

Don't worry that children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you-

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How do you view your parents? What did you notice? I know you have seen things. It was not in the thick of divorce when my kids had questions. Oh no, they sat there silently recording the whole mess. I am sure they had observations and thoughts. One parent I knew told her kid to just try and like her new boyfriend. She said "I don't have to, it's not my f... divorce. You see, the kids were mulling it over. They had formed an opinion that differs from yours.

Ten years later, my kid asked me why I had left. Oh, they didn't know. I never told them. Unbeknown to them, I was kicked out. Who knew? That caused an interesting conversation on the other side. My Ex never saw that coming. Frankly, neither did I. My kids only know me by watching me. They have formed an opinion.

I always considered my mom to be 350 pounds most of my childhood. Upon her death, we cleaned up her stuff. I found picture after picture of her looking skinny. She was not that big for very long. As a kid, I only remember the momma bear that was 350 pounds. Why? It's because those moments were strained. She was tough to live with. It's ingrained in me. What have I engrained in my kids?

Then we grow up. Our parents have (mostly) finished raising us. The picture you envision of your parents tells a lot of how it's going to go in your marriage. Really? This is why I believe that. Your marriage is directly related to what type of parent you are. Let me explain further. Possibly, I had a vision of a big mom. Like hell am I going to marry a fat wife. Bad experience. My Dad could have been a drunk or a miser. Will I scrimp, penny pinch, restrict, and deny my wife and kids? Will I drink? Will I cross hell to avoid being my parents?

You see, we do bring our parents into our marriage. They always voted conservative. Maybe you loved going out for a family dinner every Friday night. You want those values too. What if your new spouse does not? That's exactly why 15 years down the road you see your parents in the mirror. We are so much like them. Yet, while were dating, some of those beliefs and traditions never came up. You just thought your vision of marriage would work.

In a wedding, we hear vows and an encouraging word by the minister. Do you remember it? On the wedding day, there is little we remember. It's an "in the moment" thing. Did you do a pre-marriage course to know your potential spouse better? Maybe you tried them out in bed and decided "that's good enough." How much did you really cover morals, values, and codes you live by? In bed and while having fun the *I do* part is easy. We all have a ton of "fun" in the beginning. Then marriage sets in and we start to experience the "*I don't*" part. It would be far better to cover the "I don't part" before your married.

In our family upbringing, we record what our parents fought about. What they laughed about. Through their actions we gained a set of right and wrongs. Years later, we have an opinion of what to keep and what to throw out. In a marriage, when do you figure that out? While dating or in bed? Nope, it's when the baby comes. My Ex was (unbelievably) lax on a clean apartment in the first few years of our marriage. I suspect she was rebelling against her clean freak parents. Then the baby came. The vacuum and anal cleaning habits arrived too. I did not see that coming, yet I should have. She is like her parents.

That's why I say that parenting and a marriage are connected. Much of who my parents where is engrained in me. Like it or not, you are the sum of your parents. To be fair, I am not like my Dad and Mother, yet I am. I am not as clean as I should be around the house. I give people

far too much leeway on how I'm treated. I have been known to penny pinch. To put sports first. I am my parents.

In my marriages it's been a blessing and a curse. I've had to adjust. Not everything my parents trained me for is transferable. It just isn't. I think that a new marriage has a jockeying period of adjustment. To a new spouse? No, to where my parents training fits in, or doesn't. How far are you willing to go as a parent? What are the punishments and rewards? Does your spouse agree? Did you have those conversations before marriage? Not likely.

Where are your lines? What are the rules? Did you share long range visions? All of those ideals come from what you know and how your parents reacted. I am different than my parents. I bet some portion of who they were did not work with my current and former spouse. We adjust by knowing what will work. I am a different spouse and parent than my parents were. Why? I have my own marriage battle scars. Not everything is transferable.

It goes like this. You just get married and buy a dog. Honey, the dog needs to go out. I say "it's your turn." She gives the look. Now it's my job. I fold all the towels. She says I folded them wrong. I give her the look. It's now her job. Who let the dog out? My mom and dad let the dog out. In my marriage it's now my job. My Ex was trained how to fold towels. She didn't like my towel training. Now she knows it's her job. That's how a marriage begins.

In a marriage course we write down a bunch of ideals. We will share the dishes, fold the towels, and both let the dog out. Yet, that's not how it rolls in many marriages. In a few families the guy usually does not do the dishes. I knew one fella that told his wife he does not do diapers. It makes him gauge. She compromised on that. What else did she compromise on? I know a wife who wanted to party away from her spouse. Her alone time, I guess. Then she cheated on him

several times. Did he compromised to make peace? Yes, but he gained hell. Compromise, toleration, and enduring ideals can ruin a marriage. Your marriage will not be your parents' marriage.

My parents had to work life out. Their ways were given with good intentions. They offered that learned advice to me. It worked for them. I said before that we bring in all the crud we can carry into a relationship. We try and hide plenty of baggage. Then we add a kid and the marriage shifts. Why? It's because we didn't see that coming. Who really knows how they will react with a baby? How about a rebellious child? I have a cousin that has two tyrant kids. She doesn't care. The extended family does. Kids do change the relationship dynamics. Most of the time we can't use what we've experienced before. We're working it out on the fly too just like my parents did.

Do my wives like spending time with the in-laws? Nope. Their ways are not her ways. I decided to clean up the toys after a play day. Does the wife agree? Nope? Wasn't raised that way. Life and parenting make marriage somehow different than in the training course. Why wasn't that covered. Oh, they probably mentioned it. Oh, we probably wrote down fluffy words like compromise, sharing, and understanding. Trust me, the look from a wife does is not conducive to compromise, sharing, and understanding.

The current wife says we don't go to her restaurant enough. It's always mine. Not true. Yet, when it's her turn she asks me to help pick. Can you see the dilemma? The trap? It's about relating to you in a marriage. How long does it take to realize how they function? You see their parents in them. Sometimes the kids see a small strain in their parents. Why is that? It's your family upbringing going through round nine with your new spouse.

I can pass on my view of arguing to my kids. My parents had a view that they shared with me. Did I really share that with my spouse? A few years into our marriage we talk about life goals, hopes, and dreams. What happens if they do not line up? It's in that moment that you know the fluffy answers in your marriage workbook were just ideas. Oh, now you have an opinion on travel, retirement, and parenting. Marriage is tough because most of those hard questions never arrive for the first five or so years.

I hate talking about this. I passed over this though several times. No, I'm not talking about it. Breath! I had worked overtime for several months to save for a trip. We loaded the trailer and set off on a family vacation. One night we were sitting on the edge of a high cliff overlooking the ocean. We could see ships passing into the night. It was serene. My Ex turned to me and stated that she could not see us being together in the future. Yes, we were divorced 4 months later after 11 rocky years.

The problem is that most people don't talk in the beginning. There is sex, parties, and adventures. Somewhere along the way people begin to think. They begin to explore life. then they realize that the one across from them is the wrong fit. Unfortunately, that's how divorce rolls. We come in with good intentions. Yet, we leave with disillusionment. Why? It's because how we were raised will affect how another was raised. We just don't like talking about it until it's too late.

By no fault of their own, parents pass on ideals. I have heard of mothers that save their wedding dress for their daughters. A father saves his mother's wedding ring. They have wonderful visions of sending their children down the aisle in their vision. Maybe a kid had plans for their own wedding. Plans that press the parents the wrong way. What happens when visions

clash? The bridge between parents and a marriage can be a hot topic. Everyone involved has an investment they want return on.

I split up from the Ex after grade 12. Her parents thought they got rid of me. A year and a half later there I was back at their door. I can remember it so clearly as her mother said “I knew it, I just knew it.” What did she know? They thought I was done. They were right but it took another 12 years. My Dad though she was a great pick. My divorce lawyer didn’t agree. The best laid plans? We are trained from birth to carry on the family traditions. To uphold the good name. Then he or she arrive and blow it all to hell.

I have seen a movie where the wife presses her husband against the wall and says “they are not your family, you’re with me now.” It’s got to be the worst feeling as a guy. Oh God, now everything that happens is my fault. I have to save the day. It’s “do” or perish. I know it’s not that simple. Yet, creating your own family is daunting. Sure, we are trained like our father and mother before us. Yet, can I provide, cook, and love as well as my parents did? Will I cook, clean, and parent as well as my wife wants?

For some it’s the opposite. We make a pack with ourselves. I will love better than my parents. I’ll be a better mom or dad that they were. How about “I will be the parent I never had.” I’ll not spank, yell at, or punish my kids. Then you have kids. I’ll cherish my wife. Yeah, until the first misunderstanding. The guy that always forgives and admits blame (bad idea) is doomed. What happens when she brings it up in a movie 10 years later. Oh, she will. What? A vow or pact to yourself is extremely destructive. Marriage is a mystery of navigation and reaction. No vow will survive that.

Some of the most amusing moments is when new parents bring in those new ideas and promises into their marriage. The first parenting discussion. Who changes diapers, gets up at night, and takes the kids to school? Who talked about those conversations? You bring them up at a family dinner and the parents wink at each other and laugh at you. What happens the first time you disagree how a child should be raised. They are not easy or fun conversations. All your ideals just exploded.

So much of who we become is etched in two places. One is in your family home life. Your mom and dad changed you forever. Your brothers and sisters altered your perspective ever so slightly. We see parenting. It gives us insight and recommendations. All these family things make us into the person we are.

There are friends and work mates. Those people will affect you too. Over the years I am much the same as my friends are. I most certainly am a Postal worker. I have gained musical interests from my friends. It's me now. No course, book, or advice can truly prepare you for marriage. I wish we could just be as we are when we enter a marriage union. Just fart in bed and see how that plays out. Miss a payment or forget a bill. Refuse to punish little Johnny while the other side wants to spank. Marriage is crazy at best. We will change yet again.

I heard a story of a guy who was planning a big surprise for his 10th anniversary. He pulled out all the stops. The secret meetings with her friends. The planned present and dinner. It was designed right down to the very last detail. He was so sneaky and proud of himself. Then came the day. He had not said a word. No reminders. No hints. No questions on what to do on the special occasion. After work, there he was at the door. Honey I'm home. There she was too in total shock. Why?

As it was, she had totally forgot. There she stood totally stunned. There he stood totally stunned too. The running gag throughout history is that men forget birthdays and anniversaries. Maybe we do? Lucky for me I have not yet. That man realized pretty quick that it was the best day of his life. He had just gained the ultimate get out of jail free card. Her forgetfulness would be forever in his back pocket if he screwed up. The ultimate anniversary gift for a guy to be sure.

We have seen friendships. A parent gave us a picture of what family looks like. We all have likes and dislikes. I have said before that marriage is the ultimate relationship. You don't generally get naked with friends or family. You sleep in the same bed about a foot or two (king bed 20 Ft) apart. Food, kids, family, and sex become personal. Your opinion is not just yours. It affects them bigtime. Drink or do drugs and it affects more than just you. Quit work and more than one person starves. Marriage is a doozy of a relationship.

In your youth, we asked mom for a hug. We don't tell dad everything. Do we really want to lie or tell the truth to a spouse? It's a yes and no answer. Try telling the truth about your in-laws. Good luck with that. Have an excuse that your too tired to nurse your sick kids. That won't work either. Good luck not sharing sickness in marriage too. Who wrote the manual for those issues? Certainly not your parents. Did your friends tell you how to be a good spouse or parent? Nope!

Here's the kicker. You work it out with your spouse. Somehow, through all the fights, you gain respect, love, and companionship. Your kids are watching. They are going to do to you what you did to your parents. I can hear the parents snicker and laugh in the background. You will look in the mirror and see your mom and dad. All that you have learned from them will be tested and tried. Your spouse will want you to give some of that up. that is marriage.

There will come a day when you realize that your making another human. A person that will have to endure, tolerate, and compromise with many people and things. Can you handle your kids failing? Will it be easy to see them pick the wrong mate? Pursue the wrong friends and line of work. You did but that was different. Was it? Don't think for a second that your parents weren't watching you to see what you will do with the very same messes. That is parenting.

Trisha Yearwood sings a great song called "she's in love with the boy," The whole song is about a girl who fell in love with the parents last choice. Yet, she did not care. Years later, this girl had a baby of her own. She grew up and fell in love with a young buck. In that defining moment, the girl (now a mother) stops the dad by saying "your no different than as he is now." Let them go. All the parenting in the world cannot prepare you to let go of your child to another human soul.

Yet, it's been done before. Your parents let go of you hopefully. It's your turn. Family values set you up to succeed. Possibly even to fail a little. Yet, there you stand at the alter making your own choice of mate. Your own relationship. How it works out is based on how much you think they are your best friend. How set apart are they from family, friends, and workmates. It should be the ultimate relationship. A relationship that begins to create a new family. Then you realize, all of a sudden: the tradition continues.

Imagine being a fly on the wall at a wedding. From up in the loft you can see grandparents looking at parents, who are looking at you. What if your new bride was pregnant too? She is looking at her belly. It's a line of tradition. We hate and respect it all at the same time. Each parent had hopes and dreams for the ones to follow in their footsteps. She then takes her hand off her belly and puts it into the hand of a man. They say "I do."

All the relationships begin here. In the creation and continuation of the family unit. Each lesson and experience from two different family lines will create a new line. Your babies' future friends and co-workers have no clue how they will be altered and changed. All our best parenting plans will go sideways when they interact with those people. The birth of a baby is the birth of future relationships. That's the way it has always worked.

I mentioned before that family lines tend to go in a somewhat straight line. We eventually see our parents in the mirror. Leopards don't really change their spots. Family does not either. There was a report just the other day that proved statistically that families in a current economic situation trend to continue that way for decades. It's just not that easy to move from middle class to rich. With that said, where is the hope and desire for more? To succeed where the parents did not. I call this "being relationships." A place where we change the odds.