the disappointment and heartache I would have caused those who knew and loved me. It was because I wanted to live and to love again. I was still afraid to live but more afraid to die.

In my attempts to keep my new reality from consuming me, I spent a fantastically large amount of money. In trying to shut out the demons, I spent money that I could not even recall spending. A little of this prescription drug to calm you down and a little of that liquid courage to cheer you up, and whatever happened in between, resulted in financial disaster.

This forced me to again look for work – something I had not done in several years. Having a small business in our home sufficed at the time but now I was in trouble. The realization that my age was a factor in securing the type of employment I had easily accessed in the past was shocking!

Throughout all of this, my true passion in life – the thing I love doing most became obscure and lost in the dimension in which I was living. I am a creative person, have always created something and have been relatively successful in my ability to sell it. Mosaic stained glass is my passion. It is the one thing I can get totally lost in and come out feeling that I have again found myself. It’s kind of a personal lost and found. For a short time I was able to rent a studio and

when that was no longer available, my sheets of glass sat forlorn in their boxes, waiting patiently for me to lovingly pick them up, dust them off and create again. Studio space is at a minimum in my city but the glass beckons and I will again give rise to my creativity.

I truly wanted to have clarity in my life but my demons kept arriving uninvited. I knew these were thoughts that new age thinking purports you can overcome, but it didn't compute that way for me. Have a thought, recognize that it's negative, manifest another thought – make it positive and immediately chuck the negative into the bin. Didn't work for me. Nope – for me it was have a negative thought, ponder it and then regurgitate it - over and over again until it becomes your own personal nightmare.

If you are fortunate enough to have children, to have loving, supportive family and friends to help grease your walkway to another life, you are halfway there. I don't really know if I could have made it without the support of my daughter and her family, my Mom, my best friend, my sisters and other family and friends who did their best to alleviate my pain. I fiercely hung on to my human life rafts. Other people disappeared. A great learning experience arises here – those people who aren't there for you in the turmoil of your darkest hour ain't true friends and never were. One person who I regarded as a friend told me I was “too high maintenance”.

In the words of Hugh Prather “I need other people, not in order to stay alive, but to be fully human. Unless there is someone to whom I can give my gifts, in whose hands I can entrust my dreams, who will forgive me my deformities, my aberrations, to whom I can speak the unspeakable, then I am not human. I am a thing, a gadget that works but has no ashes”.

So I thought I was ready for dating. I was very lonely and very unsure of myself as a woman. This was the first time in my life I had truly lived alone. I was scared shitless!

My first encounter with a man on a romantic or let's say physical level was a disaster. The man had more baggage than I and although my first instinct was to try to help him – I just couldn't. Then there was the much younger man thing. He told me I was sexy, we made love like there was no tomorrow and he was very, very good at it. In my mind he reinstated my womanhood. At the time I didn't know that I was the only one who could do that for myself and that this was one of my life's hidden contradictions. Unfortunately the man lacked morals. Although I was told he was separated from his wife, he was in fact married and still is.

To date, the last stab at the proverbial dating conundrum after divorce, was with a man whose wife had committed suicide a year earlier. She suffered a mental illness so repugnant that she took her own life. I felt so badly for him and respected that he had cared and looked after her for years prior to her death. He was a “lovely man”, an educated professional, a good conversationalist, had a beautiful boat, (another passion of mine is the sea), was very kind to me and after a short time, told me he loved me. I found out that my sixth sense was still operating at full throttle when I suspected that I was not the only woman in his life. He confirmed it.

I have to, at this point, mention my Doctor. He helped me immeasurably. He gave me medications to assist me in that time of need, but not without an end date. He gave me his ear and his shoulder. He told me he would be really pissed at me if I allowed my mental state to reach it's climactic end. I will always be grateful to him but unfortunately failed in showing him that.

I referred one of my more memorable “dates” to him with a pure intent to help the guy – and me of course. The guy couldn't get it up which was about the last thing I needed to deal with, so I

handed him over to the Doc with strict instructions to “fix him UP”. Unfortunately, Mr. X and I are no longer, but poor Doc has him for life.

All right already, no more men – for a while anyway.

Writing this is a cathartic experience for me but I also want to impart my story to my fellow women (is that an oxymoron?) who may be going through a similarly traumatic time in their lives. To tell you it’s ok – you’re not a freak, you’re not alone and you WILL make it back.

There are stats on us blindsided, abandoned women. The statistics vary but apparently it takes a year for every 4 you were married to “get over it”. So 20 years equals 5 years of recovery. In my personal experience, this statistic is pretty realistic. Do not be deceived – it takes time and you must take yours in order to recover. Hearing “get a life” is not helpful. Everyone I knew was astonished as to the level of incongruity I seemed to have reached. I was a strong, smart, opinionated and hard assed woman. What the heck was wrong with me?? Don’t allow anyone who hasn’t been in your shoes to make a judgment about you or how you are handling this life altering experience. Everyone wants you to “get over it” so that they can get you back as you were, but you will never, ever be the same. Accept it, go on and hope that they will too.

Oh and watch your body. My body and I experienced a total differential of 40 pounds over a 3-1/2 year period. 20 off at the beginning and 20 back on recently. I had bags of clothes marked “too big”, then “partially too big”, then “partially too small” and then “too small”. Talk about completing a full circle, never mind having “nothing to wear” at any given time. The “too big” are now in no way interesting.

Now let me tell you about my bed – a place in which I found amazing solace when the nightmares of my day ended. I suppose that should be daymares but it’s all relative isn’t it? A mare is a mare. Yes m’am.

When choosing a mattress – give it your all – spend the dough to get the best you can. If you have to sleep alone – do it in style and comfort. Going to bed was and still is such a pleasure. At first it was my escape but gradually my bed became the most comfortable piece of furniture I own. It is the Taj Mahal of my life at the moment. I will not have a TV in my bedroom but it’s full of books, fluffy pillows, soft music, candles and incense. And that’s for me alone. Now I wonder if I could sleep a wink with someone else in it but I’m not totally averse to trying.

So how do we go on? We find we are worthy, creative, loving, beautiful, able and extremely *desirable* creatures. In time we do “get over it”. I still have no idea how many years that totals but it does get so much better with each passing day.

We come out of the fog, we pat ourselves on the back because we actually made it through one of the most horrific experiences of our lives – one that resembles death, and we’re proud of ourselves again.

Finding solace in yet another woman or man - such a repetitive story these days and in such astounding numbers.

It’s far easier to believe that this new person will be “the one” than to face why the last “one” didn’t work out. The roar of sexual excitement and the promise of heart pounding testosterone again coursing through one’s circulation must dull reality. But hey it’s definitely titillating.

In attempting to address why so many older adults are abandoning long term marriages for new partners in shocking numbers today, the subject of menopause in both sexes arises. The fear of no longer being wanted, the fear of aging, of losing one's external beauty, translating into self rejection, plays a role in this difficult time in our human natures. The belief that finding someone new and younger will make us feel desired, youthful and beautiful again is, in my opinion, an unrealistic expectation and played out over the long term, just doesn't work. Many, many people believe that this will save them.

What I have learned through all of this is that "being in love" is an illusionary, euphoric experience that has a relatively short shelf life. After the bloom has worn off and as a couple - when you face real life with all its uncertainties, trials, tribulations and joys, is when your true mettle is tested.

I cannot stress enough that open communication on every level, is the key to a successful marriage and without it love withers and literally dies on the vine, so talk – talk lots!! Find a workable way for one person to truly hear the other. I believe a marriage based on truth and honesty can survive anything!

I have also come to the realization that despite everything that went down in a negative sense in our marriage, we as individual human beings, had never been as close to Nirvana as we had come together. No one can ever take that away.

Don't give up, stay awake, life is good – certainly preferable to the alternative. Go for it – you can do it – I'm almost there!