

I Guess That's Me (A Reflection)

Lee Frank

Unhappily Married

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Going away didn't help to keep us together. You can see it in this picture. You might also see Bev's put on weight. Me too, and it'll be more noticeable in the next picture. This one is at her parent's home. I don't look happy. I was rarely happy there. They were good people but not my kind of entertainment. Bev's neither, but you do these things when it's family. I know I did. At my family gatherings, the fun relatives greatly outnumber the boring. Did I say boring? I don't mean to demean her parents. After all, her mother was a saint. They said so at her recent memorial. Ever try to live with a saint? It wasn't

just me. Her son and daughter would always say with exasperation, "Mother!"

My ex-mother-in-law would always bring up the most inappropriate conversation at dinnertime. Usually the topics were death or disease. Even her husband chided her. And while she did the great deeds and performed the great charities, he's the one I choose for sainthood. He survived alcoholism and living with her for almost fifty years.

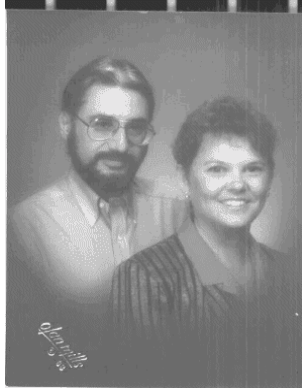
Enough about other people; Bev and I were the ones in misery. When we weren't on the road, we were living mostly separate lives. A few years before the end, she moved into the guest bedroom. She'd been using the guest bathroom as her own from the beginning. At some point she decided to redo it in pink. Given her poor vision, she did a fairly good job of painting. But that wasn't all. She had found those foot square mirrors I had used for the chessboard in that New York apartment. She mounted most of them on the wall opposite the sink. After a dozen years, many of these mirrors had lost their luster. The backing had discolored on many edges and corners. But she wanted to do this and I never said a word.

I was trying very hard not to make it worse. After I gave her the money to try the Mary Kay dream, I was silent when it evaporated. I never even said, "Why don't you throw this junk out?" Which is probably what I was thinking. During these years, I rarely said what I was thinking, and I don't suppose she did either. Since you can see where this is going, I won't bother you with the details. (Details, they say, are where alternatively God or the Devil is hiding.) I won't bother you with Bev's faults because this book is not about her. It's about me.

I can say this much: Beverly brought unneeded assumptions into our marriage. In this, she was like millions of others who've made the same mistake. (Some

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make it over and over.) Somehow I knew this was not how you make a marriage. I don't know how I knew, but I knew. Marriage is not about what you think it should be; it's about what the two of you make it. Preconceptions only leads to problems, and only teamwork solves problems. Marriage is not a partnership where each struggles for power. I could go on, but you either know this already or will never, as they say, "get it."



What we got, was divorced. As you can see by this officially posed "they're still married" photo neither of us was getting any thinner. Bad joke: We not only grew, we grew apart. The photo (actually a series by one of those photography mills) was her idea. Like this would help keep us together. It didn't. Eventually, she acknowledged this truth. I found no fault with her arrangement of the No-Fault divorce. When this painless procedure was over, we both felt better.

This wasn't what I expected when we got married. I was reminded of this the other day when telling a friend the kind of help I needed around the house: filing, making calls, running errands, taking cars in for repair. And she said, "Oh, you mean you need a wife." And I said, no, I

never asked a wife to do that. Nor would I. A wife is not my personal assistant.

A wife and husband are supposed to be a team. A team works together, one does some things for the other and vice versa. If the guy is in fact stronger, then he should carry the heavy garbage (if such exists). If the woman is more skilled in the kitchen—and none of these postulates are necessarily true—then maybe she should do more cooking. Maybe if the husband has better eyesight than the wife, then maybe he should do the fine detailed cleaning or write the checks. Or vice versa. A personal assistant is nothing I ever expected from a wife. I never expecting anything.

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