



When your Partner Betrays You – Parents Journal January 2005

By Anne Jones

There is nothing so challenging to a marriage than infidelity. Very few relationships survive this act of betrayal. It can hit at the very heart of a person's inner security, self esteem and faith in love and the effects can be long lasting – affecting future relationships and happiness. However, many "victims" of infidelity survive and move on to create happy and deeply fulfilling relationships.

I recently met Sarah and Peter who have both gone through the anguish of their partner's infidelity, however they have both gained from their experiences. Their story is heart warming and has a happy ending!

Sarah's story

Sarah had been married for 5 years when she faced her personal nightmare. One day during the New Year holiday period she decided to pack up and go home early. When she reached her apartment she was filled with dread as she failed to open the door – it was double locked. Intuitively she knew what she was going to find. John, looking grey with fear, eventually let her in and, yes he had a woman with him. Sarah's legs went to jelly and her whole body shook. The girl was one of their friends. Shocked and distraught by their betrayal she screamed at them to leave and after they had gone she too packed her bags, unable to stay now the apartment was tainted and spoiled. She moved in with a friend and never went back.

No way back

I asked her if there had been any chance of reconciliation – after all, it would be a shame to turn away from a loving marriage because of one mistake. No chance, John had been having a full-on affair for some time and he showed no real remorse, although he was upset about losing her respect and declared he loved them both.

It's worth an attempt to save a marriage that has been loving at some stage. Of course, you don't want to condone ongoing abuse and in this case John had obviously taken his love elsewhere over a period of time so Sarah did the right thing to move away. If she had returned to her marriage she would have lost self respect as well as living with ongoing distrust of John.

The aftermath

Following her initial shock Sarah went through a number of emotions. She was, of course, furious with both her friend and her husband's betrayal and she also felt humiliated. Later she felt guilty; was there something lacking in her that had caused the break down of their marriage?

Anger, humiliation, denial and guilt are all natural reactions to this type of trauma so accept these emotions as part of the healing process.

Sarah turned to her family and their problems. Her mother was dying of cancer and she spent the next six months absorbed in caring for her and her father. She put her life and troubles on hold and it wasn't until after her mother died that she began to come to terms with what had happened. **Caring for others is a great way to ease the pain within ourselves but soon or later we have to go back and start healing the scars.**

She was lucky enough at that time to meet a great counsellor, Kylie Bolton from Australia, who she felt empathetic and caring. Kylie helped her to acknowledge the experience and to deal with the trauma instead of internalising it. **It is quite a normal reaction to go into a state of denial after a bad experience but you need to accept the reality of the situation, no matter how painful. Counselling is an excellent way to gain help without judgement. A stranger is**



more likely to be honest to you than a friend and pouring out your troubles endlessly can put a strain on even the closest friendship.

Looking Back

On reflection Sarah could see that her marriage hadn't really been very easy or harmonious. Her husband was a good looking and charismatic character. He overawed her and she felt desperate to please him so she had consistently suppressed her own needs and feelings and through this had lost her natural free spirit. **This clear sighted view of her life with John has helped Sarah to move on and find new love. Any relationship where you don't feel free to express your feelings freely will inhibit your spirit and will eventually result in low self esteem.**

Peter's Story

Peter went through a period of depression and guilt following the death of his father. The circumstances of his father's death were particularly upsetting as he had died overseas, painfully and slowly and Peter and his mother had allowed his father's death to be assisted; a situation that had left him guilty and disturbed. There was also a huge legal battle over the status of his father's travel health insurance and Peter used involvement in this to put his grieving on hold. The ensuing depression and grief caused him to withdraw and he lost vital communication with his wife Rachel. As he went deeper and further from her he hoped that she would follow and understand his pain but she saw his distance as a rejection. **This is a typical cause of a relationship breakdown – when communication falls down so empathy and understanding tend to fall off. It's vital for the sake of a relationship to express your views and feelings on the one side and for the other to understand the moodiness is not a rejection but a symptom of depression and inner pain.**

Peter and Rachel had few common interests. Rachel was quite a determined character and insisted Peter gave up his sport as he spent so little time at home with her and their boys due to the demands of his career. **This challenge of outside interests v family is a problem many marriages face. Compromise is the only solution with some give and take on both sides. Both parties need to have their own hobbies but its also necessary to develop some shared interest.**

Rachel's interest was singing and she belonged to the local operatic group. Her evening sessions became later and later. Looking back Peter sees that deep down he knew that she was having an affair but he refused to acknowledge it. At this time Peter's job took him and his family to Hong Kong. However, she was still in communication with her love but again he refused to acknowledge the signs.

One night he approached her for love and she emphatically denied him – this was a signal that he could not ignore. He confronted her and she told him that she was in love with a member of her singing group. Peter was devastated; he couldn't sleep or eat and over the next three months lost 12 kilos. He hit rock bottom. Rachel went back to England and eventually Peter decided to get counselling. This helped him to see that he had batted down his grief for his father and that throughout his marriage he had suppressed his own feelings and allowed himself to be talked out of doing the things that he wanted. **Like Sarah, Peter found great help from counselling to see that the breakdown was not caused by anything that he had done or not done but a difference in needs. He also learned to speak of his feelings and allow that his needs are also important.**

Happy Endings



Peter and Sarah met in a bar in Hong Kong and there was an instant mutual attraction and they quickly became good friends, fell in love and married. They have a close, sharing and loving relationship and both of them have brought to their marriage a strong understanding of themselves – which they both feel they would not have had if they hadn't gone through the loss of their previous partners. They have let go the past have not let their own self respect be affected by their unfaithful ex partners. They are aware of their own needs and are not afraid to express them to each other. And finally but not least they have a gorgeous baby boy to complete their new and happy family.

Put in side

Why your partner may stray:

- You are not speaking to each other about feelings and needs
- Sexual problems. If sex is painful or distressing go to a doctor or counsellor.
- Holding onto the past – unexpressed grief and emotional trauma. Take counselling.
- No time for each other – share time and mutual interests.
- Not enough freedom “Birds allowed to fly will return, those that are caged will try to escape”
- Poor childhood experiences e.g. unfaithful mother or father as a role model.
- Neglecting appearance. My grandmother said “I dressed to catch him now I dress to keep him”. Both sexes take note!

Put in side

Counselling

Visit www.mindperformance.com for details of counselling in Hong Kong.

Resource: Hearts & Hands Counselling on the Internet: www.heartshands.org – Spiritual Help Line service.