

Chapter 1

Til Death Do Us Part

*Go to your bosom; knock there, and
ask your heart what it doth know*

William Shakespeare

If you were not seriously thinking about the state of your marriage, you wouldn't be holding this book. Are you taking stock of your life? If you look around, you may notice there is a stereotype in books, movies and people's general attitudes that the woman is the one who gets left alone. She is alone not by her choosing, but rather the man in her life has chosen to leave her. Now this woman must pick up the pieces and deal with it. She is often viewed as the victim. She is not who this book is about. This book is about women like you and me who decide to leave and deal with the consequences in a responsible manner. We are not the victims in this scenario. We are choosing joy and this is a radical thought, thus negating the existing stereotype.

It's the Moments that Count

People will think or even ask if there was some traumatic event that led us to this irrational decision. Did he beat you? Did he cheat on you? Did he lose all of your money? These are the common inquiries and of course are legitimate reasons to leave, as our society would, I'm sure, agree. But what about the subtle putdowns, the forgotten Mother's Day gift, the forgotten Valentine's card, the empty Christmas stocking, the ongoing choices he makes, putting you second, third, or worse, last on his list? These examples may seem trivial compared to physical abuse or infidelity. But think about it — these are the small events and expectations that make up your everyday life. Our whole life is small things. As it is said, "It is not the days we remember, it's the moments." And if these moments are filled with unkind words and indifference, it causes the subtle depletion of your soul over time until we finally realize these small moments are not so trivial. This is when your soul begins to die, your desire for life wilts away and you begin to forget what its like to have someone love you, care for and appreciate you. The worst part of all is you begin to not love yourself. You begin to believe you are not worthy of being first on his list. It is unlikely that you've woken up one day and said, "I'm bored of my marriage, I think I'll leave." Instead, you wake up every day empty and without love, until finally destiny calls to you in some way to wake you up and allow you to believe in yourself again.

I can give you an example of a moment in my marriage I will never forget as long as I live. I was late with my period in the month of June. The funny thing about this story is my first thought when I took the pregnancy test was immaculate conception? Because we rarely had sex. Anyway, there I was already a mother of two beautiful children and I had longed for a third child since my youngest started preschool. He was now finishing first grade. So you could say I was pleasantly surprised at the sight of a positive

pregnancy test. However, I got the shock of my life when I told my husband. I assumed he would be happy about the news or at the very least be supportive. I was wrong. In that moment, I think God was giving me a message I was supposed to hear with my heart and my gut, because when my husband looked at me blankly then frowned at the news, my stomach turned and I felt hollow to my very core. He then proceeded to ask me how that was possible and what I was planning to do about it. He stated, "I was going to buy a sports car," as if my news had dashed his latest plans. Now this little story of a moment in life could be considered trivial, but the truth that I faced in that moment was hardly so. He might as well have just said, "I don't love you," because it was the equivalent or even worse than hearing those words. He didn't speak to me for the rest of the weekend. I got the silent treatment. But as it turned out, I miscarried and I seriously believe this event happened to show me something about my marriage that I was refusing to see. Fate gave me a hit that summer — albeit a painful one — and still it took me a couple more years to see it, but finally I did face the truth. In that single moment, with one expression I learned my marriage was a lie. It wasn't infidelity, or stealing but something more subtle. Something much easier to put away in the corner of my mind, a private moment no one has to know about. I revisit this story for you to think about and encourage you to face your truth because that is why you are holding this book. You believe in love for yourself and for others. You are not the victim. You're not buying the myth that marriage is a struggle and it's supposed to be difficult. How difficult should it be? Should you die inside while trying to hold your family together? Should you ignore the moments of truth? Or should you take a chance on life and live the only one you have?

Taking Stock of your Marriage

In retrospect, I describe my marriage as an airtight container with no room to move or breathe. The air was growing staler every year. I had to escape from that box to save myself and grow in this life. I know why I wasn't happy. I can reminisce on certain events, people and unfulfilled needs that all contributed to my unhappiness. However, when you are in the middle of the storm (or the calm), it is not always so obvious where these feelings are coming from. For example, maybe you only hear, "I love you," once every two years or worse, you have to ask if you are loved. On a larger scale, perhaps your partner wasn't happy when you told him you were pregnant, as in my story. You don't ever forget these disappointments. All small events, words and moments spent add up to this whole thing we call life. Do you like the whole picture you see? If not, why not? Contrary to the cheated or abused wife, the neglected wife is quietly dying from the inside out. Some people with their careless comments or criticisms are witness to this; your soul being chipped away slowly. But you and your heart are the number-one witness to your life, to this quiet pain that is not defined as domestic abuse or infidelity but something much more subtle and just as devastating in the long run — neglect.

I remember another enlightening moment. My epiphany was questioning how could some people be so lovable when I was so unlovable? This epiphany came to me when I had mistakenly been talked into taking a family trip to Las Vegas when my children were eighteen months and three years. I was told by my husband that it was a family friendly place and would be fun for the kids. Unfortunately, as soon as we arrived, he had meetings and tee times booked for the days we were there. He certainly should have gone on his own. In the evenings, we stayed in the room mostly and ordered room service. So I was left to take care of two babies in a city that doesn't sleep. My parents were also there. When the kids, my parents and I decided to take a little train ride (public transit), my three-year-old daughter became fast friends with the nice couple sitting next to her. She liked to talk to everyone at that age and was curious about people. However, my father told my daughter to be quiet and not to talk so much. She continued to talk to the nice couple, ignoring her grandpa so that he had to repeat in a stern tone for her to be quiet. It hit me right there — why should she be quiet? Who was my father to tell my daughter when to speak? Meanwhile, during this short interaction, I couldn't help but overhear the woman a few seats behind me talking on and on about her cats as if she was the only one who ever had cats in the world. Her audience was a nice man who hung on her every word, almost cooing in response to her. I thought to myself, how can this woman go on about her cats and I can't get anyone to listen to me? Everything I said was inappropriate, too loud or not smart enough. But I knew that wasn't true. I knew I had just as much to say as that woman but that I didn't have the man to care enough to listen. And then I decided this would stop, at least with my daughter. I said to my father, "Just let her talk. She wants to talk." I knew then there was something missing in my life. It made me feel deeply lonely that a stranger on public transit reminded me that I was missing love in my life. Does your spouse value what you have to say?

Is your marriage a team effort or a one-man show? If you consider your marriage a one-man show run by you alone, then how can this be successful? For example, are you only getting lip service with such statements as "Sure, I'll help you out...but I have a tee time for Saturday..."? The golf course wins again. Mutual respect should also be part of the relationship for it to be considered a success. Take a moment and ask yourself, what are some of the words you would use to describe your marriage? Make a list. Did any of the following words come to mind: team, support, love, sex, respect, priority? If not, why not? Dig deeper and take the "What is the State of your Marriage?" quiz at the end of this chapter and find your score and what it means.

Also, separate the two roles your husband plays in your life: one as father and one as husband. If your husband is a good father and consistently displays devotion, reliability, caring and availability to your children, then that's excellent and will continue to be of great value during separation. But is the father of your children still your lover or is he a neglectful husband? Being an excellent father does not preclude his love for you and should not make you a prisoner to his neglect. My husband wasn't interested in me sexually after we had the children, but I still needed to be touched. Sex is a basic human need. My needs were not only being ignored but I was repeatedly rejected. If I asked for it I would get a response like, "Don't bug me, I'm tired." This kind of neglect

and rejection can make a woman feel ugly. I thought maybe there was something wrong with me. I wasn't beautiful enough. In retrospect, this makes me so sad for the years I gave him and the neglect I suffered. I never should have thought of myself as ugly — what a waste of time. When I am now in the presence of my lover, I feel beautiful no matter what. My hair could be greasy and I'm in sweats, but I know he thinks of me as his beauty queen. I have that sexual confidence no woman should have to live without. Sex is one of the most important ingredients to a healthy marriage, and I mean sex without games. When sex is used as a tool to gain power by either partner, it loses its charm. If you are like I was and are married to your children's father but are missing a lover, it is fair to say you are missing a huge ingredient to a happy relationship.

Do not place all of the emphasis on your head and logic while evaluating your marriage. Logic is not what makes us live our best lives. Knowing that you deserve better is the first step to recognizing you need to change your life. In the book *When Life Changes or You Wish it Would*, a man who decided to become a priest later in life discusses how common it is for people not to feel entitled to happiness especially when it comes to ending a relationship or a marriage. There is a certain amount of guilt in wanting change; in wanting more than the mediocre.

It's easier to put up with it. It's easier to continue on with the status quo then to question it. It's easier to resign ourselves to acceptance. It's human nature to feel we must be grateful for what we have rather than complain about what we don't have. But when we are grateful only for material things and refuse to complain about the basic human needs such as being loved, we have missed the point. The next time you hear yourself complain about your marriage followed by, "But...", ask yourself why you are justifying your unhappiness.

Also, I have just finished reading a memoir entitled *If I am Found Missing or Dead* by Janine Latus. It is Janine's life story, which includes the tragic murder of her sister by the hands of a boyfriend. But what I'm most struck by in this book is Janine's denial of her own abuse. She suffers at the hands of a stranger, a boyfriend and then a long-term husband. She stoically refuses to tell anyone about the abuse. I am not criticizing her because I have done the same thing. I was not open about my loneliness in my marriage either because there is a shame in sharing truths about abuse or neglect. However, Janine, in spite of the emotional terrorism dished out by her beloved, still questions whether leaving him is the right thing to do. And this is a great example of what I was saying earlier where it is hard to be objective in analyzing your marriage and life in general because you are in the middle of it. You start to believe your marriage and the abuse — no matter how obvious or subtle — is normal. Janine is also an example of a woman who is not listening to her instincts and lets logic and reason interfere with her decision to put an end to her husband's abuse. As Janine ponders leaving a fifteen-year marriage, she thinks about what she will have to sacrifice to obtain her freedom. The risk of loneliness, the loss of fortune, the possible fighting over her daughter. But she quickly comes to realize that what she has in this moment does not resemble security or safety for that matter. So what is she giving up to gain her freedom? What are her logical reasons for staying in an unhappy marriage?

Janine's thought process serves to remind you that these decisions take time and what is obvious to other people is not always obvious to us. Living every day with abuse or neglect blinds us by its familiarity. It takes away our ability to see our own present and future. This is when we must rely on our sixth sense because it doesn't let us down. It doesn't lie. Still, give yourself the time and consideration required to make your decision. Eventually, you will reach your last straw. You will have your epiphanies and 'aha' moments in time, and will then come to your decision. In the meantime, try to be self-aware and refrain from making excuses for your spouse's bad treatment. Making excuses is our logic interfering with our instincts. Begin with these small steps and you will come out of your haze to gain clarity to see the truth. The bottom line is no one can judge your life except you. No one can tell you to be happy because you go on exotic holidays or because you drive a nice car. These material things do not make a loving relationship nor do they account for the lack of it. You have to decide if this is a marriage worth saving and make this decision not only from your head, but most importantly from your heart and your gut.

Let's ask the question again after careful thought, do you feel entitled to happiness? Remember, marriage is not a prison cell or a life sentence. Also, carefully consider the effect your marriage is having on your kids. So many people believe the other fallacy that "we must stay together for the kids..." But ask yourself, what are my kids learning from our relationship? As Shmuley Boteach reminds us in his book *Shalom in the Home*:

"In a marriage where there is constant fighting, especially when the fighting takes place in front of the children, the children internalize pugnaciousness and chaos. They become unsettled kids. And in a marriage where there is no passion the children become sullen and withdrawn, sunk into themselves like their parents. They don't know how to express emotion because they haven't learned. But in a marriage where the parents not only get along but love each other deeply, the children drink from a nourishing fountain of affection."

It's surely food for thought. What are we teaching our children? So few of our children are learning the meaning of love and too many are learning to expect disappointment and conflict, or worse, indifference. Let's change this beginning now.

Also, don't underestimate the detrimental effects of marital stress on your own physical health. It is proven in scientific studies that emotional stress does bad things to our bodies such as lowering our immune system, making us more prone to illnesses and infections. I personally found in the long run, I am so much healthier now that I have removed myself from the stresses of my marriage. This is not a dress rehearsal. This is our one shot at life and we should embrace it with love and passion, but that is only possible with our health! Taking stock of your life, specifically your marriage, is not an easy thing to do and may take years to accomplish. It requires telling the truth to yourself and listening to your inner voice — one of the most difficult things we humans must do to live an authentic life.

True Love and your Life

A good way to evaluate your decision to leave is to refresh your memory on the meaning of true love. Do you believe in true love? If not, why not? What role does love play in our lives? I believe in love and that probably doesn't surprise you. The biggest influence on my decision to leave my marriage was the absence of love. True love is real, very powerful and we need it to survive. It is far more powerful than money. As Rhonda Byrne reminds us in her book *The Secret*, love is the greatest power of all. We emit the highest frequency to the universe when we love.

However, some folks do not believe love is necessary to make a marriage a success. I, for one, wouldn't want to live with the people in that camp. Non-believers tend to look at marriage as a business partnership. Of course, that is true but it's so much more than that. You could have a partnership with your best friend or a colleague. Is that all it is then? I knew someone who used to say there was no such thing as love and that marriage is a business, and love is for poets and musicians. How cynical, I used to think and then I found myself in that very situation. Where was the love I thought I had found? Was it an illusion? Was it simply charm and circumstance that led me down the aisle? Was it that I had given up on the poet? I, for one, never wanted to give up on love and when I finally learned my lesson — that I would not find love in my marriage — I knew I had to leave it. But if you don't believe there is a special someone out there for you, why did you marry your husband? If there is no such thing as true love, then consider your first love as loving yourself. I am in no way suggesting you should leave your marriage for someone else, as this rarely works. However, leaving a marriage to love yourself makes sense because while in a loveless marriage, we learn how not to love ourselves. We are taught every day by our partners how to put ourselves last, put ourselves down until we believe every last cutting word. We finally believe we are not worthy of basic love. Start believing in yourself today and in the meantime you can ponder the meaning of true love for you as an individual. In your final departure from this loveless relationship, you give yourself at least a chance to find love.

To refresh your memory on the meaning of love and the role it plays in this world, just watch the news when there is a natural disaster somewhere in the world, and see how many people are willing to aid that country. I am always impressed by our human ability to merge together for the greater good in times of need. Check out a program called World Vision where millions of Americans and Canadians foster needy children from Africa so they can eat, go to school and provide for their families. You could also do my favorite thing and watch a few movies about love stories that are impossible to resist. Love big or small; it's all of equal importance. If you don't have love in your life, how can you give it to others either on a larger scale or in your everyday life? At the end of this chapter, I have made some movie recommendations. Choose at least a couple to watch alone and think about the role of love in the characters' lives. The plots vary in subject from sacrifice, destiny, lost love to secret love, but they all remind us of the power of

love. Remember, these stories are inspired not just by someone's imagination, but by someone's real experiences.

Now consider this: if true love came knocking on your door, would you answer it? Have you been reminded of your own experience of true love by watching these movies? Have you experienced an unstoppable love with powers beyond yourself? Have you ever known a person you are inextricably drawn to by a connection spanning all facets of your life? In a spiritual sense, true love is believed to be blessed by divine intervention. Why did we meet that certain someone and what were the circumstances? Is there someone you know who fits this description either from the present or the past? Does this describe the love you've had with your husband? If your answer is yes, you are lucky and maybe that love is not dead. Maybe you see you and your husband as lead roles in one of those love stories. Thinking this over carefully and identifying where your marriage went wrong should be your next step before ending the marriage. But if this were never the case and you know in your heart of hearts that you and your husband never shared the power of true love, then it is time for you to consider moving on because everyone deserves love in their lives.

In your contemplation, look for signs. I was holidaying with my family when I had made up my mind that I was going to end the marriage. One afternoon, we were sitting on the beautiful sandy beach when this older woman caught my attention. She was body surfing, laughing and full of life. I was admiring her energy and thinking, *I hope I'm that happy when I'm that age*. For some reason, I caught her attention as well. She walked right over to me, boogie board in hand as I sat with my husband on the beach. She struck up a conversation. She told us how she had lost her husband a few years ago and how she was starting to live her life again. She said that although he was a good man, he was not the love of her life. This hit me like a ton of bricks as I had been struggling with my decision for many months. I knew the man sitting beside me was not the love of my life and I also knew who the love of my life was. This woman, or "angel," I like to call her, gave me a message. The message was don't wait a whole lifetime to live the life you want. Don't stay with someone you don't love. Don't wait to truly live until your twilight years. It was as though she knew me from some other lifetime. She seemed to read my soul and give me an answer to a question I didn't even realize I had asked. This otherworldly incident just shows you it's important to pay attention to signs like this when at a crossroads in your life. Don't let your logic disregard messages from strangers or other unusual occurrences. Look for signs and you will see them. Feel in your gut what you really want and you will feel the truth.

Now, I will ask you again, if true love came knocking on your door, would you answer it? I mean, really answer it? Would you gather up the courage and go for it, no matter what you're in the middle of because it will be the end of your life as you know it? Get ready for the beginning of the rest of your life. By the way, there is no mistaking lust for true love. You will know the difference with certainty. You won't be able to find true love without taking a risk. Give yourself the chance to have it, experience it in all of its pain and glory, starting with loving yourself. If you stay in a loveless marriage, you are depriving yourself of one of life's miracles.

Is it okay to tear apart your family because you are unhappy? Only you can answer that question. Where do you want to be in two years or ten years from now? Again, only you can answer that question. But consider love and where it fits in your marriage right now and then consider love and where it will fit in your life in your future. Consider the connection between love and happiness. Can you have both? Is it possible to have one without the other?

Perpetuating the myth that marriage is a struggle does not lead us on our authentic path. We are only justifying a bad marriage. Let's stop normalizing unhappiness in relationships. Why should we say it's okay to be in an unhappy marriage, because it's such a struggle anyway? Who decided it was a struggle? And if it is a struggle, how much of a struggle is acceptable and how much is too much? Is it too much when he puts you down regularly or is it too much only when he uses his fist to make a point with you? Hopefully, you're seeing why accepting your marriage as a struggle is wrong.

Maybe historically the marital institution was a tool of survival, thus we came to believe that it was okay to be unhappy in it to serve the greater purpose. In our modern times though, we are still making excuses for struggling marriages. It's the only way to get the bills paid, we hear ourselves say. But we couldn't afford these things if we lived in two homes. Let me ask you this: are you operating an agricultural business or is this your life? Yes, you will have to compromise some of the comforts of the marital institution but having the confidence and believing you deserve more will make the compromise worthwhile in the long run. And think about it — the long run is equal to your remaining years on this earth and that's a long time. Also, I have a hard time understanding how it is humane to remain in a marriage because you made a vow until death do you part. Think about those words. It does sound like a life sentence. Until death do we part is preposterous in this modern age. We know our decision as a young adult may be outgrown in our middle years. Why should we be harshly judged for that or even ridiculed by referring to it as a "mid-life crisis"? Conversely, maybe our decision will stick and we will still be in love with that partner we chose so long ago. Nevertheless, a lifetime is a long time and we should shake the notion that our partner choice in our early twenties is a must keep until our nineties, especially when it isn't working. It will take courage to face this truth as it does to face any truth in our lives. Because honoring these vows at any cost for a church or anything else is compromising not only ourselves, but our children too.

Choose joy! If you believe you are entitled to happiness, start making changes now. Don't forget to believe in love and in yourself. Remember, crossroads in life appear when we must examine what has value to us and what allows us to be who we were meant to be. The point is finding out what matters to you — is it the big house, the car or the exotic holidays? Is it inviting the chance of true love into your life or is it role modeling for your children the possibilities of love? Think about your health and what you are teaching your children by staying. Listen to your instincts. Choosing to break up your family is one of the most difficult decisions you will make in your lifetime. But once you have come to it, it will be with certainty; certainty that you are ready to embrace the changes, the challenges and the joys of starting a new life. Remember, you are not a

victim in your own life but a hero. Will the world come to an end if you seek happiness? Of course not! Make your decision and start your journey today.

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