

WHEN YOU GET YOUR WISH

By Debra Rowe

I've wanted to be married for a very long time, ever since my first "happily ever after" stories, more than 40 years ago. It wasn't the white dress and wedding ceremony I wanted, although I don't think I would have refused had the opportunity presented itself. And I didn't want the painfully awkward showers with their gifts of towels and toasters that the bride and groom inevitably hated.

No, the main reason was of course to have a soulmate – someone I could share my innermost feelings with. But more pragmatically, it was to have a partner with status. I wanted to be able to leave a boring party early, saying "My husband has to get up early in the morning". I knew having a husband at family gatherings would promote me from kitchen slave to sociable guest. I wanted a husband to stand firmly authoritative between me and the used car sales agents and the phone repair people.

Of course any feminist would see I was looking for an easy way out, a crutch I could use to avoid the more unpleasant side of life. And, growing up in the fifties and sixties, I despised that part of myself, and learned to be independent. I worked

during the summers to put myself through school, and then continued working. Keeping a roof over my head was my primary concern. After that, any spare time I had was devoted to reading, hobbies, and time spent with friends. But always, deep underneath, I felt a desperate longing for a connection with a man.

I had my share of relationships, everything from the blissful stomach-churning wonder of “My God! He likes me!” to the sadly resigned “Here we go again.” But none of them lasted, and I grew more and more accustomed to being on my own.

So much so that I found I wasn’t prepared when a long term friend suddenly became first, a lover and then, wonder of wonders, a husband! Because we had spent years getting to know each other as friends, our “courtship” seemed bizarrely short and prosaic. After all, there’s no point in doing the dating thing. We already knew about and liked one another. Once we became aware that we were sexually compatible (and that took two weeks of painfully shy negotiations), we immediately set up house together. Anything less seemed absurd. He was in the midst of getting a divorce from his amicably separated first wife and so there was no rush to get married. We lived together for almost four years before all the details got sorted out and we were finally wed.

And instead of living happily ever after, that’s when things got really tough!

The wedding itself was easy. I was 48, Nick 67, and both of us were more interested in the state of being married than in the actual ceremony. We found a

cheerful 72-year-old local woman to officiate. She was just beginning her career as an ordained minister. Our witnesses were a health food specialist and a tea leaf reader. The ceremony was performed in our home on a Wednesday evening after work. No church, no photographers, no white wedding dress. It was intimate, casual and heartfelt, and we loved it.

After our wedding, curiously enough, we felt a third entity had joined us. There was suddenly Our Marriage to nourish and protect. We already knew we could live together companionably and successfully but now we became more willing to listen each other. We each struggled harder to overcome old destructive habits. And we knew that this new sensitivity would only make a good thing better.

When the challenges appeared, however, I had the odd feeling of being hoisted by my own petard. I could remember all too clearly what life was like when I was single. I remember sighing for a partner to talk with. Now I have a husband who adores talking. He's a psychotherapist but for him, talking is not only his job. It's his passion. And gradually I found I was getting tired of the intensely heated discussions we were having at the breakfast table, at the supper table, at 4 in the morning, on the way to grocery shopping, and on the way back from the squash courts. But when I heard myself shout, "I don't want to talk about it anymore!", part of me gasped, snickered, and mocked "You got what you wished for. Why complain?"

And I remember how I'd wanted a partner who would give me limits I could use to help myself in and out of sticky situations. Well, guess what? Apparently, I

don't much like limits. When, after a long day's work updating databases and typing faxes at the office, my husband courteously suggested I might not want to sit in front of our home computer surfing the Net all evening long, I bit his head off. It didn't matter that my neck was sore, my eyes were burning and what I really wanted to do was relax in a hot bubble bath. How dare he say to me "nay"! And the morning that he turned off the alarm and crept quietly out of the bedroom to return half an hour later with a steaming mug of my favourite hot drink, I nearly knocked him over in my blind panic to get ready for work. It didn't matter that he'd been thoughtful and compassionate. It didn't matter that I was dog-tired, and that I still had time to get to work. All I could do was fume "How dare he shut off the alarm without my permission!" And afterwards, sitting at my desk at work, comfortably on time, I have to grin wryly to myself.

For marriage has turned out to be better than I'd hoped, but not what I expected. And as I learn to relax my expectations and accept the unlooked for gifts, our relationship continually deepens in richness, warmth and love.
