

Getting the Love You Want



Call today about workshops and other help for
your relationship

Imago Center for Relationships
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Hello Friends

This past two weeks we've been winding down our summer, with trips to New England for vacation and a reunion for Baker River School, a small secondary boarding school which we began and ran together back in the 70's and 80's. (That's for another story!)

We're both avid swimmers, so at different points Bruce found he could still have fun ropeswinging with former students (now in their 40's) into the Deerfield River, and Betsy cherished long swims in the refreshing early morning waters of Elbow Pond and Buzzards Bay.

But it's not just physical activity that keeps us young. It's the abiding commitment we have to creating more conscious relationships through the powerful tools of dialogue. Our couples workshops, coaching packages, one day events, and teleclasses are all ways in which we honor our commitment and seek to keep young and fit mentally and emotionally as well. These offerings are all described in this issue.

The special article in the issue is entitled: *Becoming Storytellers and Storylisteners: "I remember a time."* In it you'll hear a personal story of our own to illustrate the power of storytelling.

As always, we are yours on behalf of strengthening the bonds of commitment and love between couples.

Becoming Storytellers and Storylisteners:

"I remember a time"

Do you have some personal stories you keep telling yourself over and over - the ones you just can't seem to get out of your head, whether you want to or not? We're talking about those insistent stories you hold inside yourself and may or may not even be fully conscious of.

These personal stories are the ones we are always encouraging couples to tell each other, because in **the telling they hold the potential for rich and deep mutual understanding and empathy** - the stuff of real love and connection.

This is also important because **these stories are also often the secret engines driving our behavior**. They may be happy or sad stories, funny or terrifying stories, embarrassing or prideful stories, but chances are at least one is playing in your mind at any given time and causing you to think, act, feel, or sense things in a particular and powerful way - and not always clearly!

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Despite how much your stories are always unfolding inside - some movie is always playing, so to speak. **Yet have you ever thought about how often these stories actually get told or shared, even with your partner?**

We've discovered that the answer to this question is usually "Never" or "Not very often". This is especially true for the quieter partner - the "minimizing" partner in our jargon, but also for the more expressive ones, the "maximizing" ones.

But what we discover at our workshops that **in the safe structure provided by learning and using the couples dialogue**, partners share with the other brand new stories so to speak - stories from childhood or maybe even from a more recent time - stories full of really dramatic if not traumatic events, and rich new information.

Couples get to know each other afresh and anew even when they've been together for many years.

In fact, even as the stories gets told, the one telling it may not even realize how important or life-shaping the event may have been. **And this is not simply a phenomenon for newcomers to dialogue.** Here's an example from our own experience, as told by Bruce.

"Not long ago I shared with Betsy in a dialogue a personal story - a memory where my father and I (age 12) became separated in the crowd entering the gate at a major league baseball game I had long anticipated attending. Unwilling to forego the game in favor of finding me (as I made it up anyway - I didn't know how else to interpret it) he and my grandfather had simply abandoned me outside.

"Now keep in mind that I had told this story often in a somewhat casual even light hearted way to others - but never to her. This time though, when I told it to the most important audience of all, she listened in the deep and intentional way that the structure of dialogue insists on. No one, not even Betsy, had ever listened to me tell this story like this before!

"As she listened, I found myself describing the details of sitting on the car hood in the parking lot, sweating in the hot sun, listening to the roar of the crowd two blocks away, hearing the radio broadcast from the attendant's booth, looking at the empty popsicle wrappers on the ground, wondering when they would come to get me (they didn't until they were ready to leave around the 7th inning).

"And then, as she validated the depth of the hurt I hadn't even allowed myself to acknowledge previously, I really could see just how angry and hurt and completely sad and left out I had felt back 60 years ago.

So my storytelling and Betsy's "storylistening" combined to create a special gift for both of us. It was a moment of deep connection - me feeling the love and attention I had missed many years ago, and her seeing me in a way that could not have come through if I had not had the safety to recreate the event as fully as I did, knowing she would not judge me or try to fix me or tell me her own 'You-think-you-had-it-bad-listen-to-this' story."

And of course none of this could have happened at all were it not for the reliable tools of dialogue which we were able to access and put to their intended use.

Homework Assignment:

This assignment can actually be done just about anytime or anywhere. It's especially great for dinner table, car trips, long waits, or bedtime.

Using topics from the starter list below, take turns exchanging memories and any stories you have related to those memories. We recommend about 5 to 10 minutes each way.

We also recommend that you start with ordinary or pleasant memories before leaving home. Don't try to

force painful stuff. If that needs to be told, rest assured it will come on its own in due time!

Make sure you follow basic rules: take turns - no interruptions by the listener with questions, clarifications etc. Just listen with **full attention** and **no distractions**. Keep time so that it's equally divided.

Topics:

- My middle school classrooms and the kids I remember there
- Stories my parents told over and over
- What I did after school in 4th grade
- My favorite vacations
- My summer and after school jobs
- Aunts, uncles, and cousins I can't forget
- The first (or last) day of school
- What my bedroom looked like
- What I got for Christmas (or my birthday)

Get the idea? Make your own list from here. There's no end to the possibilities. We still do this and there are always new topics. Just let yourself be storytellers and storylisteners.

Private Coaching

And finally, if in this process you find yourself venturing into topics and stories that may be **painful and challenging** to tell or to listen to, please know that our work is designed precisely to guide couples in creating the safe space for one another in becoming better and more empathic communicators. It's what we've done for ourselves for many years. Consider joining us for one of our upcoming workshops described below.

If you are workshop graduates who are well aware of the basics, but really want to take your relationship to the next level, you may want to consider one of our two post-workshop coaching packages, the VIP Total Support 10 session coaching package and the Stay-on-Track 6 session package. These are semi-weekly face-to-face or telephone coaching sessions with Betsy.

With the VIP Program, through Betsy's total support and repeated practice, you learn to master the tools taught at the workshop, to turn your conflicts into opportunities for growth, and to build the future you vision for yourselves into a living reality. You can become true relationship experts. This package includes:

- Ten 90-minute office or phone sessions every other week for 20 weeks at a discounted rate
- Unlimited phone calls between sessions for 15 minutes or less
- Unlimited e-mails
- Option to repeat the full workshop anytime at current half price
- Recorded CD of each session
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With the Stay-on-Track Program you will further systematically cement your ability to use the workshop toolkit of specific, versatile, caring processes on a regular and consistent basis. In the process you will deepen your passion and commitment for each other and your relationship. This package includes:

- Six 90-minute phone or office sessions every other week for 12 weeks at a discounted rate
- Recorded CD of each session

To sign up or learn more, please contact us at betsy@betsyandbruce.com.