

Chapter 1 – Lifetime Lifting

“My idea of marriage was largely fostered by what I experienced in my natural family and what I learned from church family. Sure, I was aware of broken families, but I did not conceive or desire that for mine...”

“Lifetime Lifting” is simply the ideal or belief in the mutual encouraging between people—and in the matter of marriage, for a lifetime. I begin with this term or phrase to set the tempo for the book; that is, a tone of encouragement for those whom I have listed in the acknowledgement—except for my Lord—whom encourages me.

Courtship and marriage is where this story begins; divorce and post-divorce life is where it continues; and the desire for reconciliation with my children is where it is ideally going. As to the life hereafter—when a lifetime of lifting is over—I trust that my life as an aging adult will have been more like a needing child to my Father, and more of a father to my children. As of right now, I believe that the first is true but the second is far from true; and to my regret and remorse, I begin this story in hope that both may be true.

The children came from marriage, and my marriage began in August of 1986; and the marriage was the culmination of many months of dating that began in the fall of 1984. It was in the fall, that I first remember her—although we had already met at church. Having returned to Jacksonville Florida after college, I was in my second year of life-after-college when we met. It seemed that most of my friends had married or were in position; and so, careless at it might be, their marital status was reason enough to me to consider the same. Yes, I wanted to be married—but also felt compelled or pressured to be. If there was a time to marry and begin this next phase of life, it seemed that now was ideal.

I first considered calling her and finding out more about her after a brief introduction at a ball game. A phone message followed by a return, we talked and then went on a first date and then some more. The things that I remember most were her hair and this turquoise shirt that she wore; oh, I think she had some matching shoes if I remember correctly. It was with my wife—or friend at the time—which I would first go to Disney World, to a Florida Gator football

game, and in the many months to come, to engagement and then matrimony. We did much together and increasingly grew in closeness and intimacy.

Before we went to the altar, there was some dating—and with the dating came some difficult times. Without knowing to this day the possible reasons or causes, I will try to describe a few possibilities; but as a starting point, I had not dated much before our relationship and was very untested or untrained when it came to relationships and women. My idea of marriage was largely fostered by what I experienced in my natural family and what I learned from church family; but had nothing to do with any prior, serious relationships.

Before we went to the altar, there was some dating – and with the dating came some difficult... times

Her past did include a relationship; a tragic story of her fiancé dying from Leukemia that had left her naturally grieved and, I think, somewhat idealistic of what could have been. I remember seeing a picture of the two of them and making a comment, “Is this a boyfriend?” With the understanding that developed over time, I could not forget the impulsive comment nor the compelling story of what could have been for them. I cannot say that I lived in the shadow of this intended husband, but as impulsive as my comment may have been, the possibility was that it was an understatement—for I think he may have been much more in her mind.

What I would also learn—though more after marriage—was of a difficult childhood growing-up in an alcoholic home. Every family has their skeletons or secrets, but the reputation of her father was something seldom mentioned—and even then—over a recurring story of how he took them (the children) to get ice-cream. The sordid story was intermittently pieced together – not so much by my wife or her siblings—but by the comments of a brother-in-law who had known the father. As the youngest of six children, my wife probably had vague memories of her father—who died when she was twelve—but what she did make known was the reputation of the current step-father that had shared the same

addiction. Yes, her mother had re-married a buddy of her father's, who himself, was also an alcoholic.

Any of us could probably *come-clean* on skeletons or well-kept secrets of the family; but I raise these matters to suggest that the importance of the father cannot be undervalued in the development of his children (or step-children)—to include his daughters. If nothing more, the father provides some model or image of what a man (and potential husband) could be like. For the daughter, the father is generally one of the first and often times, primary mature male in her young life. In his book, *The Wonder of Girls*, Michael Gurian refers to a positive father-role as the *gifts of the father* (to his daughter). In still another read, *Fatherless America*, David Blankenhorn writes:

A father plays a distinctive role in shaping a daughter's sexual style and her understanding of the male-female bond. A father's love and involvement builds a daughter's confidence in her own femininity and contributes to her sense that she is worth loving...

My wife's childhood experience was nothing like this—and while many families and fathers have likely fallen short of this gift-giving—the conditions for her seemed to have been dire. She never spoke of her dad and the opinion of her step-dad was very poor—both positions of which I would not really grasp until sometime after our marriage. What little I did gather was probably passed-on in view of romance, love and potential marriage; but I could not ignore the difficult times when she would abruptly end the relationship—when one day things seemed to be going well, only to learn the next that something was not.

If there is connection between this early *on-again off-gain* scenario and the past, than I have not really put the two together. What I did observe—and endure—was a very uncertain relationship that left me on a somewhat roller-coaster ride of romance. Was it something I said, something I did or maybe something I should have done, but didn't?

I remember one time, not long after we had been married, that I somehow overlooked her expectation for an Easter basket. Not realizing that she was expecting this sort of gift (at her age), I was clueless as to what I had done, or not

done. Once realizing my so-called err, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry—because I just couldn't understand why a young adult would expect an Easter basket. Maybe it's me, maybe it's being a man; but there was no maybe when it came to eggs on Easter.

I thought *I was a pretty good egg*—as the old saying goes; but I was very naïve (and/or negligent) in overlooking the past experience and relationship with her father and step-father. Any connection between these relationships and her pursuit of the “real family”—so imagined or found in her first and passing love—was equally amiss to my attention or consideration.

I thought I was a pretty good egg – as the old saying goes; but I was very naïve...

To give some sense of *equal billing* however, my own experiences should be mentioned in this *background check*. Growing up in a military family—a Marine family—the situation could have been very different; and for one, the rule of the father was the law. A strong, sometimes-present father versus always distant and sometime-drunk father seems a marked difference in experience.

In this military setting was a dutiful wife—who kept the fire burning while he was deployed or departed for operations. She took command while he was away, and seemed to relinquish command during his stay. Our childhood—myself and two siblings—was not really a reminiscence of fatherly affection, but it is remembered with respect for authority and, for me, post-appreciation for their commitment to each other and, consequently, to us.

I do not regret having gone into marriage without much of a base or experience in serious relationships. I have read that such inexperience can sometimes be for the better. But I do regret not having considered the past more maturely and wisely, because the past—and particular childhood and family—has much bearing on the future marriage, relationships and family. If not already apparent through the early excerpts, the role of father and child is crucial to the role of husband and wife. The way that a wife views her husband—and men in general—is often through the lens of childhood experiences and relationships with her father, brother and other family.

My idea of marriage was largely fostered by what I experienced in my natural family and what I learned from church family. Sure, I was aware of broken families, but I did not conceive or desire that for mine. She not only had to indulge the experiences of her childhood, but had somewhat of a repeat from a subsequent, step-father. Was it any wonder that she was desperate for this potential healthy relationship from her first love—to include both he and his apparent, stable family?

Wanting such a change for obvious reasons, she had to accept the untimely loss of her boyfriend with the bitterness that life is unfair; that she was robbed of the one family she thought she could acquire but did not. Perhaps her *on-again off-again* disposition was just *cold-feet* (as they say); but I think that that it was the foreboding of marriage as tenuous—that whether by death of a dearly-beloved or by drunkenness of a dad—the relationship of marriage could (and would not) last or endure.

With only a brief introduction to this past experience, I imagined myself as somewhat of the “white knight”—the rescuer if you will. How often does the man enter the marriage with the same perception—either from his perspective or from hers? He will be the exception; he will debunk all past impressions and experiences by showing her the “other side” of being a man. Yes, he will undo what has been undone—or he will die trying....

*I imagined myself
as somewhat of
the “white knight”
– the rescuer if
you will.*

What a way to think—as though I could be the savior of anyone or anything? It’s enough to set sail for the “untested and untrained relationship”; but to accept the mission that I could be anything and everything they were not, is a call too high and impossible. To have such an expectation—from either view for either partner—is indeed a *design to fail* for which the relationship of marriage could (and would not) last or endure.

“Lifetime Lifting” is a good thing—for who better to encourage our partner than ourselves; but this lifting must come from others too—and the absence of a decent father can not be substituted altogether by a husband or husband-

intended, alive or dead. A knight perhaps, but the knight also has a brotherhood of alive and dead—and the history or legacy of the fore-knight has great bearing on the expectation and experience of the generations to come. Such a past cannot be an excuse for me or any other husband to fail as a husband, but it can be a significant reason for failing as a man. As the tried-and-true Proverbs offers:

Pay close attention, friend, to what your father tells you; never forget what you learned at your mother's knee. Wear their counsel like flowers in your hair, like rings on your fingers. (Chapter 1, *The Message*)

And for the legacy of our past sins and shortcomings, the book of Exodus offers:

Still, he doesn't ignore sin. He holds sons and grandsons responsible for a father's sins to the third and even fourth generation. (Chapter 34)

Need I say more—that is not offered from the doctors and the deity—regarding the import of the father in the family? A good father establishes the basis for a good marriage of his child, and a bad father a far less likely basis; neither is absolute, but one is far more associated with the other and, to the extreme of an addiction, “the other” is not. Even a good knight can fall to the rule or legacy of a bad king—but then there is often hope.

The *on-again off-again* seemed to dissipate over time and, in time, we were engaged. There was the “first-time” of my inquiry (or proposal)—which did not *fly*; but “try, try again” with the battle-cry that soon rendered the momentary victory. Even before this commitment was initiated, I was ready for her to meet the parents.

We met at a local dinner theater; a place that my parents had attended many years prior when they were at the Naval Air Station. This setting was very nice, and with reservations made for “My Fair Lady”, reservations had also been expressed about the *rocky relationship*. The *on-again off-again* was concerning to both my parents and my brother—both of whom thought that I should give it a rest; but like the independent son (or brother), I pressed-on with the thinking that *this too will pass*. By this time however, the roller-coaster had seemed to stop and we are much more on *even ground*; and perhaps my parents were less

concerned, as my dad prematurely introduced her as my fiancé. Maybe to them it was obvious that I had found a woman, a wife.

Plans were made and details were finalized; the wedding was to be at a local church where one of her sisters had been married. Neither of us had any prior association to the church but on her past impression and my acceptance, we proceeded with plans to attend there, to obtain some pre-marital counseling, and to be wed by the rector. In terms of the church doctrine or theology, neither of us was aware or familiar; but I think it really came down to the quaintness of the chapel—its ascetics and atmosphere.

The rector was a special man and friend; he offered a lot of encouragement and reassurance for both of us. Half listening to him and the other half mesmerized in matrimony, I was admittedly only half there—the other half in love with loving someone and being loved by someone. It was altogether a wonderful time, a welcomed time and a wedding in the making of time.

Each of us came into this relationship with our own expectations and impressions formed by our backgrounds however different or similar it might be. On the surface, the similarities were our age, or state of birth, our social-economic status, and the church; but beneath the surface, was the differences described previously. Sometimes the differences can outweigh the similarities and the expectations and impressions can suffer.

As mentioned already, she was the youngest of six children; one brother and four sisters. Both of us being the youngest (of our families) may not have the best of similarities, but it could have given us the opportunity to look upward and onward for the best (and worst) of all circumstances. Having the benefit of hindsight through the mistakes of older siblings should be one possibility for better, wiser decisions. Somewhat like the role of the father, these old ones can not only blaze the trail but can leave some trail-markers and maps to help those in the following. Some don't have this benefit or privilege, but we did.

Each of us came into this relationship with our own expectations and impressions formed by our backgrounds...

Family gatherings usually went well on the basis of pleasing mom and tolerating the step-father. I mention this man once again because, besides being responsible (or irresponsible) for re-creating the addicted father-figure, he was exceptionally lazy and blatantly divisive. In looking back, I wonder how any—and particular the immediate family—could tolerate his presence save to make their mother happy, if that were possible. There was an occasional showing of good toward me—that I think had more to do with where I came from, than who I was; but, in general, he made an occupation and objective out of denigrating the eldest brother-in-law—both he and his family. This “contribution” alone was enough reason to send him packing; but for reason (that no one seemed to understand or appreciate), their mother had married him.

Her apparent dedication to marriage was (or should have been) commendable; she had suffered for many years in the first marriage and, if that wasn't enough, decided to go at it again. The first husband, Jesse, was purported as a hard worker and skilled machinist; but again, most or all of this information (for the little it was) came from the same brother-in-law that was so maligned by the step-father. Other than the occasional comment, little or nothing was said of the first father; and nothing good was said of the present husband; and nothing commendable was seldom if ever said of any man in this family.

The brother-in-law was (and probably still is) a good man, husband and father; and though he had a story of his own, his faith made the difference. I always liked the man and, on several occasions, depended on him. As with the father-in-law of which he commented from time to time, this son-in-law was skilled in his own right. Not only did he help me (or my wife and me), but he also helped many of the family; yet, with all he did and then did, the thanks was scarce and the unwarranted criticism prevalent. If any man in that family could have been praised or recognized, it would have been (and should have been) him. I guess it's true that no good deed goes unpunished.

Besides the modest mention of men, there was the also some evidence that the addiction (alcoholism) was still present; though the step-father had been forced to give it up to save his life, three others (the one brother of the family) were developing or continuing in their own. Like his father, the brother was also talented and in the years prior to our meeting, had owned and managed his own business in shipboard maintenance. Not knowing the actual reason (s) for failure, his business was apparently doing well at some point or period; and as the brother-in-law and family recorder told me, failed because of the brother's addiction.

Another brother-in-law (with a similar problem) was also seemingly successful and, between he and his wife, made enough income to propel them into the very comfortable lifestyle. Besides the occasional fall and a well-stocked bar, he was considered a suitable husband at the time—but would eventually fall too far and end up among the ranks of the dispossessed and the divorced like me.

He and I would not be alone however, as the only man that had any chance of surviving a marriage may have been the least worthy—that being the step-father. Anyone and everyone else was fair game and, whether they were better or worse than the first father, they were not of the same blood; and therefore, were (and perhaps are) expendable. Only the brother of the family had impunity—or was justified—when a marriage was *on the rocks*; and though the probable cause of his marriage break-up (s) was too many “on the rocks”, he could do no wrong in the eyes of his mother with or without the daughters' agreement.

A description of the men (in this family) probably deserves more detail—and could probably benefit from one more qualified—but I mention it to the degree in order to make a single point: men were not respected and, though some probably deserved it, at least one other did not; and nearly all suffered from the very deep hurt perhaps initiated by the father and undoubtedly continued by the step-father. The sons, grandsons and all the men were held responsible for

the sins of the father (and the step-father); and though the wife seemed to soldier on, she was actually part of it in tolerating the first and patronizing the second.

As far as “Lifetime Lifting” or encouragement was concerned, the family (or children) may have been too embroiled in their own circumstances carried over from the common childhood experience of an addictive parent. Without the love of a father for one—let alone any of the children—the obvious option is depend on each other when they could. For the eldest child, a daughter, this meant becoming a surrogate mother; and while she and the good brother-in-law married young, they dually and dutifully picked-up some of the *slack*. This early effort of effectual parenting may have been part of the reason that they, among all the siblings and marriages, were the most stabilized and the least obviously-damaged and adversely-affected by the families’ experience.

I may seem to be deviating from my initial intention, “a tempo of encouragement”; but there is need to be honest from the standpoint of what I saw or experienced—especially as I think it may have pertained to or had bearing on my relationship with the youngest of the family, and own our marriage and family. As I think back on this time period ranging from ten to twenty years ago, the possibility is that I have (or will) miss something while, at the same, I might not include something else. The objective in this recollection was chiefly to summarize my perceived disposition of the males as it relates to the extended family, and potentially, to hers and mine.

Did her experience as a child have some adverse affect on the way that she thought about men; her impressions and expectations? Yes, I think it did. Did the way that her fathers (and step-father) have some adverse effect on the way that his daughters (and son) live—particularly in their views and understanding of marriage and family? Yes, I think it did. Did the way that their mother lived (around her men) have some bearing on the way the daughters lived around their men? Again yes, I think it did.

Did her experience as a child have some adverse affect on the way that she thought about men...?

My perception or opinion would be careless and unqualified to attempt to for any further—and perhaps I have already too far. My basic understanding is that children are influenced by their parents—for good or bad—and do model or imitate some of the behavior. Yes, there is potential opportunity to learn and to change—for the better—but the change does not come magically. Above all, the children or child (now adult) must sometimes painfully address (or redress) the practices of their parents with the aim of getting better.

...that no man can (or should) be respected – there were just too much pain and loss from childhood

Do I understand; have I experienced a family of addiction? No, I have not; and nor do I make an attempt to try to understand it with any follow-on. What I have said is part of my own journey to understand ultimately why I, as a husband, could never achieve any respect of my wife. But in the broader perspective is that no man had her respect while none of the men of her immediate family had much, if any, either. If a man wants (and needs) to be respected, his chances were very small in this family—and if such was his way of being encouraged or gratified, than he could expect little if any....

On the other side, a man should be responsible for “Lifetime Lifting” his wife. The initial or beginning fathers of this family did not seemingly carry-out this behavior or expression. Neither of these men could (or would) offer encouragement to the family; but on the contrary, were more beneficial to the family by staying away or leaving.

Such an absence of this expression of encouragement left an obvious void; but the void did not necessarily remain, but was back-filled with something else. For my wife (or intended), this “something” could have included the basic belief that no man can (or should) be respected; and in keeping with this experience, no man can be trusted—as reliability is not a reality. The *on-again off-again* could not be casually assigned the condition of *cold-feet*, but was the about the terror of committing herself to something that is not committable in her experience. “If I commit myself to him (like my mother did to her men), he will be like her men” could be the deep sense from the mind of a young and very

impressionable girl. Such a similar belief could have haunted some of the other girls—although they did not have to endure the brunt of a bad step-father, an intended father-like figure.

On the eve of our marriage, there might have been good reason to really ask, “What is marriage?” Is it the impression and expectation that this man can make me happy—can be a savior that helps me forget the tragedy of my parents’ failed relationship as well as my own as his child? What is certain is that marriage was **not** to be a commitment or covenant.