

Chapter 7: The Relationship

by Reid Vanderburgh, MA

That fall, I reconnected with the Choir. Erin, Liza and I became best of friends. I had never discussed relationships with anyone before, but I began to talk about my feelings more with Erin and Liza. I remember confessing to them that I always thought, on entering a relationship, "I wonder how this one is going to end?" I remarked that I just did not understand why anyone would ever want to get involved, it just leads to heartache in the end. It was not long before I learned, for the first time, why people get involved.

On New Year's Eve, two friends from my Artquake days invited me to a beach house at the Oregon coast. The gathering was a hodge podge of their biological families, friends from Portland, and friends of theirs from Eugene. I didn't know anyone except the two women who had invited me. It was during this weekend that I met Judy, who lived in Eugene. We recognized an immediate affinity for each other and spent the weekend acknowledging this to ourselves, though not immediately to each other.

Upon my return, I got her address from our mutual friends and wrote her a card in which I told her I was attracted to her and wanted to see her again. Two days after mailing this card, I received a card from her which merely said, "I'm glad I met you." No acknowledgement of my card at all! I thought I'd misunderstood, that she was saying, "It was nice to meet you, see you around someday."

I talked to Naomi extensively about this, dissecting the possible meanings of this short message, until finally Naomi said the obvious, "Do you think maybe Judy sent this

card before she got yours?" Feeling like a fool because this possibility had not even occurred to me, I admitted this might be the case. Sure enough, when I got home that day, there was another card waiting for me. Judy had gone home after mailing her initial card to me, read my card, and sent me another to say she felt the same way.

Soon thereafter, Naomi called me excitedly and told me a print shop in downtown Portland was going out of business and auctioning off their equipment, among which was a typesetting machine. Naomi owned a print shop of her own, and kept track of such possibilities. State of the art for the 1980s, this typesetter actually had a disk drive for storing jobs. Unheard of at the time, this meant not having to re-type previous jobs in order to make revisions. I went to the auction and bought the machine for \$800, intending to set myself up as a typesetter and work out of my home. It looked as if the volunteer typesetting I'd done for the women's newspaper some years before was going to pay off. With my future employment solidly envisioned, I was free to worry about having met Judy.

I first visited her in Eugene the same day I took delivery of the typesetter. More than once, I have found momentous events occurring either on the same day or in close relative proximity to one another, as if the cosmos had several plans for me that all converged at once. Judy was in the process of writing a book and was now in the final editing phase. Realizing she would not be able to concentrate on this most-hated phase of writing if I were there, she limited our first visits to one day of a weekend. So I went down via Greyhound on Friday evening and came back Saturday evening. (I had still not acquired a driver's license).

We were not sexual at first, checking out

our feelings and taking things somewhat slowly. But again, I put sex high on the list even though I did not enjoy it. For me, I could not feel I was actually *in* a relationship until it had become sexual. The hallmark of whether a woman loved me or not was whether or not we were sexual with each other. I'd never lost that romantic view of love! So I was moving things along more quickly than Judy really wanted to.

She also was very self-conscious about sex, more openly so than any other woman I'd ever met. When we finally did have sex, she was as awkward about it as I'd ever felt, which bonded me to her quite effectively. We did fall in love. She moved to Portland that June. The following March, we bought a large house together, and I sold my little house. The typesetter never worked right after the move, and in exasperation, for it had always been temperamental, I bought my first laser printer. Once this was hooked up to my computer, I was off and running and never used traditional typesetting equipment again. I named my business Your Type Typesetting, later changing that to Your Type Design Services.

Judy had a music degree, and at first worked an office job until she had developed sufficient contacts in the local music community to be able to offer her services as a private music teacher. She then quit the office job and taught students in several locations. Between the two of us, we barely made sufficient money to pay the mortgage each month. We never had *quite* enough, and saving for household emergencies or retirement was simply not an option. But we had a beautiful older home in a wonderful neighborhood, and were quite happy for a few years.

However, we were not sexual at all after the first year. As we were both so self-

conscious about sex and our bodies, neither of us really enjoyed sex. Judy kept trying to plug away at it, but I was not interested in the attempt. I knew it was no good anyway, so why try, was my attitude. I was deeply unhappy with myself, but I loved Judy and the Choir and our house, which made up for much of my internal misery.

Erin and Liza fully accepted Judy into the equation and we became the four musketeers, rather than the three musketeers we'd been before. They considered our home their home away from home, and would often drop by unexpectedly, bringing beer and food for a "barbecue." We would complain about the Choir, barbecue on the back patio, and generally have a wonderful time together.

We had some good times during our relationship, Judy and I did. I had the most enjoyable times when we were away from home. I love adventuring and traveling. Judy was always much more anxious while traveling, but my enjoyment of such situations bolstered her and she came to enjoy our trips also. She did not sing with the Choir; professional musicians are easily bored with amateur groups. But she did support the Choir by taking on administrative roles, and was the first director of the Choir's small ensemble Sweetwater.

Our relationship was far from idyllic, however. My own discomfort with living female had been steadily growing, and now that I was in my thirties, I was living with a low-grade anxiety that was increasing as the years went by. I could no longer ignore the fact that I was not living as an adult, contributing member of society. During my early twenties, it did not bother me much that I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life. I had an unconscious sense of

marking time until I grew up. But as this feeling stayed with me into my thirties, I had a growing unease that something was seriously wrong with me. My friends all had careers, were beyond the stage of having mere jobs, and I felt this difference keenly.

My business was never successful financially, which meant Judy was contributing the lion's share of our income. At first, this was not inappropriate; the bulk of the down payment for our house had come from the proceeds of selling my smaller house. But as time went by, Judy grew more and more resentful of my inability to generate income.

My lack of self-esteem infected every area of my life, including my work. Though I produced high-quality work for my clients, I always felt uncomfortable being paid for the work I did, though few of my clients ever expressed any concern over my invoices. I also had a very difficult time marketing myself, relying primarily on my skills in developing print advertising and not being able to sell myself in person at business events. During those years from 1989 to 1995, I was using my home-based business as a way to hide myself away from the "real world." My gender dissonance had grown to such an extreme that I was very uncomfortable interacting with anyone outside my family of choice. Yet *still*, I did not recognize the nature of my extreme anxiety!

By 1993, I was very unhappy in my relationship with Judy and knew it consciously. I was also very unhappy with myself, and while I knew it consciously, I was still unaware of the reasons for it. In addition to my own discomfort with myself, I knew even then that there was something in Judy that I just wasn't reaching. I would eagerly wait for her to come home from

teaching, having prepared dinner. I would hold Bear Cub and we would stand by the back window, waiting for the sound of the garage door opening that meant Judy was home. Yet when she walked through the door, I was always conscious of a feeling of being let down, as though the person I was waiting for wasn't the person who came into the house. I constantly berated myself for these feelings, which confused and distressed me. And of course, it never occurred to me to talk to anyone about it.

At this point, I fell in love with another member of the Choir. I never told her about my feelings, though I hinted sufficiently that had she reciprocated, I would have left Judy for her. Fortunately, she did not feel as I did and eventually my feelings shifted into a close friendship. However, this was the first time I seriously entertained the notion of leaving Judy. I never quite recovered from that experience, and from that time on, I knew it was just a matter of time before we broke up. I could never have foreseen, however, the circumstances under which our relationship finally ended.

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