

# Marriage 101: The final exam

So, the infamous marriage of Charles and Di wasn't so loveless, at least not at first. Such is the latest from the information peddlers of the royal unio mystica, the mysterious union which lives in perpetuity since launched via satellite to 750 million people, 20 years ago Sunday.

It was July 29, 1981 when the world watched the lift-off of what eventually became the mother of all marital disasters. The Hindenburg fared better.

Charles has since manicured his public image but, for better or worse, he'll be remembered as the leading man in the sad tale of a dead princess. And I, for one, am left asking how to do better.

As a man who has lived many years without matching socks, I am hardly an expert on this type of thing. I know the art, and it is an art, of living single. Marriage, I've observed only from ashore.

Tomorrow, however, I say goodbye. Tomorrow, July 29, is my wedding day: a coincidence that's strikingly humorous because I was informed of it weeks after whipping up a little engagement soufflé. It included the town crier and a run of mock newspapers. Complete with Royal Wedding header and smiling photos of two royal children, the Valentines news circulated at the Grand Theatre and over London radio.

I may be a pauper, but I've dreamed of more. And, quite frankly, I've had help by studying at a royal academy of sorts.

Among the things there is the marshmallow test. I refer to experiments at Stanford University, where Prof. Walter Mischel found certain four-year-olds could resist the lure of a marshmallow when promised they'd get two for waiting. He also discovered the tykes who delayed gratification had more successes in their lives than those who grabbed without thinking. We're talking sex, and most of us have failed rather miserably here.

The walking wounded, we've enjoyed the lie of Oscar Wilde, who said celibacy is the only known sexual perversion. In the UK, for instance, one per cent of men and four per cent of women are virgins when they first walk the aisle. How telling.

My bride, an obstetrician-gynecologist, can tell about the disease factor.

Respect and trust also enter this picture. She and I have plenty of both. Amazingly, virgins in our mid-30s, neither of us have had any body parts fall off.

The way we see it, you can't get your body in shape without work and getting fit for marriage is no different.

If nothing else then, a prince does the right thing to the right person at the right time. He verbalizes the same.

Anne Morrow Lindberg refers to this in *A Gift from the Sea*. She writes of finding herself loved, the rather unbelievable feeling that changed her world, how she was given a confidence, a strength and new character. The man she was to marry believed in her and what she could do, and consequently she found she could do more than she realized.

Harvard Prof. Robert Rosenthal coined this the Pygmalion Effect, the phenomena we achieve to the level of expectations of significant others.

Royal bulimia, it seems, is one of the results of failing this particular test. Scoring well, on the other hand, boosts commitment, appreciation and communication.

And aren't they basic ingredients of good friendship?

My princess and I are among more than 600 souls who will marry in St. Thomas this year. Ten times as many will marry in London. Storms will inevitably arise. And, as it is now, roughly half of our ships will go down after, on average, 13 years. Innocent children will drown in the process. Is this not tragic?

I wonder if things would be different if, as singles, we gave as much attention to sailing as to our vocations. How many of us, though, will take the time to study ship construction before heading out? Blueprints happen to be in the language of the other gender. Do we bother to learn it? How many of us are relaxing and enjoying the beach, while walking it alone?

Poor Charles isn't that bad a role model. We're actually helpless victims of an unstoppable divorce culture. And it's impossible to prepare for the unknowns of marriage.

If you buy such societal nonsense, good luck.

If I did, I wouldn't give my life away. I wouldn't believe in the power of faith. And I certainly would not look to the goodness of tomorrow.

Bon voyage.

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