

# OPINION

The Okanagan Sunday, January 24, 2009



Jack Acres and Allison McNeill



# A perfect relationship

**W**e all know people who have divorced or split up. Many people say couples are opting to separate instead of staying together whether they are married or living together. I find that disturbing for a variety of reasons, mostly because it is a message to the next generation.

A good relationship is incredibly rewarding, and a perfect one is attainable. I know because I had one for almost 33 years, which just ended with my husband's death on Christmas eve.

Our relationship was perfect for us, as we are both strong willed, very social, very passionate and just the teensiest bit opinionated.

We evolved together through many personal, business and financial struggles as well as the typical struggles that affect relationships.

We became stronger through having a daughter with Down syndrome 21 years ago, and the experience has guided what I do for a living, those who I help and volunteer for as well as befriend.

No one gave us our relationship, we earned it. We loved, argued, laughed, cried, were frustrated, exhilarated, disagreed and agreed and loved each other with passion our entire time together.

We earned our perfect relationship, which I have found out since, is rather rare.

After being in love with my husband for almost 33 years, almost married for 30, having his children as my step-children and having four of our own, I have some information to share.

Being married and parenting are two of the hardest jobs I have ever taken on. The goals are always changing, as are the needs of the children, our aging parents, the home chores, the finances - everything always seeming to take a huge portion of the day.

Then there are one's own needs - spirituality, health and exercise, socializing, education, caring children around the town for sports and activities, professional pressures, volunteering, walking your dogs and tending the garden.

Why is there never enough money for everything, no matter how much you make?

What happened to the simple relationship of just the two of us?

During the early, frantic years, with young children, it's really important to remember what drew you to your life mate and how much they meant and mean to you in the eye of the storm. Hopefully, your want to stay together and your love and respect for each other is part of every day, however difficult to carry that off.

Think back to the beginning of your relationship. Remember how simple it was?

You may recall how you couldn't wait until



ALLISON  
MCNEILL

## *Whose Challenge Is It Anyway?*

the phone or doorbell rang and he/she was asking you out. Remember when you got butterflies in your stomach when you held hands?

I'm not sure what attracts us to our life mates, although I have heard a lot of theories.

I'm not sure what keeps us together other than perhaps faith in marriage, each other or the hope that situations will get better to allow us to keep the promise we made at the altar.

Sometimes, there are real reasons to not stay together, such as abuses, alcohol and drug addictions and much more.

I am still not sure (even after all this time) how two people from different families, maybe different cultures or parts of the world are supposed to live together in harmony.

Maybe we are not meant to, as I know firsthand that many couples disagree and argue; some behind closed doors, some loudly in front of friends and family. Supposedly, that is a no-no to some, even if it feels really good at the time.

I do know that a good relationship takes hard work from both parties in order to stay interested and able to combat the many challenges we all face.

Add in having financial woes or pressures put on the relationship by the onslaught of a half dozen children, and some may not make it through.

I am not sure that these challenges are greater when one of the children has a developmental disability, but we were told that the odds were against us staying together.

We know quite a few families who have a child with a disability, and we also know quite a few who have no challenge. In all cases, everyone has their own pressures and challenges and chooses to accept or overcome them as well as they can.

We hope that people try to work through their challenges and get to the other side as stronger and better people. In many of our lives, it is not the end result that is desired, but the journey.

It's important to remember that when in the midst of a crisis.

I have asked many of our friends who have a

child with a developmental disability if they find their lives harder than typical folks. Just as in typical families, the answers are all over the map.

They may have increased financial pressures if one parent stays at home as primary caregiver. Some share that it seems to come down to how strong the couple's relationship is and what supports there are around them.

Some of us make it through these challenges, and some don't. Some can accommodate other people's likes, needs and habits and some cannot.

The stats for staying together for life are not good. Some opt out for a variety of good reasons, and some get into a better relationship on the other side.

Parenting skills may often be different, which can also put pressures on a relationship.

In our house, we can differ, but the basic philosophy is the same for all our children. We provide a safe nest, where they are loved, encouraged and respected, challenged, supported and made responsible, we feel we have done the best job we can do.

If my husband and I found a laugh together on a cloudy day and remained passionate about each other, our family, our community and world, then we figured we were with our soulmate.

How many of us can find good in bad or take on a challenge when you feel you just don't have the strength?

Why not take on the challenge of making your world and relationship the best it can be and run the risk of being outside the stats? How about staying in or creating a good or even perfect relationship with your partner and having the result of enhancing those around you?

By seeing your successful relationship become so very much more rewarding, others may take your lead and do the same.

In our case, we were able to keep our vows, unfortunately ending with "until death do us part."

Although my soulmate has left physically, he lives in my dreams, and I will always be married to him.

His love for life lives on through our children, our family and friends and the wonderful memories we all hold together.

I feel so very lucky to have had him for almost 33 years and to have been able to share a perfect relationship with the perfect partner for me.

**Allison McNeill is a mum to four, one of whom has a developmental disability and step-mum to two. She owns a communications company and is Kelowna's 2009 Woman of the Year. Email: info@misscommunicating.com.**