

# **How to Create an Adventurous Marriage- 'cause that will make us thrive.**

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## ***Survivor Kiama Better Marriages Australia Conference 2016 Evening Keynote***

We are going to introduce you to 3 different types of couple adventures:

- 1) **Adventures in the world** - creating beautiful, exciting experiences together.
- 2) **Adventures in the home** - creating adventure and meaning out of mundane chores and daily activities.
- 3) **Adventures of the heart** - taking risks to grow our own heart and soul, to expand our relationship so it will thrive.

You will also get a chance to boost your reconnections and to rediscover ways of fostering fun in your marriage.



At Heather's 50th birthday party, Heather and I, and two of our three children dressed up to represent ABBA. That is so last

century - dressing up and trying to pretend to be a famous pop group. We seem to be stuck in a time warp!

**Often** in our **marriages**, we get stuck in a time warp, going through the same situation over and over again.

Note this definition of insanity - 'responding the same way over and over again even when it's not working.' If something isn't working in our **marriage**, often we can find ourselves doing the same thing louder or more frequently, but we don't stop to think about trying something new.

**Imagine a train line stretching to the horizon - think about this quote "Even if you are on the right track, you will get run over if you just sit there!"**

So even if we think we **are** on the right track, we have never arrived. We need to keep momentum, keep moving forward.

One way we can avoid being stuck in the rut is by enhancing the adventure and fun in our marriages. Times of adventure in marriage can be hugely exciting and satisfying, and each of us can remember back to these times.

Imagine the intrepid couple ice climbing on glaciers and ice cliffs....and now rock climbing on Mount Kinabalu, the highest mountain in Southeast Asia,..... or even kayaking around to glaciers in Alaska, trying to navigate around all the icebergs.

Another memorable adventure, when we lived in South Africa, was when we found ourselves in an isolated game hide. We watched the animals mating, then spontaneously they had the opportunity to watch us mating!! Thankfully we survived and also thankfully we don't have an image to show you.

- Wonderful as these adventures were, they are often **once off** events - times we can fondly look back on, but unlikely to be repeated any time soon. So, we need to look at adventures that can be repeated on a more regular basis.

A joint passion that we have developed is cycling. Heather initially was an endurance cyclist. Many times, she has cycled in fundraising events, 650 kms from Sydney to Mt. Kosciuszko over a six-day period. It was a shared event. My job was to pump the tyres, help put the bike on the car and get her to the starting point, ....her job then, was to ride 650 kms!

Later, we were able to turn this into a shared passion. So now I've gotten involved with cycling, I have a fetching lycra outfit. When our children were teenagers it would totally disgust them seeing their Dad parade around the house in his lycra - "too much information".

- But since then, we have taken upon this as being our shared adventure and we go on regular rides together and even do some long - distance rides and stay out overnight. Closer to home, last Christmas, Heather gave me two stand up paddle boards,.. (funny that she gave me 2 rather than 1, since it was a gift for me!) .....and now we go for outings on Minnamurra River, here in Kiama. When Heather has to wait for me, she stands on her board and does yoga poses.

These adventures all have a WOW factor. They don't need to be physical, they could be creative, like doing renovations together, or creating a tapestry together, ...or they could include being involved in the community with social conscience activities.

- We call them **Adventures in the World.**

These are all memorable ways that we can maintain a sense of fun, spark and expansion of ourselves, but often the most **rewarding** and **relationship enhancing** forms of adventure actually occur **day by day** in our very own home.

- **Adventures in the Home**

I remember in the old days, the first time when we moved to a house that had a dishwasher. This was a new experience for us and I remember the first night when after the meal, John walked over and started loading up the dishwasher. All of a sudden, my libido skyrocketed, even though it was peak hour, mid week, with 3 small kids! Not wanting to waste the moment, we put a Playschool video on for the children, (which shows how long ago it was), and we had a romantic interlude.... which gave John a loyal commitment to the dishwasher ever since!!! The main thing I learned was the fact that if something is working well, ...**tell** your partner. I told John at the time, that loading the dishwasher was a turn on for me and the **rest**, is history.

For me (John), as a result of that dishwasher experience, I learnt a very important question to continually ask myself, ..... "What is it that I can **do** in my normal every day activities, that turns Heather on?" I discovered some amazing things, .....it's things like running to answer the phone, praying together, stepping up to discipline the kids, and not being defensive when she kindly gives me feedback. So, valuing and honouring each other in the **day to day stuff of life**, can add great zest to our marriages.

Even **greater** adventures can take place **between us** in our relationship, as we try to change from the inside out, to become more like the person that we want to become, in order to honour our partner, and subsequently our marriage. We have termed these types of adventures:

- **Adventures of the Heart.** My growing edge as a person has been becoming more willing and able to support Heather and back her up in public. I came from a family where conflict was totally avoided, and developed the communication style of being a peacemaker.....at **ALL** costs.

This means that when conflict situations arise, I try and keep a low profile and hope nobody notices me and the conflict will go away by itself. It has lead to occasions were Heather has felt totally isolated and unsupported when there was a situation of conflict that involved the two of us with an external source. A big part of the adventure of **our** marriage has been for me to be able to learn to **step up** so that Heather is able to feel that I have her back. One way I have reminded myself of this growth point is to put up a poster on the wall in the kitchen.



- This shows a picture of two bald eagles. I think the bald aspect is quite appropriate, as well as illustrating the sense of being able to spring into action to defend my partner. The bald eagle is one of the few animals that actually mate for life and you can see this picture shows them looking out for each other.

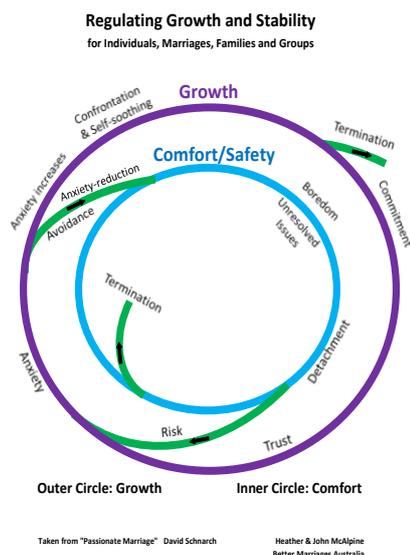
Underneath the picture I have the words -

'A bald eagle has strong eyesight and sees far into the distance. They mate for life and protect their partner from all threats. They are quick to react to adverse events and they rely on God to lead and guide them.' I made that last one up - as I wasn't quite sure of eagles' spiritual leanings! The whole purpose of this is to remind me to be able to act as a bald eagle when Heather needs to be protected in public, ...or in private for that matter.

So, this demonstrates the fact that the most **satisfying** adventure of marriage can actually occur internally **within** our heart, rather than waiting for adventures to occur externally.

So how can we develop this way of attaining adventure **within** our marriage?

Let's look at the concept of growth and stability circles.



This diagram is taken from 'The Passionate Marriage' by David Schnarch. It shows 2 circles. There is the inner circle of comfort and safety. We are usually in this circle in our relationships or as individuals. We're comfortable, we are safe. But this circle comes with the risk of tolerating unresolved issues. If we do this, we can lose the sense of attachment and develop feelings of boredom. Some

relationships find at this point that the couple grows apart, and they no longer want to be together.

So, in order to experience the adventure **within** our marriage we need to take a risk. We need to step out into the outer growth circle. This can come with a huge amount of anxiety, ..... Am I going to be respected? Am I going to still be loved by my partner? As our anxiety increases we need to stay in the situation rather than trying to avoid it and reduce anxiety that way. We need to sit with the tension. We have to practise being able to soothe our self. This then leads towards an increased sense of commitment and trust and so the growth circle continues.

Why can't we *stay* in the growth circle? ..... Too tiring as it totally takes up all our emotional energy. So, we fluctuate in and out of the growth circle, returning to the comfort circle to recharge our batteries and nurture each other.

So, we've looked at ways of maintaining and celebrating adventure together both in the **wider** world and also **within** our marriage. Now what about **fun**? How do we **regain** and **enhance** the fun in our marriage?

- David and Claudia Arp remind us that 'fun in marriage is **serious** business'. This quote reminds us that fun doesn't just happen - it requires **planning**, it requires **time** and it requires **being intentional**.

So, the intentional couple develops and maintains intimacy and builds a sense of connection through planning and making conscious decisions.

Some say – “that’s not for me. I’m a **spontaneous** person. You can’t plan for fun and intimacy. It just **happens**.”

Well if it just **happens** for you, then that’s terrific. But **most** of the time, if we don’t plan it, it **doesn’t** happen; and busyness and the web of life grow into our space for reflection and intimacy.

- Steven Covey in his book ‘7 habits of Highly Effective Families’ says, “You may **talk** of love and family fun, but if you never **plan** any time together then your very **lack** of organisation gets in the way.”

William Doherty talks of developing marriage **rituals** - regular activities that enhance warmth and love. He encourages us to -

- **Look upon rituals as a way of punctuating the daily routine of life with exclamation marks!!!!**

To become a ritual, an activity needs to be repetitive, co-ordinated and have significance, or meaning.

As a specific simple daily ritual, let’s look at how we **reconnect** with each other after being apart.

One concept that adds life to your marital intimacy is the 10 second kiss. ‘The 10-second kiss’ is the title of a book which explains that if couples kissed for 10 seconds each day as they said “hello” and “goodbye”, it would **profoundly** increase the warmth in their relationship. This **pause.....** of enjoying each other’s company provides a regular connection point in the Hi’s and Bye’s of life. If the kiss is too daunting, you could try a 10 second hug.

One couple I was seeing for counselling, who experimented with the 10-second goodbye kiss in the mornings after I’d recommended it to them, had an interesting story to tell. Two

weeks later, when I asked the couple how it was going, the wife said, "Well, we're only up to the 7 second kiss, but today Barry didn't even get to work!"

Rituals need to be **clearly communicated**, with **each** of your desires being expressed, and put into action; otherwise they won't work. Sometimes rituals need to be reassessed if both parties have unequal expectations.

Let's look at **ways we've had fun in the past** and how we can **rekindle** this in our relationship.

To be able to take risks in our relationship we need to know our partner and how they think and will react.

- 'The best love is that which awakens the soul' - this quote is from the movie, 'The Notebook'.

If we are going to **awaken** our lover's soul, we need to **know** something **of** their soul. With that knowledge we need to then value their soul, honour it, celebrate it, party with it and deeply respect it.

John Gottman terms it as having a love map of your partner, which he describes as being - that part of the brain where you store all the relevant information about your partner's life. He talks about couples who have made plenty of cognitive room for their marriage. Without a love map you can't really know your spouse.

- Leo Buscaglia summarizes this concept- 'A loving relationship is a wanting to celebrate, communicate, and know another's heart and soul.'

May each of us be inspired to reach for the high notes as we develop more adventure and fun in our marriages!

May we leave this Conference with an attitude that will take new and healthy risks, towards a path enabling us to grow more and more in love with each other in this adventurous journey called marriage!