



Chapter One

Young and In Love ... and Totally Naïve

If you were to ask any of my friends what has defined my young marriage thus far, they would probably say “chaos!” We are not your typical couple. I got the flu on our honeymoon, and a week later my husband had emergency double knee surgery. Frankly, I think that set the tone for our union for several years to come.

I had these grandiose dreams about marriage, which were not entirely unlike the dreams of any other young woman. I had my entire wedding planned out by the time I was twelve, right down to the flavor of the filling in the cake. (It was raspberry, and it was delicious.) Every love song on the radio evoked that first dance.

I have heard many girlfriends complain that their fiancés weren’t particularly interested in the wedding plans. I must have lucked out big time, because my fiancé, Scott, was just as excited as I was. When I got stressed out, he took over. He showed the

Adventures in Holy Matrimony

same concern over the flowers on the cake as he showed over his favorite football team's next big game—and that's saying a lot for the guy. I found my dress, and everything fell into place. The niece and nephew I was about to inherit agreed to be in the wedding party; the church was something out of a fairy tale; and most of my family members were coming in from New York for the big day. Definitely a dream come true. No reason to believe our marriage itself would be anything but!

That's the problem with most people, though, isn't it? They equate a beautiful wedding with a beautiful marriage. Sure, you can have a beautiful marriage, but it's not all wine and roses. I can't tell you how many people tried to warn us that it wasn't always going to be a dream come true. We just didn't want to listen. Anyone who told us anything other than what we wanted to hear was promptly shut out and dismissed as trying to ruin the great thing we had together. (Which wasn't giving our pals much credit, since none of them would ever purposely steer us wrong!)

We should have listened.

It turned out that married life was a trial by fire. We went from whispering sweet nothings into each other's ears at the reception to practically wringing each other's necks in the bedroom.

And you know what? It was necessary. It still hurts sometimes. We have so much learning to do. But we're fully committed to each other now—and in love with each other again—which is more than I can say about the state of our union a year ago. Duking it out and refusing to quit are exactly what saved us, and I believe that can save just about anyone who is willing to put up a good fight. Not a fight with each other, but a fight together against the many forces that conspired to divide us. And

YOUNG AND IN LOVE ...

as you'll see in the coming pages, there were many, many potential divisions. Perhaps even some of the same ones—whether quirky or devastating—that are stalking your union right now.

In today's world, many people bring a lot of background brokenness to marriage. We sure did. I believe people need to see that even a man and woman who look good on the outside but are messed up on the inside—even people who have made some stupid, sinful choices—are able to overcome those stumbling blocks through the power of Jesus. During my many dark, dark days, I went to our local Christian bookstore looking for something—anything—that would walk me through my messed-up state and messed-up marriage. I found lots of marriage books—good books, many of them—but I just couldn't identify with the perfect, smiling couples on the cover. These books looked like the hardest thing the marriage counselor/authors had encountered was an argument over whether to get the Lexus or the Beemer. What would they know about the marital ramifications of bipolar depression? Pornography? Fatherlessness? Poverty? Sexual abuse?

I left the bookstore, feeling defeated. But we serve a great God. In the years to follow, God brought us something much better than a book. We were blessed with amazing friends who were willing to offer us painfully honest renditions of their own stories, and their successes—and their challenges to us—became our inspiration. That's why I believe none of our own struggles will be in vain. I'm trusting God that our stumbling blocks will be stepping stones for other searching couples.

Where We Come From

Perhaps like some of you, my husband didn't have a Beaver Cleaver-type of existence growing up. He comes from a broken home and never knew his biological father. His adoptive father

Adventures in Holy Matrimony

died when Scott was only three. My mother-in-law worked at a feverish pace to keep food on the table for Scott and his older brother, but sometimes there was no food. My husband can recall many nights of eating only cereal for dinner because there was nothing else in the cupboard. He grew up in poverty, yet he can look anyone in the eyes and tell him he had a wonderful, happy childhood.

He swears his mother never yelled at him. He says that when she was angry, she actually got quieter. For the most part, Gloria was a pretty docile woman, and Scott never felt threatened. He talks about midnight games of Tag with family and friends and time spent at the beach. The town he grew up in was very much “in the boonies.” Everybody knew everybody else’s business, and the nearest hospital was a good twenty miles away. Kids graduated from high school and got married or took a job in a local factory or grocery store. It was more likely that kids from my husband’s side of town would get married young and never move out of the area than it was that they leave and go to college. I’ve always had this fascination with big cities and a desire to move to one. My husband looks at me like I’m growing antennae out of my forehead every time I bring it up.

Scott wasn’t exactly a “player,” either. He had a few girlfriends but nothing really serious. He was brought up to respect women and to be sensitive to their needs. So he never played the field or tried to score with as many chicks as possible. He wasn’t about impressing his friends, and I believe him when he says this, because it takes a big man to admit to something like that. He didn’t want to be intimate with someone he wasn’t committed to for life, so when he came into my world at the ripe old age of twenty-seven, he was still a virgin, and I was utterly amazed that twenty-seven-year-old male virgins existed.



YOUNG AND IN LOVE ...

My life was considerably different growing up. I come from an intact family. My parents have been married for almost forty years. I have memories of my father taking me sledding in the winter around our area of Pennsylvania and then to a restaurant for hot chocolate with extra marshmallows. I spent summers at my grandparents' house in New York, hunting for seashells with my cousins at Jones Beach. My dad drove my mother crazy by standing in the middle of the front yard during thunderstorms. She'd stand at the screen door and scream at him, "Are you NUTS? Get in this house right now!" He'd light another cigarette and blow her off; when she was out of sight, he'd pull me out into the yard with him and tell me about the storm clouds casting a murky gray over the sky. It's amazing neither of us ever got struck by lightning.

I don't have a lot of happy memories, though. A lot of my childhood memories are sad. My parents had a lot on their plates when I was little. They were caring for one of my grandmothers, who had become senile and physically unable to take care of herself. One of my older brothers suffered from Cystic Acne, which caused temporary skin disfigurement, and that made him a target for bullying as a teenager. A number of other unfortunate circumstances had a grip on our family. Back then, we didn't talk about any of it. None of it had a name, but it set the tone in the house. An overall sadness permeated the air.

What really ruined those years for me, however, was the sexual molestation I endured at the hands of a neighbor. When people ask me how long it lasted, I can't give them an exact time frame. I don't know for sure, but it happened over the course of years. I can't be certain how old I was when it began, but in my earliest memory, I am three or four years old. I didn't ask for what happened to me. I don't know of anyone who would. But I never told anyone at the time. And as I grew, I never simply "ran

Adventures in Holy Matrimony

away” from it because it filled a void. I grew up feeling very displaced, and the other kids seemed to value me about as much as they’d value a piece of garbage on the street. As disturbing as it is to admit it, I didn’t run away because at least at his house, I was the focus of somebody’s attention. As a result, even now in my late twenties, I’m still learning the difference between sex and love, as well as how they go together.



As a teenager, I was at total odds with my mother. I always knew my family loved me, but we didn’t talk much. I was going through a lot of unresolved issues because of the sexual abuse, but my mother told me to “just forget it happened.” She meant well, but I couldn’t “just forget” something that so shaped me and defined my early years. I believe we all have a tendency to try to keep a lid on the things that hurt us. I don’t fault her for that anymore.

We fought ferociously, sometimes to the point of throwing furniture at each other. I said, “I hate you,” more times than I could count, even though I never meant it deep down. My mother didn’t understand me, and I didn’t want her to. My mom had her own issues to deal with, but she was so focused on the people she had to take care of that she neglected herself. I didn’t understand that as a kid, and I held it against her.

Like many abuse victims, I was ashamed of myself, of the abuse, of the struggles I was going through. I wanted her to love me and accept me so desperately, but I knew she could never grasp the things I felt inside. I preferred that we keep our distance from one another.

It was a lonely time in my life, so I did the only thing I could

YOUNG AND IN LOVE ...

think to do—I acted out. I tried to kill myself, but I didn't want to die. I wanted someone to understand the level of sadness and desperation I had reached. I wanted somebody to love me and give me permission to feel hurt and violated. I also started cutting myself. I carried a box cutter in my backpack, and when I felt especially stressed or sad, I cut my arms and legs. It was somehow strangely relieving, yet I can say in all honesty that I did that for attention, too.



There was one light that came into the midst of my blackness during those years. I accepted Jesus as my Savior when I was thirteen. It was an earth-shaking experience. I felt genuinely changed and renewed. But I have come to believe that the true Christian life requires bringing the darkness to light. As hard as we try to keep things covered up, God is constantly seeking to let everything be known. Even though I was just a kid, I gave my heart to Him with pure expectations, but I was still gripped by fears and sorrows and unhealthy behaviors that felt all too natural to me. God was trying to pull back the curtain, but I slapped His hand away and chose not to trust. I was just a kid.

And there was the sex thing, too. Sex was love, and love was sex. The two were not just connected—they were virtually the same thing. I did a lot of things I'm not proud of. While attending a youth group retreat in high school, one of the speakers said, "Imagine your soul is like a daisy, and every time you have sex with someone outside of marriage, you're ripping one of the petals off. Eventually, you'll have to rip the leaves off too, until you're nothing but a stem. That's what premarital sex does to you." That was an accurate, heart-wrenching description. I gave a lot away during my teen years. Purity is easy to lose, and healing can be hard to come by. I'm thankful that we serve a God

Adventures in Holy Matrimony

who makes all things new, in spite of imperfect fools like me. When I was intimate with somebody, I felt crushing shame; but if I wasn't intimate with somebody, I felt unlovable. Strangely enough, as I would come to find out, I wasn't being "intimate" with anybody. I was engaging in the cheap, rip-off version of intimacy, trading truth for lies.

I guess it's pretty obvious by now that Scott and I both entered into holy matrimony with enough baggage to weigh down a commuter jet. Especially on my side of the plane.

From Zero to One Hundred in Sixty Days

Scott and I started seeing each other in January 1999. We made our little romance official on Valentine's Day. By March, we were looking at rings. His friends were ecstatic. My friends wanted to have my head examined. And I don't blame them, looking back on it now.

In their defense, I suppose I did seem pretty irrational. I had gone away to college in Nashville, Tennessee. I wanted to be a songwriter, and my parents wouldn't agree to let me just move down there for a year or two. The only way to move there right away was to do so under the guise of pursuing an education. I didn't care about my education. I didn't think I needed it. So when I gave up on pursuing my education, nobody was surprised. That was how I worked back then—if it wasn't interesting to me, I didn't bother with it. (This is just one of the lovely patterns I was going to have to break to make my marriage work.)

I moved back to Pennsylvania and in with my parents, who were none too pleased to have me there. My mother stood in my doorway on the day I flew home and said, "If you think you're going to sit on your butt and do nothing, you've got another thing coming. You go in there first thing tomorrow

YOUNG AND IN LOVE ...

and tell your boss you need full-time work.” So I went back to the nursing home where I had worked part-time in high school, and I groveled, and I got full-time work. I shocked my parents by turning into a complete and utter workaholic. I not only worked my normal hours, but I picked up extra shifts and helped coordinate special functions. I didn’t like my job, but I was earning loads of money, and that was all I was concerned with. I had no expenses, apart from a small student loan. I told everybody that I would move back to Nashville permanently by the following summer. There was something kind of romantic about the whole idea.

All I did in my spare time was write songs. I was obsessed with my music. Through a friend at work, I met a guy named Brian, who was also a wannabe songwriter. He played the guitar too, and we had good chemistry, artistically. I worked all day, went drinking at night, and jammed with Brian into the wee hours of the morning. I spent a lot of time feeling really hung over. When I left Nashville, I didn’t know what, if anything, I believed about God anymore (ironically, this was partly due to attending a conservative Christian school there). On top of all this, I began to spiral into a deep depression, partly fueled by my dark lifestyle of running from God and partly by an as-yet-undiagnosed clinical condition. I pulled further and further away from God the longer things went unaddressed.

That’s the state I was in when Scott met me—depressed, drinking way too much, light-years away from God, and completely self-absorbed.



My friends knew how much my music meant to me. Most of them weren’t Christians, so they didn’t see a big issue with

Adventures in Holy Matrimony

my alcohol consumption, but they were concerned about my depression, which I had dealt with all through high school, too. They thought that moving back to Tennessee would be good for me since I missed the city and my college friends so desperately. And I seemed determined and driven to make a go of the songwriting. I had made a lot of great connections and had a number of opportunities on my plate. All I had to do was move back to Nashville.

I remember the look on my best friend's face when I told her I was getting married. It was shock and horror, followed by hysterical laughter. Juli didn't like Scott anyway. It was nothing he did wrong; she just knew my track record with guys. I picked jerks who treated me poorly, and she was constantly on the defensive, on my behalf. She eventually grew to love Scott, but that didn't mean she was on board with the idea of me becoming his wife. It seemed to her like I was abandoning the dream I had had since I was twelve years old, when we used to worship the ground Amy Grant walked on. Not to mention the fact that I was so young, and she had hoped that I would finish my degree first. We argued over dinner at a local eatery, and I, of course, told her she was crazy and that I knew exactly what I was doing. After all, I told her, Scott would move back to Nashville with me after we got married ...



Scott and I were barely together for three months when we had “The Nashville Discussion.” Scott said he loved me, but he didn't like the idea of having a wife who would be constantly traveling. Also, his family was here in Pennsylvania. His friends were here, and his job was here ... everything he had ever known was here. He didn't understand why I couldn't pursue my career from home.

YOUNG AND IN LOVE ...

But, really, he did understand. He was a music buyer before we met and had spent quite a bit of time in Nashville, dealing with record and distribution companies. He knew the ins and outs as well as I did. It was almost a given—in order to be successful, you had to be at the center of the action. And we both knew the action wasn't always healthy. Scott was more concerned with the ties that bind, and those ties were firmly knotted in central Pennsylvania. He said, without really saying it, that I had to decide what I wanted more, because I couldn't have both.

I loved him, and I couldn't imagine living my life without him. I wanted to commit my life to him and have children with him. So I fell into the all-too-familiar trap of believing, as many women do, that I could change his mind. I figured once we tied the knot, I'd be able to convince him to pack up and set our circus down eight hundred miles away. I didn't believe for a minute that I was trading in one dream for another. I was just adding an extension onto the original dream. So we forged ahead with the engagement ring and eventual wedding plans, all the while dodging phone calls from friends pleading with me to reconsider.

I would never advise anyone to get married as young as I did. Scott was older and much more settled; I was at an age that is normally reserved for acting crazy and not being tied down to anything, including a spouse. I was so immature, but I didn't realize it. That's what my friends tried to tell me, but I ignored them. They thought I should enjoy my youth, and I thought they needed to grow up.

Despite it all, the wedding was going to go on.

Charles Manson or Marriage Material?

Like a lot of techno-savvy people our age, Scott and I met

Adventures in Holy Matrimony

online. I was nineteen years old, had dated a succession of jerks, and was recovering from a breakup with yet another one of them. I was typing away, happily minding my own business, when I received an Instant Message from a complete stranger. He said he “liked my profile” and wanted to know if I was interested in chatting. For the the readers who aren’t knowledgeable about the Internet, let me fill you in. Just because the electronic person you’re chatting with says he is a 6’0” male, muscular, and a successful trial attorney, does not mean he really is any of those things. He could just as likely be a 5’2”, overweight mortician with a really bad comb-over. Or, if you’re really unlucky, he could be a serial killer. There’s no way you can tell, so these are the chances you take.

I was a little nervous that I might be talking to a freak. But I was also bored, and it wasn’t like I was giving him my address and Social Security number, so I humored him. That was in 1998, and we continued to chat for the better part of a year. I was so gun-shy from my past romantic failures; I made it clear I had no interest in a serious relationship—or at least that’s what I told him and what I tried to convince myself of.

One day he asked me to meet him for dinner, and I panicked. I said we should talk on the phone first, so I called him up. It was the most boring conversation I’d ever had. I asked him a lot of really pointed questions: What is your favorite movie? How long have you been a Christian? What is your biggest struggle in life? And he answered all of my questions with a monotone, one-word answer. When he invited me out on a “mini-date,” I felt obligated to say yes, just because I feared sounding rude. I figured we’d sit together in awkward silence over platefuls of pasta, go our separate ways, and be done with it.

The incredibly boring phone personality was great company

YOUNG AND IN LOVE ...

live and in living color. His insanity rivaled my own. He liked to have fun, and he had a twisted sense of humor—score. We shared a basket of bacon-onion-cheese fries and spent hours making the waitresses crazy, wishing we'd finish up and move on. There was so much to talk about, and we had so many interests in common. Scott is the kind of guy who holds the door open for you, pulls out your chair, asks if there's anything you need, and grabs the waitress's attention when you're out of Coke. Call me crazy, but I like that. I'd make a horrible feminist, wouldn't I? Anyway, I've never been a big believer in love at first sight, but I knew I was going to be spending a lot more time with this guy.



It was at a Super Bowl party a week later that I realized he might be marriage material. He introduced me to his throng of friends, and I munched on nachos while pretending to understand football. Since Scott is eight years older than me, many of his friends were already married with children. It became obvious within the first fifteen minutes that he was a kid magnet. He was the only person in the room who was willing to pry himself away from the game to entertain the children at the party (and I now understand what a sacrifice that is for him). I saw serious father potential—something really special. A lot of men would rather have their fingernails ripped off than roll around on the floor with their friends' kids.

I felt a lot of pressure that night to figure out where this new relationship was going. Would it be a good friendship, or something more? The party was held at the theological seminary where his best buddy was attending school, and during halftime Scott pulled me aside and showed me around campus. Alone in the chapel, he asked me what I thought.

Adventures in Holy Matrimony

“What do I think about what?” I asked him.

“Everything.” He said. “What do you think about us?”

It was too early for me to tell whether or not we had a future together, and I didn’t want him to get the wrong idea in case it didn’t work out. I didn’t want to seem like I was leading him on, but I had to admit ... I saw a future. As my mother always tells people, there’s nothing not to like about my Scott. He’s just a nice guy, and everybody loves him as soon as they meet him. I take a lot of pride in saying that. But a nice guy does not a husband make.

There was another interesting thing that happened that night, too. His pals were—probably rightly so—concerned about my spiritual status, partly because I had a smoking addiction at the time. One of them took me aside and told me that Scott’s friends had been praying that he would find a wife. They all felt like he had so much to offer a woman, and as he approached thirty, his search for love sort of became everyone else’s mission, too. I leaned against the counter in the kitchen with folded arms, listening politely as Jon ticked off all of Scott’s good qualities on his fingers. Either they were sick of him and trying to get him out of their hair, or they were genuinely on a mission to “talk up” their friend in an effort to help him find a good woman. But they also wanted me to know that they were watching.

Scott asked me out to dinner later that same week, and I said yes. We became inseparable. We started cultivating love.

I was nineteen.

She Who Pays the Bill Gets the Last Word

I love my mother to death. Many of the things that used to drive me nuts about her when I was growing up have become amusing quirks that give me a good laugh now, but I didn't always feel that way. My mother would have made a great corporate executive. She rules with an iron fist, and what she says goes. She takes flack from no one. Such a personality was very useful when I was a teenager and needed somebody to get me out of trouble at school, but when it came to planning my wedding, we constantly butted heads.

My mom comes from a wealthy family. She had the ultimate fairy tale wedding and the reception was held at a posh New York country club. Good news for her, bad news for me. Mom had certain ideas about my wedding. I'm guessing she had these ideas long before I was even born. She wanted me to have the kind of wedding the New York relatives would talk about on the four hour drive home, yet she didn't want to break the bank. If we had grilled up roadkill and had a square dance for our wedding reception, my father wouldn't have cared. In fact, he would have been grateful that we were saving him money. But my mom had it all planned out, and we didn't have much room to argue since, after all, she was paying for it.

In a perfect world, I would have worn my mother's wedding dress. It was a gorgeous dress, but my mom is about four inches shorter than I am and much thinner, and there was no seamstress on this earth who could make that happen. We decided I would wear her headpiece, and we began shopping for the dress.

Mom used to do some modeling, and she is forever telling me I'd be so beautiful if only I'd lose some weight. She means well, but it is forever a bone of contention between us. I have always said the perfect Christmas gift would be breast reduction

Adventures in Holy Matrimony

surgery, so it was horrifying having to ask my mother to literally stuff my cleavage into those dresses, only to have her poke the side of one of my boobs and say, “I bet that would go away if you lost a little weight.”

I had my preferences. No ruffles, nothing puffy, no hoop skirts, nothing sleeveless, and the less cleavage, the better. And don’t even think about sequins. If it had been up to me, I would have marched down the aisle in jeans and Nikes. I bet that would have given the New York relatives plenty to talk about on the drive home. But that wasn’t to be, and in the end, it was my mom who picked out the dress I wore down the aisle. And it was beautiful. I’ve got to give credit where credit is due.

Scott and I chose October 28, 2000, as our wedding date—a fall wedding. No ice to contend with, but no groomsmen roasting in their tuxedos, either. We loved the idea of having falling leaves as the backdrop to our special day. And when we got back from our honeymoon, the holiday season would be upon us. So we decided on floating autumn-colored candles as the centerpieces at the reception.

My mother nearly dropped dead over the concept of having an orange candle on the table at a classy event. We were informed that we would be having floral centerpieces. Some of our already-married friends suggested various deejays, but my mother wanted a live band. We didn’t want a live band. We told my mother we would be checking out a few deejays, but the live band thing was definitely out. No more than two days later, my mother came home from work with a name and a phone number and informed us that this would be our deejay. Defeated, we pulled out every CD we owned and made up a very detailed list in an effort to avoid as much disco as possible.

YOUNG AND IN LOVE ...

As the days counted down, we struggled mightily with purity. We succeeded at behaving ourselves for a little while, but then, we messed up. I was coming out of an unsettled, unholy lifestyle, but I wanted to have a godly relationship. I wanted to start over, settle down, be a good Christian woman, and eventually a holy wife. But we just couldn't keep our hands off each other. Years later, as I began to pursue healing and wholeness, our decision to have premarital sex would come back to haunt us, but I'll save that for another chapter.

My mother, who remained a virgin until her wedding night, was absolutely paranoid that I was having sex with Scott. She interrogated me every chance she got and lectured me about the importance of waiting. She nearly drove me crazy. I was always telling her to back off and mind her own business. Whether she realized it or not, my mother was my conscience. She intensified the feelings of guilt that I already had, so I brushed her off—but only because I knew she was right.

I knew then—and even more now—that in reality we were making a huge mistake. The culture—and some of my friends—wanted us to believe it was okay, but God told us otherwise. My mother had great wisdom in this area, and we would have been wise to heed her advice.

Maybe I'll drive my own daughter crazy someday, lecturing her about saving herself for marriage. But who knows—maybe I'll plant a seed that grows real purity in her, too.

I'm grateful my own mom at least tried.

The Special Day That Started Out a Nightmare

The night of our rehearsal, I was a wreck. Reality was hitting me hard. At the time, “Butterfly Kisses” was a popular song, so

Adventures in Holy Matrimony

we jumped on the bandwagon and told the deejay that I wanted to dance to it with my dad. Like any popular song, it seemed to come on the radio about every five minutes. That meant I was bursting into tears every five minutes, too. I frequently asked Scott if he thought I was crazy, and he humored me by saying no. I had nightmares about tripping on my way down the aisle, landing face first in a pile of rose petals thrown by Scott's six-year-old niece.

The guy who married us, Pastor Mick, was a wonderful friend. He could sense I was a nut about to crack, so at the rehearsal he did his best to break the ice. He put on a Rastafarian wig and told me to relax in a Jamaican accent. On the first run-through, I nearly sprinted down the aisle. I started to cry when we were rehearsing our vows. I spent large amounts of time in the bathroom.

I was up late that night, getting the last of the favors ready, making sure I was packed for my honeymoon, trying to make sense of what I was about to do. In the hours just before my wedding, my heart raced, and I began to realize that I wasn't just starting a new life but saying goodbye to my old one. It was sad in its own way. I didn't belong to my parents anymore. I was about to be responsible for making another person happy, not just myself. I was about to become my parents, and I was about to face everything that scared the heck out of me when I was a teenager. I couldn't wait to take those vows and fall into my new spouse's arms, but part of me wished that I could curl up under the blankets and be Mommy and Daddy's forever.

I woke up bright and early on the morning of October 28. It was a sunny day, and windy. I didn't want to wake anybody else up, so I just threw on some clothes and drove to the salon. While I was there, I ran into a woman I used to work with who was actually coming to my wedding later in the day. She

YOUNG AND IN LOVE ...

told me about the photographer who did her granddaughter's wedding and how awful she was. She said her granddaughter was suing her for losing two rolls of film and never refunding her money. I asked this woman for the photographer's name and nearly fell out of my salon chair when it turned out to be the same photographer we had hired.

Thankfully, I was with the same woman who had been doing my hair for years. I managed to calm myself down and enjoy my morning. I felt like a princess, which is no small feat for a life-long tomboy like me. When it was all over, I got out of my chair in a button-down denim shirt, a pair of sweatpants and flip-flops with a huge bridal headpiece stuck to my hair. I whipped out my debit card and looked around the salon as she swiped it through the reader.

"Uh, your card was declined." She ran it a second time, but it rejected the card again.

"What?" I grabbed the card out of her hand and dialed the eight hundred number on the back on a pay phone.

I was several hundred dollars in the negative. I was so stunned and upset that I nearly swallowed the receiver. I promised the stylist that I would be back to pay her in full and raced across the street to my bank, where I nearly tackled the first bank teller I saw and breathlessly told her of my dilemma, frantically waving the card in front of her face. She looked up my account and shook her head. There was no mistake. I was really broke! I forced myself not to cry. That money had been set aside for our honeymoon; we weren't going to have to worry about anything!

She printed out a statement, and I saw that I had been charged numerous times for the candy we bought for the reception. The

Adventures in Holy Matrimony

card reader had been malfunctioning that day, so the cashier had swiped my card over and over, reassuring me that it wasn't going through and I didn't have to worry about it repeatedly charging me. But they obviously didn't know what they were talking about, and I wound up paying for the same candy order a dozen times. Sadly for me, it was a Saturday, and there was nothing they could do about it right then and there. Plus, they said they could probably only refund about half of it to me.

There I was, dressed like a hobo about to be married, and I was so angry I was shaking, but I couldn't remedy the situation.

When I stumbled through the door to my parents' home, my mother was in her robe, making coffee in the kitchen. She got a huge smile on her face and told me how wonderful my hair looked. I threw my purse across the room and burst into tears. She came running as I sat down in the middle of the living room floor and sobbed. I stuttered and stammered and told her about my debit card and the crackpot photographer. She assured me that my photographer was reputable (she was a friend of my mom's friend) and told me I would probably get a lot of monetary gifts (in addition to her own), so I shouldn't worry about being broke on the honeymoon. I calmed down and put eye drops in my bloodshot eyes. For all the hassles and arguments we had gone through over those last few months, my mom became my emotional support that day. She took good care of me and saw to it that I worried about nothing.

As she sat there rubbing my shoulders, I realized that all of her suggestions (and even demands) were not an effort to undermine me. They were her way of making sure I had the most beautiful wedding day possible. She had a fairy-tale wedding, and she wanted the same thing for me. On that day, the hassles were over. The big event had arrived, and the arguments

stopped. She saw to it that I had everything I needed. She handled the stressors and coordinated everybody, so all I had to do was look pretty and show up. My mom was a great mom that day.

I'm old-fashioned about some things. I didn't want to see Scott on our wedding day until the doors opened and my father walked me down the aisle. But I snuck in a two-minute phone call to him that morning. He was so terrified that he could barely talk. I told him I loved him and that in just a few hours, we'd be one.

I told him to take an antacid and sit down, too.

Let's Tie the Knot Already!

I sat in the back of my parents' car on the way up to the church, and my mother periodically made eye contact with me in the rearview mirror.

"You okay?" she'd ask.

"Just thinking happy thoughts." I'd smile back.

It was a sea of chaos as soon as I walked into the church, but as I mentioned, my mother became Barbara the Chaos Slayer. She arranged the little bottles of bubbles on the table leading out the door, and she made sure the bows were firmly attached to the pews. Juli, the friend who had told me I was crazy for getting married in the first place, was my maid of honor, and she also took on the job of ridding my life of stress. As we got ready, I stood in the mirror, gawking at the sight of myself in a wedding gown. I had seen myself dressed up like that dozens of times before, at fittings and getting my pictures taken for the paper, but this time it was different. I began to get sentimental

Adventures in Holy Matrimony

and teary. The emotion of that moment was shattered by my bridesmaid, Sue, running past me in her dress, with a bottle of cover-up makeup in her hand, frantically asking if someone would please try to cover the huge tattoo she had gotten on her back in college.

Perhaps the cutest part of my wedding day was Scott's six-year-old niece, Alex, who was our flower girl. She had a little white dress on, and her hair was full of curls. She was my little shadow the entire day. When somebody fixed my hair or adjusted my headpiece, Alex stood next to me, looking up at me in awe. Everywhere I went, she followed, holding my hand. My wedding dress had long, wispy, sheer sleeves that she loved to feel. We went over the plan. I handed her the basket filled with rose petals and made sure she understood that she was supposed to sprinkle them down the aisle as she walked, not throw them in heaps. She nodded in agreement. I told her to walk slowly. She looked up at the strange adults in the room and sheepishly nodded her head. You know what? She didn't sprinkle one single rose petal because she was so nervous but she made up for it by being absolutely adorable.



Everybody gets skittish at a wedding. Even the people in the bridal party—or, as I like to call them, the pit crew—get wound up and nervous. By the time the music started, Scott's niece and nephew were leaping all over the place, my bridesmaids were pacing, Pastor Mick was playing the air guitar (don't ask), and my mother was asking me every fifteen seconds if I felt okay. Much to everyone's dismay, the chapel was on the second floor, which meant Juli had to hold my train and follow me blindly up the stairs. I started walking, heard a thud, and realized I couldn't go any farther. I looked back and Juli was lying flat on

YOUNG AND IN LOVE ...

her face on the stairs, still holding my train.

“Shut up and walk,” she told me as I tried desperately to stifle my giggles.

My father took my arm, and we stood in front of the huge wooden doors, waiting for our cue. He told me not to put my veil over my face, because he was afraid he wouldn't be able to lift it properly. I don't remember what else we talked about, waiting for our lives to change. Everything was a blur, and the world seemed to come to a screeching halt.

Now, I've been to some weddings where the bride looked very serious, as though her face was going to crack, but most break into a huge, glorious smile as soon as they appear in that doorway. It must be uncontrollable, because I did the exact same thing. I caught one glimpse of my Scott at the end of the aisle, and I couldn't stop the joy bubbling up inside. I didn't care about falling on my face, or catching my sleeve on fire while trying to light our unity candle. I had one goal in mind: getting to Scott.

When my father and I arrived at the altar, he kissed my cheek and let me go off to a whole new world.

Scott didn't look nearly as thrilled. In fact, I was expecting him to keel over onto his groomsmen and cause a domino effect. He didn't smile; he didn't blink; he just stared at me while Greg, his best man, kept one hand on his shoulder at all times. I gave him a huge smile. He wobbled and winced but didn't return the sentiment. I didn't see him smile until we couldn't get the unity candle lit, and we couldn't help but laugh. Later on, when the ceremony was over and we were waiting for the receiving line to begin, I asked him why he looked like he was on the verge

Adventures in Holy Matrimony

of death. Had he eaten a spoiled appetizer at the rehearsal dinner? No, he told me. His overwhelming shyness got the best of him, and when he saw the number of people in the church, he got scared.

Pastor Mick, who had done his very best to keep things light-hearted and humorous, talked a little bit about our friendship and the things we had been through together. The great thing about Mick is his transparency. He wasn't concerned with impressing people or putting up a front. He was as honest as a person could be and always willing to share his own struggles and shortcomings with us. We loved Mick, and in addition to his transparency, we loved his twisted sense of humor. But like mine, sometimes his humor came out at the wrong times. We were just a bit horrified when Mick held up a thick piece of three-ply white rope.

"I have a unique wedding gift for you," he said, grinning at us from his pulpit. "It's not your average gift, like a blender or a lamp. You'll probably get ten blenders today, by the way. No, this rope symbolizes your union with each other and with Christ. The Bible says a cord of three strands is not easily broken. I want you to hang this somewhere in your home, so you always remember that with God in the center of your relationship, that cord will never be broken." He handed us the piece of rope. We sniffed and each wiped away a rogue tear.

Mick leaned over, grinned once more, and said, "It's not for you to tie each other up with!"

Partying Like It's 1999

The deejay, who showed up driving a hearse, was set up at the reception hall with his collection of disco hits. The cake showed up in one piece, with none of the icing flow-

YOUNG AND IN LOVE ...

ers smashed. The champagne was on the table, and Scott and I couldn't stop disappearing around the corner to smooch. Most married people can relate to the almost compulsive need to look at their hands right after saying "I do," to see if that wedding ring is really there. There was a lot of kissing, clinking of glasses, and hand staring.

There would have been more dancing ... had our friends not gotten lost on the way to the reception. Mark and Jen were the official keepers of the CDs, but as the limo pulled away and the guests began leaving the church, Jen had to use the restroom. When she came out, everyone was gone. Both of them were from out of town, so they didn't know how to get to the reception. As we frantically searched for them all over the reception hall, they were in the parking lot of the church, hoping someone would find them. They were eventually recovered by a fellow wedding guest who went on the hunt.

By the time Mark and Jen were recovered and brought back to the reception, we'd had our fill of disco. But if you're giddy enough, even disco sounds good. Our photographer was wandering around the building and missed our first slow dance as a couple so she made the deejay restart our music, which meant restarting our dance, so she could jam her huge camera in our faces and capture the pseudo-moment. At the height of the festivities, she disappeared into a back room with him, where they sat at a table, drinking. By the end of the night, the deejay was dead on his feet, and the photographer could barely walk.

The last song of the night was "Unchained Melody," and my husband was with a group of his buddies, talking. I grabbed his arm and said, "I want to dance with you." I don't know what was so magical about that. It was a pretty straightforward sentence, not in the least bit flowery. But Scott remembers it being

Adventures in Holy Matrimony

incredibly romantic, and to this day, whenever that song comes on the radio, he smiles at me and asks me if I remember ...

Some of our friends gathered around us and prayed over us before we left for our hotel. We soaked in their prayers, fully and foolishly believing that life would be easy and carefree. Every night would be like our wedding reception. We'd do lots of slow dancing, and we would always feel that passionate about each other. Our friends prayed that our relationship would grow deeper and more intimate, that we might overcome the obstacles and painful circumstances that were sure to come our way.

But we didn't really believe that we'd confront any. At least, nothing serious. We said we understood that marriage was hard and that it required compromise and perseverance, but we didn't understand the depth of what that meant. We figured compromise and perseverance meant an argument every now and then. We had no idea what was headed our way, and I'm glad we didn't know. I think if we had known, we might have stood each other up at the altar!

It was very late when we got to our hotel. It was the hugest hotel room I'd ever seen, complete with its own wine cellar. We poured ourselves some wine and hopped up on the bed. Oh, God, I thought, this is the most comfortable bed I've ever felt in my life. I just wanted to pull the blankets over my head and go to sleep. I was exhausted. I hadn't had any real sleep in over a week, and now I was expected to have sex. We might have been more enthusiastic about it had we waited to have sex in the first place. But it was "old hat" to us and not particularly thrilling. It was a lesson we had to learn the hard way—God makes rules in order to protect us, that we "might have abundant life." We broke His rules, and it made that night, in particular, less abundant.

YOUNG AND IN LOVE ...

Still, even if you have a less-than-thrilling wedding night experience, you blow it off and assume that the rest of your life together will be glorious. The next morning, my husband and I sat with our families at my parents' home, where they had brunch for us, and we opened our gifts. We were blessed with more than enough money to get by, which eased my mind about the debit card fiasco. We kissed our families goodbye and left for the Finger Lakes in New York, where we had rented a cottage for ten days.

It was on our first vacation as a married couple that reality would slowly begin to seep in.

I Spent Our Entire Honeymoon in Bed ...

It was cold and windy in upstate New York. The combination of cold weather and my extremely weak immune system won out within twenty-four hours. As Scott and I sat across from each other at dinner, I realized my throat was beginning to get sore. I spent the next day—and five days after that—in bed with the flu. I tried to get up and feign enthusiasm for our honeymoon, but I couldn't breathe. Everything hurt, and I was so dizzy I had to steady myself by holding onto the kitchen counter. We got in the car and drove to a few wineries, but once we got there, I was either asleep or too dazed and achy to get out of the car and go on the tour. It was then that I learned what kind of man I had married.

I'll be blunt—if Scott had gotten the flu, and not me, I don't know how I would have reacted. My family has always had a “just deal with it,” approach to illness. Faced with a sick husband on my honeymoon, I might have even been a little ticked off, even though it wouldn't have been his fault. I know I would have been disappointed, and I'm sure Scott was disappointed. But he never told me, not even once. He took care of me, made

Adventures in Holy Matrimony

me tea, made sure I had something to eat, rubbed my back, and told me he loved me. He didn't complain, even as I sat on the couch, looking like death was at my doorstep, watching *Jerry Springer* on what was supposed to be the most romantic week of our lives.

“I have the rest of my life to love you,” he told me, “and I can wait a few days for it to start.”



By the end of the trip, I was feeling better, and we did have fun. We spent a day driving through the countryside and went to Niagra Falls, where we ate dinner on the Canadian side. We went out to dinner at beautiful restaurants, and finally toured a few of those wineries where I'd almost slipped into a coma earlier in the week. We enjoyed the last few days of our trip and managed to cram a lot of activity into a very short span of time.

We also decided to take another stab at sex. It seemed odd, that after months of Scott not being able to keep his hands off me, he was not approaching me for sex now that I was over the flu. I approached him, not unlike I would have approached him before we got married. He was a willing participant, but he seemed disinterested. And there were problems, too. He wasn't functioning the way a guy should function. I was concerned, but not really worried. I chalked his problems up to the same thing that caused me to come down with the flu—weird weather and not enough sleep. But Scott was mortified, as I've come to learn all men are when they “can't get it up,” and apologized profusely. I told him not to worry about it, and I really meant it.



YOUNG AND IN LOVE ...

There would be plenty of time for that.

There would be plenty of time to make up for the honeymoon that didn't live up to our expectations.

When we got home, that's when the real fun would begin.



But even though I wasn't overly concerned with his physical problems, I was disappointed. There were no two ways about it—one of my romantic dreams (admittedly sex-filled) was dashed on our honeymoon. And apart from the sexual issues, something else was weighing me down. I had an uneasy, gnawing feeling in the pit of my stomach. It was the same feeling I got when I was in denial about something, usually that I was dating a jerk. In fact, one of the reasons I knew Scott was “the one” was because of my lack of uneasy feelings early on in our relationship.

I took the gnawing feeling to mean that I had made a mistake in getting married, and it didn't go away for a good six months. As I would eventually come to realize, it was not an indication that I had made a bad choice in getting married, but that I had made a bad choice in getting married with so much unresolved stuff from the past. The gnawing would eventually evolve into chronic stomach problems.

I went into the first days, weeks, and months of married life feeling conflicted and alone.

It was a recipe for deep depression.

It almost wiped my world away.

Reflections

1. What are/were your expectations of marriage?
2. Does your idea of marriage match up with the things you were taught growing up? Have you been pleasantly surprised, or disappointed?
3. What kinds of marriages did you observe growing up?
4. What one thing do you wish you had done differently in the earliest days of your marriage?
5. What did you do right?

Scriptures:

Hebrews 13:4

Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

Isaiah 33:6

He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is the key to this treasure.

Psalms 127:1

Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.