

## Letter No. 1

A letter to the reader,

We will be 34 years married this March. We believe that Marriages are made in heaven but so is thunder and lightening. We are sorry we didn't have a course like the Alpha Pre Marriage course 34 years ago. It would have helped us avoid a lot of pain. We both knew that Scripture clearly instructed us to "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" **BUT** it has taken us a long time for both of us to really practice this.

We were married for 22 years, having had 4 lovely children, when a major crisis hit. We were separated for 11 months but afterwards thanks to friends, to a Marriage healing ministry called Retrouvaille and the Lord's grace, we were reconciled.

This 11 months was a painful time for both of us but we both learned a lot through this time about ourselves and each other. We have learned to be better listeners, more assertive and more willing to make allowances for the other.

Marriage now is much better for us the older we get. We are enjoying getting older, having more fun together and we are more respectful of each other's differences. It is worth fighting for your marriage; it is worth investing in it. Satan wants to destroy marriage but God's grace is there for each married couple if we call on it. We thought we would share some honest reflections of our romance and disillusionment phase in our marriage to give hope to other couples that may be experiencing pain in their marriage - that there is a way forward. May you be blessed.

### **Romance and Disillusionment Phase of our Marriage**

#### **Paddy:**

"The minute I laid eyes on Anne I knew she was the one for me. I met her at a retreat and that evening I asked her out. I was really pleased when she agreed. I felt sure I had met my queen. We had so much in common. I really enjoyed out dating. Our first years were an adventure for me. I worked hard at being the provider and thought we were the happiest couple on earth. I didn't notice the onset of disillusionment in Anne. In fact I was blissfully unaware of any problem in our marriage until I learned that Anne had developed bulimia. It really didn't strike me that our relationship had anything to do with it. I thought I would be supportive to her in dealing with her problem by accompanying her to visit her psychologist. I didn't see a need for me to continue and didn't understand Anne's severe disappointment at this. She started to study with Open University and I thought I really was helping her in taking the kids away for summer camps etc, not realizing that a growing singleness was happening in both of us. I was really disappointed when she didn't want to go for walks in the forest, which we had in earlier years. I kinda thought things will be ok when ever Anne got her degree. I then was disappointed when she wanted to do a Masters degree and I began to notice a big change in her. Suddenly she had become very assertive and had developed a great use and ease with language. It seemed like the woman I was married to, was someone other than the woman I had fallen in love with."

**Anne:**

God was central in my life before and after I got married. I believed He had brought us together. I can't honestly say that I fell in love with Paddy at first. I was never whisked off my feet so to say. That had happened with my first boy friend. However I knew Paddy was the one for me. I loved talking to him initially and getting very excited about how much I thought we had in common. I guess I was in love with the idea that I had found someone I felt God had selected for me....I thought I could love the nice bits and God would change the rest.

Disillusionment set in very quickly for me. The week after our honeymoon I remember Paddy asking me for a breakdown of how I had spent the housekeeping money that week. I was horrified at what I thought was a very controlling attitude and was very frightened. We had some great times together before the children arrived, going off on weekends etc. As soon as our first child was born I felt very abandoned and isolated and left to look after her much of the time. When our second child was born I really felt on my own. Paddy, I thought, was off saving the world. We had three babies in 3 years and three months and I felt desperately unable to cope. A friend moved in and helped care for the two younger children for nearly a year. While this was a great help to me I really resented the fact that in my opinion Paddy's life hadn't changed at all. He had the perfect single married life.

I had developed an eating disorder on the pregnancy of our third baby. I only told Paddy about it four years later, on our fourth pregnancy. This behaviour was my way of vomiting up all the bad in my marriage and in my life. This was one area Paddy couldn't control. I went for help at this time. After 3 months of therapy which really helped the psychologist suggested that Paddy needed to start getting involved in the process or otherwise I would grow one way and he another. Paddy agreed to come to a session but on the way home he told me he didn't see the need to go any more, after all it was my problem. I felt my life was at an end...with no hope. The next day when I awoke to feed our baby, I could feel the blinds coming down on my mind. They diagnosed it as postnatal depression...I diagnose it now as a loss of hope. I was on medication for a year and a half and continued with the therapy. But the psychologist was right. I grew in one direction but felt I was on my own.

We plodded on for several years. Studying for a degree in psychology gave me room to breath. We went for counseling when we were 14 years married but it really didn't change too much. By the time our 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary came I felt like I was feeling disillusioned in our marriage - I felt like if I had committed murder I would have been released after 3 years... but this was a life sentence. My heart was torn with anxiety for the children and the knowledge that I could no longer live with this man. I moved out of our bedroom and lived as separate a life as I could for the next year. I felt let down and incredibly sad. It was like looking at life through bars and no way out.

**Paddy:**

When Anne got postnatal depression it was really a trying time for me. It was so sad seeing Anne not being able to cope with life, children, home etc. However things improved and we plodded on. I had planned a surprise 3 day break in Edinburgh for our 22<sup>nd</sup> wedding anniversary in 1999. But we both got the flu and we had to cancel. I couldn't believe it when Anne announced that she was moving downstairs. I thought it might just be for a few days - she needed space. However the few days became a week, then a month then Anne started to talk about a legal separation, consulting her solicitor, divorce... I resisted this strongly which seemed to make Anne only more determined to get her freedom. I was trusting God's promise that "what God had joined together let no one separate". But sometimes it seems there is just no short cuts - "no pain, no gain."

The 11 months we were apart were awful. I felt very sad for the children particularly our youngest. I felt very hurt, misunderstood and judged by Anne. I also felt quite dehumanized - when I would share about my day it seemed all I got back was coldness, indifference and lack of interest. It seemed my

whole world was coming in on top of me. My feeling of hurt was like walking down a dark tunnel not knowing where or if there was an exit but somehow trusting God that there was. It really helped that I had some very supportive friends who helped to keep me sane.

### **Steps to Reconciliation:**

After 10 months apart a friend challenged me one day, when walking on Killiney beach, that if I loved Anne I needed to be willing to let her go, and give her a Divorce if that's what she wanted. This was very challenging and I saw that this was how God loved me - unconditionally. I came home and shared with Anne that I loved her and was willing to agree to a Divorce if that's what she wanted. She broke down in tears and the miracle of reconciliation had started. Then another friend shared with us that we should do a Retrouvaille weekend - a weekend for couples that have difficulties in their marriages. So 13 couples gathered in a retreat centre in Navan and the weekend was led by 3 couples who had had difficulties in their marriage and whose marriages had been transformed by Retrouvaille. Anne and I enjoyed our experience of dialoging and learning to share our feelings non judgmentally. We recommitted to our Marriage.

Marriage now for us is more life giving. We still have different interests, different friends etc. Anne loves craft, films etc. I love sports - squash, soccer, hill walking etc. But we do things together. Kids have moved out of house and we are enjoying each other. We miss each other if one or other is away.

### **Conclusion:**

Thank you for the opportunity to share some of our honest recollections of our romance and disillusionment phase in our Marriage. A course like the Alpha Marriage course could have helped us enormously to build strong foundations, understand the art of communication and learn tools to resolve conflict. So whether it is a Retrouvaille weekend or an Alpha Marriage course PLEASE do invest in your marriage. No matter how much pain there is in your relationships, there is HOPE. Turn to the Lord and ask Him for the grace to help you take the next step. Love is a Decision, Forgiveness is a Decision, so the way to a renewed Marriage is a Decision.

"Father God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob thank you that Marriage is your idea. Release your grace into everyone who reads part of our story which is part of us. Thank you that there is hope. Take away our fear of change. Fill us afresh with your Holy Spirit and help us in our own Marriage in Jesus name."

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you"  
Ephesians 4:32

**Paddy & Anne**