

MARRIAGE AND PARENTING - FLYING HIGH AND TOUCHING THE CLOUDS

by Susie Itzstein.

The plane lifts off the tarmac in Melbourne and the journey back to Perth begins and I look out the window and reflect on the fullness of our short visit. My partner Shelton and I have been working very full days over this short visit of just one week as we have presented two workshops - one for couples to learn how to build and repair and enrich and nourish their relationships and the other for parents to expand their knowledge and skills around parenting.

As the plane lifts effortlessly yet higher and higher and we are seeming to touch the clouds I reflect on my experience over these days and give thanks for the privilege of these couples sharing with us and each other. How enlivening it has been experiencing these couples opening their hearts and facing and exploring whatever stops them from deepening their loving and taking those precious steps towards deeper connection and intimacy either as a partner or as a parent.

Being in the position of teaching and facilitating such transformation feels like I'm continuously "flying high and touching the clouds".

"Who goes to workshops like these?" you may be thinking. I don't do that sort of thing. Well, the participants come from a very wide cross-section of society. Just engaged, newly weds, some married for 20, 30, 40 years, some deeply connected and happy, others facing affairs, separation and divorce, some just simply bored and drifting apart, some unhappy and lonely, some searching.....from all walks of life; all professions, trades people, electricians, teachers, business people, stay at home Mums, nurses, mechanics, builders, engineers, plumbers, butchers, computer programmers, accountants, students..... Just your every day "ordinary people", just like you and me.....

What motivates people to give up a weekend to explore such issues? All have decided they want/need something to be added to their lives. All leave looking at their lives and their relationships from a different vantage point. Many "flying high and up in the clouds" as they remember and re-visit that place in their heart that for many years has been pushed aside behind the doors of 'busy-ness', responsibilities, work and the many other things that take priority.

"Most of the serious problems in relationships stem from the fact that people do not understand the true nature of love." says Pat Love in her highly recommended book, "The Truth About Love". She says that couples have many misconceptions about the nature of love and these lead to destructive conclusions. Many of us have erroneously been led to believe that happy stable couples for instance: never argue, are not dependent on one another, both want sex equally, never get angry, get all their needs met, share responsibilities equally, never feel lonely, always agree, think alike, always know what the other wants, and resolve all their problems. **None of these statements is true.**

Couples learn that all relationships go through normal and predictable stages that include highs and lows and that many couples mistake the lows for the end of love and that they can learn how to prepare for and how to navigate these times. They learn most people prepare for the wedding but they don't prepare for the marriage and as well we usually prepare for the birth but not for parenthood. They learn that staying in love requires different skills and consciousness than falling in love - love doesn't last; you have to *make* it last. They learn that being the "right partner" is more important than attracting the "right partner".

I wonder how our world would be if everyone of you who is reading this who is contemplating separation and divorce and splitting up your family (statistics tell us that more than 50% of marriages end in divorce and more than half of those divorces involve children still living at home) decided to spend just one weekend reconsidering just what is going on in your marriage.

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Please give yourself the choice to rediscover the love you once felt and the dreams that you had. Imagine creating an exceptional relationship with your partner. Imagine him/her becoming the partner of your dreams. Imagine your family being a safe haven and sanctuary for everyone who lives in it. Know that it is possible. Marriages do heal after affairs, separations and all kinds of disconnection and conflict.

So the tip for this month is if you want your relationship/marriage/parenting to change you have to do something different. Doing the same thing over and over and expecting something different to happen won't work. To get something different you have to do something different and usually we need to be taught how. Learning concrete relationship skills and practical strategies is something everyone needs. Know you can learn to create the true love you long for *with the partner you already have*. Even the most distant spouse or parent can be motivated to give it another try.

So on this and Everyday, Happy Loving.