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MARRIAGE

The Bridge that Never Broke

A larger-than-life testimonial on a 24-year cross-national, inter-religious marriage that just kept getting better

Nirmala Baker, Connecticut

Fred and I met in a most unusual way. One evening in India as I was returning home from work, I passed the newspaper stand at Matunga Railway Station. I glanced at The Illustrated Weekly of India, dated July 4, 1971. The cover caught my eye, so I bought it. I flipped open the first page and spotted a letter to the editor from a Frederic Baker requesting anyone from India to correspond with him. Curiosity got the better of me. I used my last aerogram and scribbled a brief note to him introducing myself.

Three weeks later I was pleasantly surprised to receive a polite reply from a gentleman in Hartford, Connecticut. It was Fred replying to my letter. He wrote that he had taken a university course on religions of the world, was impressed with Hinduism and wanted to learn more.

Fred later told me that he had received about 500 responses

to his published letter from all over the country. But mine was the first. We corresponded formally for about three months, exchanging information on our social customs, culture, festivals and general interests. I explained the system of arranged marriages in India and how my mother had lined up some prospective grooms for me. We shared our views on the merits of Eastern arranged marriages versus love marriages in the West. I was cynical of love marriages, which often culminated in divorce. We also expressed other thoughts and views on marriage: its purpose, morals, values and ethics. We were both amazed to discover that we were two minds thinking as one.

By September our excitement and exuberance compelled us to write two or three letters a week, not even waiting for replies to previous letters. We would just read each other's mind, and write letters in delightful anticipation. All of this sparked a flame that drew us closer. We were getting emotionally involved.

Fred sent me a taped cassette for Diwali asking me to marry him. I was dumbfounded. Faced with a very difficult decision and wondering how to cross the traditional barriers, I placed my entire faith in the Lord. I prayed fervently asking if Fred was the right person for me. Numerous obstacles were removed, one by one.

I had been going to the Sri Siddhi Vinayaga temple in Mumbai every Tuesday to pray for a good husband. Now Lord Ganapati was bringing me to Fred, 8,000 miles across the ocean. I arrived in the United States on December 11, 1971, and we

got married on December 17. We strictly followed the Hindu tradition of no dating.

Fred and I came from two very diverse worlds, each with its own culture, food, religion and language. We complemented each other. He was quiet, shy, reserved and private. I was gregarious and chatty. Fred sacrificed his privacy. I compromised by giving him some space. One of our greatest attributes was being able to communicate. If we had a difference of opinion we agreed to disagree—rather than have an argument.

We were committed to making our marriage work. We showed each other respect and trust. Neither took the other for granted. It gave us great pleasure to make small sacrifices for each other. Fred allowed me to continue performing puja (Hindu worship) every day and observing Hindu festivals. I participated in his Christian holidays.

Two months after our marriage I was pregnant and ill. Feeling homesick, I longed to go back to India for the delivery of my child. I also missed the luxury of servants who did all the menial chores. Fred regretted that he was unable to send me to India. After our son Douglas Sanjay was born, Fred appeased my despondency by helping with the care of Doug and the housework. It was Fred who woke up in the wee hours of the morning when the baby cried, allowing me to sleep and rest. Watching my husband do more than his share of the work bothered me. I gradually ventured to learn the dignity of menial labor.

I have come to realize that the role of a spouse and a parent is not an easy one. There is no formal education on how to be a mother and a wife. But Fred and I regarded our marriage as a sacred bond. We adopted the best of both cultures and instilled them in our son. Doug is a wonderful blend of the East and West, a handsome offspring of an Asian-Indian mother and a European-American father. I decided to be a stay-at-home mother and a full-time housewife. I learned that these are the most gratifying jobs in the world!

Fred was truly the answer to my prayers. He was my ideal husband, faithful companion, best friend, chauffeur, gardener, electrician, plumber all rolled into one. I felt honored to be his devoted wife. I adored him and stood by him in hard times and during his illness. We enjoyed 24 years of blissful marriage. This marriage was our greatest success in life. He passed away on October 22, 1995.

Today, I live alone. Whenever I become despondent, I mentally call on Fred for comfort. And just at that moment the telephone will ring. My son or a friend will call to ask me out. Thank you, Fred, for still being there for me.