



Growing Back Together Again

The Dallen's house was full of pots. There were pots on every conceivable flat surface. Tall straight ones and short, fat curvy pots covered in polka dots, glazed and unglazed, purposefully ugly ones and unexpectedly beautiful pots. The ones near the doorways inevitably had little knick-knacks in them, the loose change and twisty ties, or the receipts they did not think to throw away. There were even several that were full of blue buttons. Mr. Dallen, until very recently, had worked at the button factory and would bring home a few of the basic, four-hole, blue buttons every week or so. He would keep them in odd places around his room. But when he had bought his wife the studio and she had started to make pots, he just decided to gather them all together in a pot here and a pot there. And because there were so many pots, Mrs. Dallen never knew that any of them had any buttons in them.

The reason there were so many pots was because Mrs. Dallen had just become a ceramic artist. She was not very good, yet, and she did not really know if it was appropriate to try and sell her pots, whose purposes were primarily decorative. So, she placed them around the house, in anticipation of the day when she would know what to do with them.

Mr. Dallen did not mind. He had bought her the

studio so she could make things with clay, something she had wanted to do for so long, but which children and expenses had kept from her. Now that the children were out of the house, and the property Mr. and Mrs. Dallen had bought in Texas early on in their marriage was full of oil, they both had the time and money to do the things that had eluded them for so long. So Mr. Dallen retired and furnished a complete, if somewhat smallish, ceramics studio for his wife on the back of their house.

As they were shopping for used kilns and ceramics wheels, (Mrs. Dallen was still frugal, even if they had become rich, and insisted on starting with used equipment) Mr. Dallen tried to think of what he would do with his free time, now that his wife was going to be a ceramic artist. He decided he should try and get into this new video game craze and try a few of those. He had seen the ones his son had played and thought maybe there was something a little tamer, more his pace. While his wife was discussing types of clay with a shopkeeper, he went to the electronics store and perused the game systems. He left a half hour later with an older game system, one that would attach to his TV, and a few games, including Dr. Stickit's Stamp Collecting Challenge, and Chicken Hatcher. Mr. Dallen was pleased with his purchases.

Thus, Mr. and Mrs. Dallen entered into two separate retirements: Mr. Dallen with his video games and Mrs. Dallen with her studio. They made an effort to eat at least one meal together during the day, but Mrs. Dallen liked to get up early and Mr. Dallen liked to sleep in, so breakfast was out. In fact, Mrs. Dallen got up so early, and Mr. Dallen so late, that her lunch was only an hour after his "breakfast."

They did eat dinner together every weeknight. They watched their two favorite game shows and ate, only making comments about the game or certain contestants.

What is stopping you from giving your spouse a hug that lasts at least a minute everyday?



They never talked about each others day or activities because they each figured they knew what their spouse was doing and any detail he or she could give would not be worth sharing with the other, only moderately interested partner. And so after that hour of dismal interaction, they went back to their respective parts of the house. Mrs. Dallen spent the time cleaning up the studio and preparing for the next morning before going to bed. Mr. Dallen stayed up for three more hours reading and watching his news show.

Neither of them noticed how predictable it all was, and neither of them noticed how far apart they had grown. Mr. and Mrs. Dallen each felt that they still loved their partner, but that that fact was just understood and they need not go out of their way to encourage affection or express their feelings. This was probably because they had been growing apart since the children were born. Mr. Dallen worked long hours at the button factory and Mrs. Dallen always had the children to take to school or soccer or piano. Time for themselves had been put on a shelf somewhere and forgotten about, as neither of them seemed to consider it a necessity. And this negligence to their relationship might have spiraled downward if someone had not brought it to Mr. Dallen's attention.

Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon had been neighbors of the Dallens for many years, before they retired and moved to a condominium in Florida. Mrs. Lisbon and Mrs. Dallen still

kept in contact, as women do. Mrs. Lisbon would tell Mrs. Dallen about playing golf with Mr. Lisbon and how much fun it was and she had missed spending time with her sweetie. Mrs. Dallen would smile over the phone encouragingly and make “mhmhm”ing noises to show she was listening, even though she wasn’t really. But Mrs. Lisbon wasn’t a very skilled phone converser, and so she wouldn’t notice Mrs. Dallen’s lukewarm confirmations. Consequently, when Mrs. Lisbon mentioned that they would be coming back to town for a few days next week and would it be all right to stop in for a visit, Mrs. Dallen didn’t even realize the request and gave her usual “mhmhm” noise. And Mrs. Lisbon, not really listening either, heard the affirmative response and planned the visit into their trip.

So a few weeks later Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon stopped by the house and a very surprised Mr. Dallen met them at the door.

“Well, look who it is” Mr. Dallen said, extending his hand, “Mrs. Dallen is out...buying glaze or something or other, but you can come in. Would you like something to drink?” Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon entered with the traditional “hello, good to see you” and settled in the front room, the only room not filled to the gills with ceramic creations.

After the initial questions about what brings you out here again, Mr. Lisbon asked about how the Dallens use all their free time.

“Well,” Mr. Dallen began, “I’ve bought myself a game system and am having fun trying to figure out these video game things. I have one where I am a rare stamp collector and another where I raise chickens to sell. Other than that I do most of the same things I did before.”

“I see, sounds good.” Mr. Lisbon replied, “And how about your wife? Does she play too?”

“You mean Tabitha? No no, she works in her studio