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Single in a Couples' World

By Thelma Mariano

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Advertising for St. Valentine's Day seemed more relentless than ever this year. Everywhere I turned, I saw candy hearts or jewelry glistening in store displays. Radio announcers drummed the message home through constant promotions of dinner for two. There was no one "special" in my life. I had been working hard on my home-based business, running two personal development programs and then writing well into the night, week after week, to expand my website content. I wanted - and felt I deserved - a little appreciation.

So for the first time I did the unthinkable. At a flower shop, I ordered an exquisite arrangement of orchids and lilies for myself. I also purchased a box of chocolates to share with friends.

The flowers still brighten my kitchen table and lift my spirits.

The media tries to convince us that being part of a couple is the ideal. If that were true, why do half of all marriages, particularly in the West, end in divorce? Why do so many relationships stagnate and prevent us from being ourselves, from growing?

Many people stay together because they fear growing old alone. I admit that I have been there, too - unhappy in my marriage but afraid to leave. Paradoxically that was the loneliest period of my life. There was a serious lack of communication; below the "respectable" surface of couplehood, I lived in quiet misery.

>From images of successful couples in the media to dinner parties, society is always pushing us to "pair up." However, many of us experience protracted periods in our lives where we do not have a partner, times when we need to heal and/or discover and develop ourselves. Singlehood should be seen as a viable option.

Single in a Couples' World

I have been single for over 15 years. If no friends are available, I go to a movie or a restaurant alone without feeling "strange." I see others, too, coming on their own. For years now, I book a flight south and take a solo vacation, packing a few books along with my swimsuit and shorts. I am convinced that people find it easier to approach me as a single; I have never lacked for company either on the beach or while traveling.

Though I never elected to "be" single, I have grown in ways that would not have been possible had I remained in a relationship. This lifestyle has allowed me to develop the self-confidence to take on new challenges and lead a truly fulfilling life.

Here are some distinct advantages to being single:

- Stronger friendships

Living with another person can make you lazy about reaching out to others. Also, couples tend to

socialize with other couples. As a single, you can develop satisfying friendships with people of all ages, social classes and backgrounds. Among my friends are a 77-year-old poet, a 28-year-old abstract painter, a single mother and a married creative director.

- Time to invest in yourself

As a single, you have more time to take courses, develop interests and hobbies or train for a new career. You can also heal past wounds and work on personal growth. Being single is a unique opportunity to explore who you are and what is important to you. Also, when there is no partner to lean on, you become more resourceful and proactive. The boost in self-confidence in one area of your life will extend to other areas as well

- Your choices - your life

To me, the greatest advantage of being single can be summed up in one word - freedom! You choose your own friends and see them as often as you like. On the home front, if you decide to paint your walls purple or buy a striped velvet couch, no one else will object. You are at liberty to come and go as you like, to eat when you're truly hungry, or to play music in the dark.

To build a rewarding life as a single, you need to feel complete on your own. It is also important to take responsibility for your life - pursue supportive and stimulating friendships and develop your interests. Too many people live in a holding pattern, unmotivated to take proper care of themselves or their surroundings because they haven't met a suitable partner. This is such a waste of time and opportunity!

One way to better appreciate your singlehood is to list the benefits you derive from this lifestyle. This is easier to do when you have been in an unfulfilling relationship and have seen the down side. Maybe your partner was a night owl, but you prefer getting up at the crack of dawn. Remember all the compromises you had to make - and be thankful for the choices you now have.

A number of singles are joining forces against the "tyranny of coupledness." One such organization can be found at

Quirkyalones describe themselves as independent thinkers

who want to live full lives rather than accept unsatisfying relationships. They believe in love, they just don't want to settle!

I, too, refuse to settle. I know what I want in a potential partner and trust that he will appreciate all that I have become. Finding happiness as a single does not prevent me from leaving a corner of my heart open just for him.

Thelma Mariano, life coach and author, is dedicated to bringing clarity and direction to people's lives. See her on-line coaching programs, articles and column at

The Basics Of Marriage Counseling

By Stephen Kreutzer

Almost half of all marriages end in divorce. That is why there is an increase in couples seeking marriage counseling. Nobody wants to think that the marriage they are in will end. Marriage counseling offers a way for couples to work through problems with an outside influence. Marriage counseling can help couples to rebuild a marriage that was on the way to divorce.

Marriage counseling is a type of therapy that helps married couples resolve problems they may be having in their marriage. Most often counseling is conducted with both partners present. However, sometimes there will be individual sessions depending on the couples needs. The basis for marriage counseling is research that has shown problems in a marriage are best solved through communication and working together. Marriage counseling usually lasts a short period of time, until the problems are resolved and the marriage is back on track and the couple can handle problems on their own. In a session the counselor will ask questions, listen and analyze problems. The counseling usually starts with an analysis of the marriage and its problems. Then the problems are worked through to an amicable conclusion.

Marriage counselors are trained in psychotherapy. They also have an understanding about families, how to understand client's needs and problems. They also have training that allows them to help clients work through the problems to reach conclusions. All of this training lets them be able to identify underlying problems. A good marriage counselor will not make a client feel guilty or blame. They will teach clients to work through problems and get over bad feelings.

Marriage counseling can help couples open the lines of communication. Communication has been shown to be the key to a healthy and happy relationship. Couples with problems seek marriage counseling to get a better understanding of what has gone wrong in their marriage, so they can once

again have a string marriage.

Stephen Kreutzer is a freelance publisher based in Cupertino, California. He publishes articles and reports in various ezines and provides information on marriage counseling at CyberTopics!

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