

“Love and marriage, love and marriage, go together like a horse and carriage.”

As obsolete as the horse and carriage are these days, love and marriage have continued to survive. And like everything else in life, the institution of marriage has evolved to meet the needs of a changing population.

In this issue of *FOCUS*, you'll see how some couples survive today's marriage pressures, learn about the chemistry of love, find out how BSU can help married couples with problems and how society has legally framed the definition of marriage.

One thing is sure. Whether it's love and marriage or a horse and carriage, you can't have one without the other for a successful journey.

For the Love of Marriage

By Melanie Threlkeld McConnell

Say the odds were 50-50 that the house you believed was well-built could collapse around you and your family. Would you still move in, get comfortable and add on? Not likely, right? Yet people are willing to take the

same risk with their emotional and financial well-being when they marry. Why? The need for most people to bond with a partner for life outweighs the odds that the marriage won't survive, experts say.

“Some people are still very naive about marriage,” says BSU sociology professor Patricia Dorman. “They go into marriage thinking it will solve a lot of problems, and what they find out is that it doesn't solve them, it creates them.

“Basically we're ill-prepared for marriage.



"But I think more people are becoming more realistic about what marriage means and so they go into it with a little more consciousness," says Dorman.

Like any fragile structure, a good marriage should be built with a level foundation and no shortcuts on construction. Regular maintenance is a must. Marriage, like houses, may be different colors, designs and sizes. Common now are long-distance, common-law and mixed-race marriages, as well as couples who marry for a second or third time. It's not necessarily the blueprints that matter, marriage experts stress, but the quality of materials and construction that go into building the marriage.

"I think when you find successful marriages you find people who stand side by side," Dorman says. "There is not that kind of domination that the old patriarchy comprised."

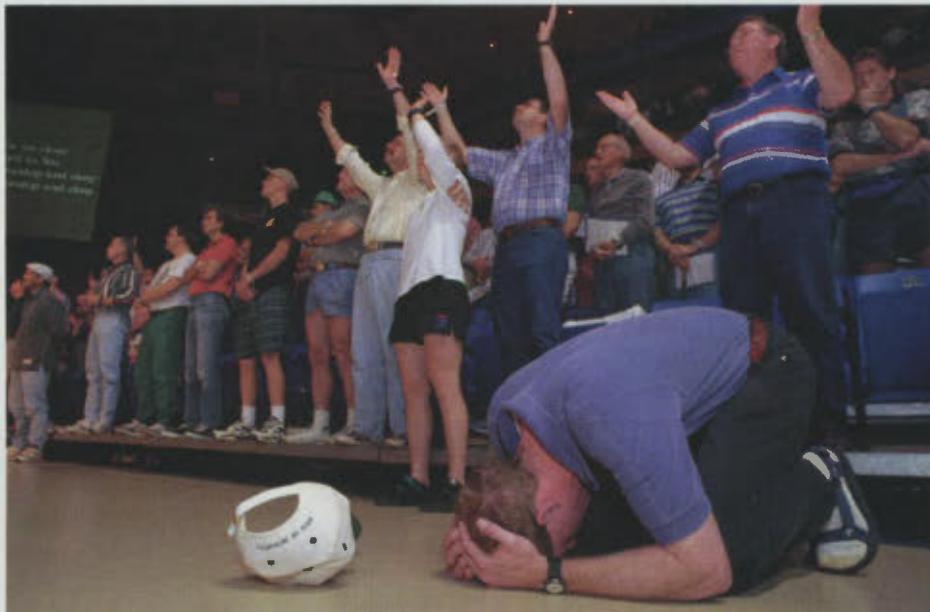
Establishing and maintaining a solid marriage is harder than people think, no matter how good their intentions, says Liz Boerl of BSU's United Methodist Students. Boerl is a minister who provides marriage and premarriage counseling to students.

With divorce rates at 50 percent, society is raising generations of children who see divorce as a potential end product of a marriage. "The students have that desire [to stay married]," she says, "but I don't think our society prepares us for commitment." Many young married couples have difficulty establishing their own marital routines and identities, she adds, often slipping back into the roles that look like their parents'.

That was cause for concern for 29-year-old Chris Dreps, a former BSU student who married Darrell Early, 28, last September. They wrote their own wedding vows and pledged to be each other's "equal partner in life." The couple lived together for nearly two years before tying the knot.

"I didn't want [our wedding vows] to be traditional and I wanted them to represent who we are," Dreps says. "I couldn't see myself pledging to obey someone."

A child of divorced parents, Dreps was determined not to follow the footsteps of her mother who prior to her divorce led a traditional life of wife and mother. It was a role, Dreps stresses, that wasn't right for



CHRIS BUTLER/IDAHO STATESMAN PHOTO

Spiritual help at being better husbands and fathers is part of the Promise Keepers creed.

her mother nor would it be for her.

Though Early's parents have a model marriage, he says, enough of his friends and their parents are divorced to make him aware of the consequences, which has helped prepare his generation for the emotional impact.

"I think that our generation has it slightly better because we have our own identities and we're not dependent upon some other person to define ourselves," he says. "I think our parents' generation suffered from this identity problem, because if there was a divorce it was a huge life-shattering emotional experience where the woman was left essentially

without an identity."

Dorman says women started questioning traditional marriage roles as a result of the "awakening that the civil-rights movement and the women's movement created." The need to have a voice came as almost a backlash against the 1950s when women gave up their post-war jobs and moved out to the suburbs, she says.

"Women had just begun to group together," she explains. "At the close of World War II, the government did a 180 degree turn on its propaganda and said [to women], 'Now go back home to your kitchen; some man needs your job.'"

"There are still a lot of women in the United States today who subscribe very dearly to the old tradition," Dorman adds. "And that's fine. That's their choice."

Women aren't the only ones redefining their role in their marriage. The recent formation of men's groups such as Promise Keepers and the Million Man March have men re-evaluating their relationships with their wives and children and learning to be better husbands.

"All we're saying as Promise Keepers is that 'men stand up and take the place that God has commanded us to be,'" says Richard Froshiesar, a regional field representative for the group. "And what that means is we don't beat our wives into submission like a lot of theories that are

'I think when you find successful marriages you find people who stand side by side.'

going on out there right now about Promise Keepers. That's not the way it is. It's about how do we treat our mates. We're to love our mates as Christ loved the church."

"If you look at the state of marriage in today's society, the one out of two divorces is still the norm, and that's the norm in the church as well," says George Halliwell, a field ministry representative for the Boise chapter of Promise Keepers. "There's a crisis in the family in America today, an absenteeism of the fathers among children. And what Promise Keepers has done is said that when a man becomes a Promise Keeper, one of the major promises is in his relationship with his wife and his children. It's emphasizing the relationship of father to the children, to be there for his children and to honor and care for his children not as an obligation but as a real joy and privilege to have children. It really brings the family together. And I think it's going to have a great impact on what has been a rising divorce rate even in the church."

Couples and marriage experts agree that finances, including relocation for jobs, continue to put the biggest stress on marriages. Working more hours and additional jobs to maintain a desired lifestyle means less time nurturing a relationship, they say.

"One out of three Americans move every year now, which was not the norm 20 years ago," says Halliwell. "There was more stability in the community. And now both husbands and wives work. There's still more of an expectation on the part of men that even though the wife has a part-time job, she also is expected to have the full responsibility of the family cooking and cleaning. That puts undo stress and pressure on the wife of the family."

So-what's the secret to a successful marriage? Don and Doli Obee, married 56 years, laugh when asked the question. Respect for each other. Good health. Sharing. And limiting arguments to no more than 30 seconds.

"I figured if you can't reach a decision in 30 seconds there's no use fighting to make it linger longer, and the more fighting you do the more remote you are from reaching a logical decision," says Don, 84.

"It's the same formula it's always been," Early says. "You've got to communicate, you've got to look at life with a little grain



It took a chance meeting in Italy to reunite the Andersons for life.

'Avoid Rodeo Queens'

By William C. Anderson



urs was a marriage made in heaven. Not that there weren't a few potholes in the road to Marital Bliss.

It was back in the Stone Age when I first fell in love with the pretty redhead. We were both attending Boise High School, and as we were walking to school one day, Dortha slipped and fell in a mud puddle. As I came to her rescue, Cupid's arrow zapped me right in the derriere. I was hopelessly smitten.

We went steady in our senior high year, but after we had started school at Boise Junior College we were physically separated. I had taken a newspaper job in Gooding; Dortha had gone on to finish her college at Washington State.

Due to a series of misunderstandings, we split up. Dortha was less than euphoric at my trying to emulate the Bohemian life of Sartre, and told me to go get a life. I did. I married the Baker, Ore., rodeo queen.

This ill-advised union was thankfully short-lived, bearable mainly because I was off in Italy fighting the war. It was there in Rome where I again met up with Dortha, who was doing her bit as a Red Cross worker. In a scene right out of *A Farewell to Arms*, we both decided we would only be happy going through life together.

Following a quick divorce after the war, I married Dortha at a military wedding. We have now had 47 years of wonderful wedlock.

What has been our secret for a good marriage? A deep commitment to one another. As such, together we have licked the many adversities that crop up in every marriage over the years. And we have spiced our relationship with a lot of humor and understanding.

My one bit of advice to our young grads for a salubrious and healthy marital relationship?

Stay away from rodeo queens. □

BJC alumnus William Anderson has written nearly 20 books, including BAT-21, and most recently, How to Survive Hospital Care.

BSU helps couples with marital woes

By Edie Jeffers

Imagine a young married couple — let's call them Joe and Patty. They have three kids, ages 2, 4 and 7. Theirs is a stressful life compounded by their jobs and a full load of classes at Boise State.

Although this may sound like a recipe for disaster, similar situations are a reality for many of BSU's "non-traditional" students, people who may be balancing marriage, family and work along with their education. And like a growing number of non-traditional students, Joe and Patty may need to turn to the BSU Counseling Center to help them maintain this balancing act.

"Most marriages [of this kind] are under great strain going to school, trying to make a living and raising kids," says Jim Nicholson, director of the Counseling Center. "I certainly see some healthy marriages that are under stress; we can help them put it back together again."

Although the Counseling Center is not set up for long-term therapy, the counselors there may see a student over an extended period of time. The center, which is accredited by the International Association of Counseling Services (IACS), provides comprehensive services for students with six or more credits. The staff includes five licensed counselors, three psychologists, including Nicholson, and several master's-level interns. The average number of sessions per student is four and the style of counseling is solution-focused intervention, which means the therapy looks to find the person's strengths and mobilize personal and external resources.

Students may visit the counseling center for short-term therapy when contemplating entering into a relationship, deciding when to have children, or for a whole range of other relationship issues. But many of the clients seeking extended help from the center are working through the process of divorce. "The center helps students through the whole process of the breakup — dealing with divorce, custody issues, and possibly remarriage and examining what went wrong the first time," explains Nicholson.

The students who visit the counseling

of salt."

"And choose your battles," Dreps adds. "Decide what's really important. There are some things that just aren't worth fighting over."

"I think [in our generation] there was a greater sense of 'til death us do part,'" says Doli, 81. "Not this, 'Well I can always get a divorce if it doesn't work.' I think there probably was a deeper sense of going into something together through thick or thin instead of 'I've got to be happy.'"

"Another thing," Doli adds, "and this is a difference between generations, we didn't have a whole lot of material expectations. We still don't. We live very simply and we always have. We've never had more than one car."

Both college-educated, Don spent 30 years teaching biology at Boise State, starting when it was still Boise Junior College. Doli stayed home with their two children. They filled their free time with horseback rides, camping, hiking, skiing and traveling around the world. They've been members of a book club for 25 years.

But Doli acknowledges that times have changed and even her own daughter could not live the life that she had.

"Being the non-money-making part of a team didn't bother me," she says. "It is not fulfilling for our daughter. She is somebody in her own right. She and her husband both teach at Kansas State and theirs is a very good marriage, but on my terms I don't think she could cope. She'd be bored."

• Successful and traditional marriages like the Obees may be hard to find 50 years from now. Many of today's couples wait

longer to marry while others struggle to redefine marriage and their respective roles in making it work. And there are plenty of resources on the market to help couples keep their marriages going.

Counselors and marriage experts are filling bookstores these days with self-help books such as *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus; Getting the Love You Want; and Keeping the Love You Find*, which offer couples ways to improve their communication and get what they want out of their relationships.

But despite the odds, marriage is still popular. In Idaho, the number of marriages rose for the sixth consecutive year, increasing 3 percent from 1992

to 1993. Because the pace of the population growth was higher, however, the marriage rate actually fell from 13.6 to 13.5 per 1,000. The national rate for the number of marriages in 1993 was 9 percent per 1,000, down from 9.3 in 1992. Much of the difference between Idaho and U.S. rates can be attributed to the high number of non-residents who marry in northern Idaho, statistics show.

Self-help books, blueprints and marriage counselors aside, marriage takes work, experts emphasize, and no one plan works for every couple. As author John Gray says in his book, "We have forgotten that men and women are supposed to be different. As a result our relationships are filled with unnecessary friction and conflict. ... When you remember that men are from Mars and women are from Venus, everything can be explained."

Or, take Benjamin Franklin's simple advice: "Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, and half shut afterwards." □



Don and Doli Obee say that having fun together is important to a successful marriage.

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