

What is one weakness that you have that has a negative impact on your marriage and how can you turn it into a strength?

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## Creating a Soul Mate

He was perfect. My prince Charming. I was a terrible romantic when I met him and I gave up my heart the day he smiled at me. I know, what a sap. Still, to my credit, he was very dashing. The first time I saw him was at one of those fancy dances at the university. He was dressed in a long tailed tuxedo. His vest and tie were a deep burgundy. His skin was dark like brown sugar and his black hair was combed into carefully casual waves over his forehead. His cheeks were high and broad and his jaw was strong. He was my date's friend and he introduced him to me. That was when he smiled at me. The smile spread across his whole face and lit his eyes so that they turned to golden honey.

We danced once that night. I can't remember anything else that happened after we did. All I can remember is the electrifying sensation of his one hand at my waist and the other holding mine gently. I didn't see him again for an agonizing two months. Then, fate or destiny brought us together.

We were in the same ballroom class. It was perfect; I got to see him every day for an hour. My semester revolved around that class and my chance to dance with him. He asked me to be his testing partner for the first midterm and after that we practiced habitually. After our last performance, in Spring, he asked me to marry him.

After a year, I found myself wondering what went wrong. If he was Mr. Perfect, then why was I unhappy? I still loved him. My heart ached just to think of him apart, but when he was near, I was annoyed. So, it was not without relief that I left him for two weeks to visit my family. It took a month to convince him to let me go.

"You know," I said, "both my mother and my brother are graduating next month."

"Yes," he said without looking up from his dinner. When I didn't say anything, he glanced at my face. "Yes, I wish we could go. Unfortunately, I have to work."

"I think it is very important that I go, John."

"I know, Jen. I'm sorry; it's just that it will be impossible for me to take that much time off. Besides, you know we can't spare the money."

"I can work extra hours this month to make up for lost time," I murmured,

pushing the peas around my plate.

“Jen,” his voice was pleading. “We’ve been through this before. I don’t want you to work anymore than you have to.”

“My father has offered to pay for the flight.”

He sighed. “Jen, I can’t go.”

I suddenly felt unexplainably angry. Words came unbidden to my throat. A soft voice in my head warned me not to act rashly. I opened my mouth to say okay but the other words were already there.

“You’re being selfish. You just don’t want me to go.” My voice escalated until the last word was a shout. The intensity of my own emotions startled me and I was immediately ashamed. Then the hurt on his face registered in my brain and I felt mad and disgusted with myself. I left the table and fled to our room as much in shame as in anger.

I cried myself to sleep that night and only woke up when John slid in beside me. He enfolded me in his embrace and whispered in my ear.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “If you want to go home by yourself, I won’t stop you.”

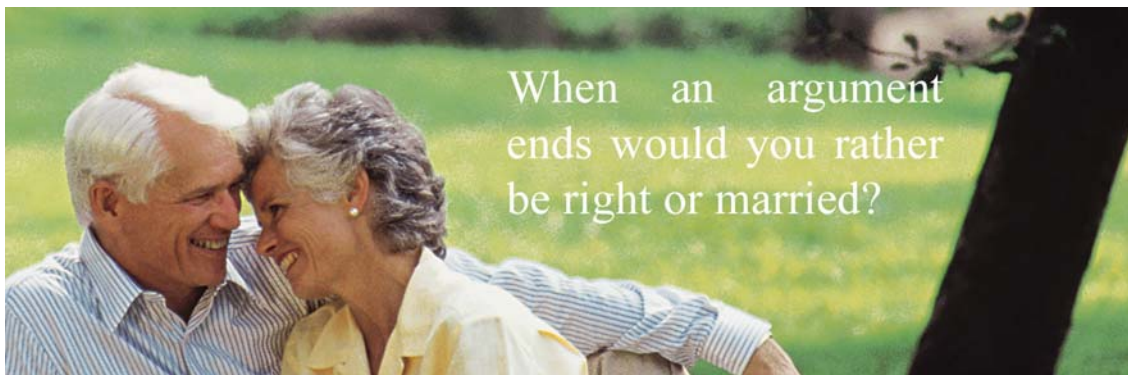
My heart melted and I started crying again. I twisted so that I could bury my face in his chest. “I’m sorry, John. It wasn’t fair of me to say what I did. You’ve never been selfish towards me. Please forgive me.”

He tightened his arms and kissed the top of my head.

Those weeks before I left were hard. Every time I looked at him I remembered what I had said and I was filled with the same conflicting emotions. I began to notice more of his faults. After dinner, he would sit at the table and watch as I washed the dishes. He never once offered to help. If I was too tired to do them, they collected in the sink. When I complained about something, he never sympathized. He wasn’t silent either; he berated. I started to feel that anything I told him was a plea for his wisdom. Then, on top of that, he didn’t fill up the car until the needle was past empty and he chewed with his mouth open.

I became desperate for the day I could leave and spend two whole weeks away from him. The minute I stepped on the jet plane, relief and happiness flooded through me so that I immediately countered it with guilt. Still, the guilt was not strong enough to stay for very long.

I walked out of the terminal and into the arms of mother only two and a half hours



Why can we negotiate a business deal with a stranger but find it so difficult to negotiate financial matters with our spouse?



later. With her arms around me, I felt a sense of peace and joy such as I hadn't felt since the day I married John; it brought tears to my eyes.

A few days after her graduation, my mother brought up my marriage. She was cooking dinner and I was sitting at the kitchen bar with my chin in my hands. I hadn't said anything about my marriage, yet somehow she knew everything was not all right. She had always known when I was upset about something.

"You're not happy with John, are you?" She chopped onions while she waited for my reply.

"It's not that I'm not happy with him...I mean, I still love him...it's just that... well..." I trailed off, hopelessly. I tried again. "Mom, do you believe in soul mates?"

"Yes. Your father and I are soul mates."

"Yeah, I know. It's just that I'm not sure anymore that John is my soul mate."

"Nonsense, of course he is your soul mate. You are married, aren't you?" She moved on to the potatoes.

"But what if I made the wrong choice?" I picked up a leaf of lettuce and began to shred it.

My mother stopped chopping and looked up into my eyes. "Jennifer, you would have problems no matter who you chose. 'Happily ever after' does not mean 'carefree ever after'. You made your choice, now you make it the right one."

I picked up another lettuce piece. She had always spoken like that. I guess that's what comes of having a writer for a mother. The problem was that it took awhile to digest what she had said. I was on my fifth lettuce leaf before I had my thoughts organized.

"Okay, Mom, suppose I did make the right choice, why does he annoy me then?"

"Why does he annoy you?"

I told her everything I could think of. I even told her that the way he breathed at night irritated me. I finished with a summary of our conversation the night he told me I could go.

"Oh honey, he really loves you. He loves you so much he can't bear the thought of you getting hurt because he was not there to protect you."

"But I'm an adult, mom. I can take care of myself. I don't need constant supervision. That's why I moved out of here."

"I know you can take care of yourself. But you must keep in mind that men feel

protective of the things they love. More importantly, you must remember that marriage is a bonding relationship. This means that he is responsible for your well-being just as you are responsible for his. Marriage means you have accepted him into your life. You and he are one person; damage to one is damage to the other as well.”

“That doesn’t change my irritation. I often feel annoyed with myself.”

“Then I suggest that you first forgive yourself and then try to emphasize his good qualities. When he does something that bothers you, counter it with the reasons you love him. Also, think of what you have in common and expand them. Play new games, watch new movies, read books together, try new things so that you can have more in common. You should have one night a week when you go dancing together, or something like it that you both like to do.”

We were both silent after this. It all sounded so churchish. I couldn’t imagine how it could possibly work. I reached for another piece.

“Jen, I was hoping to make a green salad with that. As it is we’re going to have a salad of barely identifiable lettuce. If you want to help, you can set the table.”

The next day, my mother helped me start the ‘Superman Program’, as she called it. The goal was to make him out to be even better than Superman. It was a bit embarrassing, really.

“You say he chews with his mouth open, right?”

I nodded.

“Okay, but he does have a strong jaw, doesn’t he?”

I giggled. “Yes, mom, he has a very strong jaw.” I remembered the feel of his jaw under my hands and the way the muscles rippled when he clenched his teeth.

“Good, now what about the shape of his mouth?”

I chuckled again. “Very shapely. I can’t imagine a better shaped mouth for kissing.”

“Or for eating.” We both laughed.

“And he has perfect teeth.”

“Yes, he does, and now you can see them even when he eats.”

That was how it began. It was actually really fun. Then something happened and I stopped commenting on just his physical attributes. I started to think about his character. It wasn’t long before I missed some of the things that used to annoy me. I really, truly missed him. I couldn’t wait to get home because now home was wherever John was.

The airport was a good hour away from our house and my flight was during the day. I knew John had to work, and I was planning on taking the shuttle like I had on the way in. But when I got to the baggage claim, he was there with his beautiful smile and a welcome kiss. I didn’t even mind that he was wearing sandals despite the rain. After all, he did have nice feet.

# Ounce of Prevention Worksheet

There is a story about a farmer who plowed his fields but never planted them. Reading this story and not implementing what you learned will get you the same result as the farmer who plowed but never planted.

They say that love is blind and this is very apparent when you look at a couple who is falling in love. As we start to fall in love we tend to either ignore the other person's faults or we put a positive spin on their faults. So if our friends say he is cheap, we say he is thrifty. If they say he is a know it all we inform them that he is a renaissance man. What makes the problem even worse is we both tend to hide our own faults as well.

After we get married we let our guard down and are more willing to allow our spouse to discover some of the faults we have been hiding. At about the same time the rose colored glasses that helped our spouse to put a positive spin on all our faults tend to come off. In the end we are both left thinking that we have been deceived.

In reality no one is perfect and everyone brings their own set of faults to their marriage. Unfortunately many people become disillusioned at this point, get a divorce and set off looking for their "true soul mate". Those who choose this course are met with disappointment after disappointment until they discover the truth that a soul mate does not mean a perfect mate and that a soul mate relationship is CREATED not found.

One step to creating a soul mate relationship is to develop the habit of playing the Create a Soul Mate game.

The first step is to look for your spouse's strengths and remind yourself of them on a daily basis.

The second step is to rediscover the skill you possessed when you were falling in love. Learn to put a positive spin on his or her faults. The reality is that constantly noticing his or her faults and pointing them out is not going to turn those faults into strengths. It's far better to use that energy to get used to your spouse rather than constantly trying to change him or her.

The sooner we are able to learn to love our spouse with all their weaknesses the sooner we will be able to start enjoying years of living in a healthy and happy marriage.

There are some faults that should never be tolerated. Domestic violence is one of them. If you are a victim of domestic violence please seek professional help immediately.