

Preface

My Journey to Discover the *Full Marriage Experience*

“When we get home, dad won’t be there, and he isn’t coming back.”

I was just 11-years old when my older brother conveyed this information to me as he and my mom picked me up from a friend’s house. The serious look on his face convinced me he wasn’t joking. In my heart of hearts, I knew life was never going to be the same.

Like too many Generation-Xers, my happy home life shattered apart in the aftermath of my dad’s grand departure. Everything changed. Child visitations quickly moved from weekly to monthly to non-existent. Finances tightened as child support payments followed the same pathway as the child visitations. Mom had to take on twice the responsibilities with half the resources. My brother and I struggled to cope with the swirling emotions of anger, pain, loss, and confusion. I remember praying, *“God, somebody somewhere has got to do something to keep this from happening to families.”*

While my parents’ divorce didn’t destroy my desire to be a husband and father someday, it did spark a lot of questions. Through my teen years as I watched more of my friends’ and schoolmates’ families break apart, those questions turned to doubts.

- Will I leave my wife like my father did?*
- How do I know if I will find the “right” woman?*
- Will I cheat on my wife, or will she cheat on me?*
- Do I know how to make a marriage work?*
- Is there anything I can do to make sure my future marriage doesn’t end in divorce?*

These questions plagued me for many years. The answers seemed to be out of my reach.

And then, during my junior year of college, Kelli walked into my life. We hadn’t dated long when we began talking about the “M” word. I needed answers to those questions ... and quick! But I discovered she was asking some of the same questions even though her parents had remained married.

For answers we read books, attended premarital classes, and went to a marriage conference. We talked to God and to ministers. We interrogated a number of couples who seemed to be happily married.

As these couples shared stories about their married life, the smiles, the twinkle in their eyes, and the affectionate glances gave it away: they were experiencing all marriage had to offer. Regardless of how long they had been married, I made three discoveries while listening to their stories.

First, married life is greater than they ever imagined. Secondly, marriage helped them discover more about themselves than they expected. Finally, marriage created a deeper appreciation for their spouse than they had anticipated.

The real life examples behind these lifelong love stories convinced me that marriage could be a lifetime adventure that is worth the journey.

Questions got answered. Doubt changed into hope. Anxiety turned into confidence.

Were these couples fortunate? Were they blessed? Did they know some special formula for success?

Well, kinda-sorta to all three.

Kelli and I got married on July 29, 1994. I have been a marriage junkie ever since. Thankfully, I have a day job that supports my habit.

I actually get paid to learn the latest and greatest information about marriage, family life, and relationships. Through my role at Families Northwest, I create community-based networks of relationship services and resources for couples, parents, and families. I also coordinate a marriage promotion campaign called *The Northwest Marriage & Family Movement*. The goal of the campaign is for marriages to be strengthened, parents to become more confident, and for fewer kids to be at risk of hearing “when we get home, dad won’t be there.”

Over the years, I have studied the age-old teachings from the Christian Scriptures, digested the findings from decades of social research, talked with the nation’s smartest people on marriage, and listened to real life testimonies from countless married couples. I have examined most marriage and relationship books, surfed most marriage and relationship web sites, and reviewed numerous marriage enrichment programs. I have been trained in some of the best marriage/relationship programs that exist and participated in strategic discussions for national marriage efforts. I have counseled many couples, taught relationship basics to many more, and trained many, many pastors and leaders on marriage and family issues.

Through all my studies and work, one question lingers in my mind. How do the generations raised in a culture with too much divorce and too many broken families capture a vision for their marriage? How do they acquire a vision that helps them experience all marriage has to offer?

The *Full Marriage Experience* is the answer to that question. *Before “I Do”* was written specifically for pre-engaged, engaged, and newlywed couples to prepare themselves to live the *Full Marriage Experience*.

If my wife and I can live it, most anyone can.

When my dad abandoned our family, I knew my life was never going to be the same. I had no clue I would be where I am today. I never imagined God would use me to answer my own prayer.

If you are contemplating marriage, my prayer is that your questions get answered, any doubts change into hope, and your anxieties turn into confidence ... *Before “I Do”*.

-- K. Jason Krafsky