



DIVORCE
Hell

*Break-up Rituals, Horror Stories,
Sex and the Seven Year Itch*

CHARLES G. IRION

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Salvation from Divorce Hell

This chapter provides a healing retrospective on how to find, nurture and develop a strong relationship that will also be a lasting one. This is your love guidebook. It was fun to put this information together as well as enlightening, moving and designed to keep you and your significant other out of divorce hell.



Salvation Table of Contents



Your Love Guide	149
Who is the Right Person for You?.....	151
Physical Attributes.....	151
Personality	152
Physical Fitness	153
Personal Habits	153
Money and Investing	154
Education	155
Career Plans	156
Family Orientation	157
Pets.....	157
Eating Habits.....	158
Hobbies & Interests	159
Religion.....	160

Finding that Special Person	161
Where Should I Look?	161
Now What?	163
Asking for a Date	164
Men Asking Women	164
Women Asking Men	166
What to Do on the First Date	167
Ending the Date	168
Asking for Another Date	169
Going Dutch	170
Moving On or Out	170
The Courting Process Begins	171
Getting Better Acquainted	171
Intimacy	172
Moving Toward Engagement	173
Consider a Contract	174
Premarital Counseling: The Best Time and Money You'll Ever Spend	176
Planning the Wedding	177
How Much to Spend	177
Who Pays	178
Who Plans It	178
How Long to Wait	179
Where to Have the Ceremony	179
Enjoy the Honeymoon	180

Making the Marriage Work 181
 Marriage is Teamwork181
 Let God Be Your Guide181
 Nurture Your Relationship on a Daily Basis182
 How to Avoid the 7 Year Itch183
 Vows184

Divorce Hell

Your Love Guide



Body Type _____ Height _____ Weight _____

Hair Color _____ Eye Color _____

Age _____ Ethnicity _____

Tattoos _____ Piercings _____

Important Features: ___ Legs ___ Butt

___ Bust ___ Hands

___ Ears

Personality: ___ Outgoing ___ Entertaining

___ Reserved ___ Quiet/Shy

___ Day Person ___ Night Person

Education: ___ High School ___ Some college

___ BA ___ Masters

___ More than me ___ Less than me

___ Same as me ___ Doesn't matter

Continued...

Interests: ___Auto Racing ___Baseball ___Basketball
 ___Biking ___Boating ___Camping
 ___Concerts ___Cooking ___Dancing
 ___Fishing ___Football ___Hiking
 ___Movies ___Music ___Reading
 ___Running/Jogging ___Skiing ___Snowboarding
 ___Soccer ___Softball ___Tennis
 ___Theater ___Travel ___Volleyball
 ___Water Skiing Other _____
Other _____

Religion: ___Doesn't matter ___Same as mine

Pets: ___Dogs ___Cats ___Other
 ___None ___Lots

Children: ___OK if already has ___Wants children


Eating Habits: ___Average ___Vegetarian

Drinking Habits: ___Doesn't ___Social ___Everyday OK

Relationship Goals: ___I just want to have fun
 ___Serious relationship
 ___Ready to settle down
 ___Want children



Who is the Right Person for You?



Physical Attributes

It goes without saying that physical appearance is often a very important criterion for choosing a loved one. This is not to say that it's the ONLY criteria, but let's be honest – you're not likely to fall in love with someone (much less spend the rest of your life with that person) if your eyes don't light up and your heart beat a little faster when this special being comes into view.

While we all know that looks don't make the man (or woman), it certainly doesn't hurt if one of your initial reactions is, "Wow! What a dish (or hunk...or other current slang term). If your first thought is, "Yuck!" and you are completely unattracted, that's undoubtedly the end of this particular story.

So if you're at a stage in your life where you're looking for Mr. or Ms. Right, let's get down to brass tacks; give some serious thought to what sort of physical attributes you find appealing. Do you go for tall, dark, and slender? Blonde, blue-eyed and buxom? Are you a leg man? Do you find yourself noticing hair, hands, or muscles? Are you drawn to those of a particular ethnicity, either your own or one completely different from yours? How do you feel about body art? Are tattoos okay but piercings turn you off?

Personality

Perhaps the most important consideration is personality. What kind of personality do you have, and are you drawn to those who are similar, or different? Are you calm, thoughtful and deliberate, or are you the one in your group everyone gravitates to because you always know what's happening? Are you outgoing or introverted? Shy or effusive?

Are you well-read and well-informed, or do you think newspapers are best used for lining birdcages? Are you hopeless at remembering and telling jokes, or do you know more of them than any of your friends?

What is your political persuasion, if any? If you're very politically engaged, it may be important to you that you find someone of similar opinions. Or you may enjoy discussing current events and deciding together how you feel about significant issues. Many people with politically "mixed marriages" have no problem with the fact that one person is more conservative or liberal than the other, but for others that difference could lead to strife.

Are you easygoing or a take-charge person? Are you always prompt, and do you expect your partner to be, or would you be comfortable with someone who is "mostly" on time? Here's a criteria most people never think about until they discover that too big a gap exists: do you want to be with someone who will tell you what to do? I've seen some matches where one person clearly wore the pants in the family (it wasn't always the husband) and both people were blissfully happy – or not.

Are you a day person or a night person? Is it necessary that you and your significant other be on the same schedule? How sociable are you, and what do you expect from your partner? If one of you is the life of the party and the other sits in the corner like the country

Salvation

mouse, is that a deal-breaker? You may not mind living with Silent Sam (or Samantha) – or would that be the kiss of death to a long-term relationship? Some people are attracted to their opposite on the sociability scale, looking for balance and hoping the other person will bring them out of their shell or help them calm down a bit.

Physical Fitness

Don't forget to weigh in on fitness. Are you a couch potato, softball player, a jogger, or a marathon runner? Do you envision yourself with someone who is just as fit as you are, more so, or less so? Do you want to meet someone who will inspire you to become more fit than you currently are, or would living with someone devoted to personal fitness drive you right around the bend?

Personal Habits

What personal habits matter to you? Are you interested in (or definitely NOT interested in) people who smoke tobacco? Other substances? What about drinking – is a beer with pizza okay, or do you prefer cocktails before dinner? Or perhaps alcohol is a definite no-no with you. If you're not on the same page with your potential sweetie, things can go sour in a hurry.

And then there's the issue of tidiness. Do you want your dwelling to look like a model home, or do you prefer the lived-in look? And when does "lived-in" cross the line into "this place is a dump!?" Do you think cleaning should be done by the folks who made the mess, or are you happy to hire a housekeeper or weekly cleaning service?

Divorce Hell

What other habits are important to you? Making the bed? Putting dirty clothes in the hamper, the dirty dishes in the dishwasher and the cap on the toothpaste?

Money & Investing

As you've no doubt heard, money is one of the two or three shoals on which many relationships founder. Once things seem to be developing nicely, it's time to start learning whether or not the two of you are compatible on this critical issue. Is one of you a saver and the other a spender? Does one of you watch Wall Street Week faithfully and read the financial pages recreationally while your beloved is busy perusing catalogs and sale ads? Are you a cash-only person who faithfully balances your checkbook to the penny while your partner goes everywhere with debit card in hand, never carries cash and hasn't written a check in years?

Perhaps the disparities aren't that broad, but it doesn't mean you can forego discussing how you both deal with money. Assuming you're both mature adults, you've probably already established how you handle your money, so merging those habits with those of someone else will benefit from a good deal of candid discussion.

Is it your expectation that all income will go into a joint account, or that you'll establish his/hers/ours accounts? Do you think expenses should be shared 50/50, or pro-rated according to your respective incomes? Or do you have some other scheme in mind, such as "I'll pay the mortgage since the house is in my name; you can pay for food and utilities..." or "We'll split the mortgage 50/50, you can buy the food and I'll pay the utilities..." or some other variant.

If you're completely merging your finances, do the two of you agree on the amount of "running around money" each of you should have each month? Will you have joint or personal credit cards, or both?

Salvation

If one of you quits work to stay home and raise any children you may have, how will that affect your finances and how you will specifically handle your money then? Is there a cut-off amount above which purchases should be discussed before they are made?

Will you jointly sit down to pay bills and balance the checkbook, or does one of you actually like doing that sort of thing and is willing to take it on for the household?

Investing is something of an offshoot from money, but the older you are and the longer you've been in the workforce, the more relevant this subject becomes. What kind of retirement savings plans do you have? Do both of your employers offer 401K plans? Do both of you take advantage of them, and if so, to what extent? Do either or both of you have Individual Retirement Accounts?

With respect to ordinary savings, do you both have some? How liquid are your assets? If most of your money is tied up in real estate, for example, it could be problematic to get access to those funds should you need them. For that matter, ordinary savings are a topic all their own – for what are those funds intended, how much discussion should occur before they're tapped, and at what rate do you plan to add to them are just a few of the concepts to consider.

Education

Then there's the tricky matter of education. How high is this on your list of important things to consider in a partner?

How much education do you have, and how critical – if at all – is it to you that your partner have similar achievements or educational goals? Even if you are relatively on the same plane, education-wise, right now, what are your future plans in this area? Do you envision yourself getting an MBA or a law degree, or going back to school later on to become a nurse or other type of professional? If so, and your

Divorce Hell

partner has no such plans, is that okay with you both, or will it create an unbridgeable gulf between you?

This should be considered and discussed before things get too serious; many a spouse has earned a "PHT" (putting hubby through) while helping one member of the team achieve his or her educational goals, only to be left in the dust several years into the relationship. Maybe your partner is just so darned nice and attractive and thoughtful that educational parity is completely irrelevant, but at least remember to take the time to think about it.

Although there are always exceptions, a person who lacks a college degree can expect to earn significantly less over the duration of a career than someone who is college-educated. This can have a major impact on the rest of your lives, together or apart!

Career Plans

Do you work to live, live to work, or find yourself somewhere in between? What kind of job do you have, and is it the one you expect to have for the rest of your working life? Do you plan to work full-throttle for a few years until your career is established and then tone it down a bit to enjoy raising a family? Do you expect your spouse to work? Now? When you have children? After the children have left the nest? Would you be happy living with or being a "Mr. Mom" who works at home or simply takes on the role of primary parent?

The economy is constantly changing, and we all know that even the best-laid plans some things have to be changed, so it's worth discussing what you are and are not willing to do if things get especially tough in your geographical area or in your life or work.

Family Orientation

How close are you to your family and friends? Do your parents and siblings live within a radius of a few miles of one another? How often do you get together – monthly, weekly, daily? How would your beloved answer this question? If you grew up with wildly different family traditions and expectations, be sure you weight carefully how this will affect the relationship between the two of you.

If you grew up with a big, exuberant family that loves to spend time together, and you fall in love with someone who had one sibling and lived clear across the country from grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, the mismatch could be either blessing or a burden. The “small family” person might loved to be absorbed into the other’s bigger tent – or it might be just too overwhelming. If one person’s idea of family togetherness is dinner together every Sunday and weekends at the cabin more often than not, it will not match the other person’s expectation that he or she will only see the in-laws at Thanksgiving or Christmas, but not both!

What about your future family? Are you hoping that a bundle of joy will arrive within a year of your marriage, or would it be fine with you (or even preferable) if you never have children? If you do want children, would you consider adoption if for some reason you couldn’t produce biological children with your spouse? And would you settle only for an infant, or would older children be fine with you? Where do race and ethnicity fit into this equation, not to mention mental and/or physical handicaps?

Pets

Are you a “love me, love my dog” sort of person, or do you detest the idea of having a furry creature in your home, not to mention in your

Divorce Hell

lap or in your bed? If you do like pets, are you a dog person or a cat person? Do you breed snakes, or raise parakeets? Pets can add warmth and love to a home, but if you're not on the same wavelength on this subject, you will probably wish you were. And don't even think about biting your tongue about the current presence of a dog or cat, with the expectation that you will be able to alter the situation later.

Eating Habits

This issue might seem like a no-brainer – and you might be very surprised. Are you a foodie who watches the Food Channel nonstop, swaps recipes with friends, loves to cook, and entertains around food? Or is your idea of a great meal one that comes from the freezer, in through the front door or the car window, ready to eat? Do you think food preparation and cleanup should be a team effort, and are you in agreement on this point, or does one of you hold the attitude of “not my job, man”?

Do you or your partner-to-be have food allergies, gluten intolerance or picky food preferences? Are you or your potential mate a vegetarian or a vegan, and if so, is that how you plan to raise any children you may have? It may not be necessary to be 100% congruent on the idea of food, but if your ideas and preferences in this area differ wildly, you should definitely consider how flexible you are both willing and able to be.

Hobbies and Interests

This is another area that often trips up would-be couples. What seems fun and interesting during the getting-to-know-you period of your relationship can come a cropper down the road.

Do your hobbies and interests lend themselves to participation by both of you at once, or do you have separate but equal interests which take up equivalent amounts of time (and money)? If one of you would be happy as a clam spending every evening working a ham radio or quilting in the extra bedroom, will your partner be equally happy for you to do that? Does he or she have a similar interest of his/her own, or is there an expectation that you should be doing things together more often than not, even if it's just watching television?

Are you equally interested in sports? To participate in or watch? Live or on television? Do either or both of you enjoy participating in team sports like softball or bowling? There are reasons for phrases like "golf widow" and if you don't want to be one or have one, think about that now.

If one of you loves auto racing and the other prefers golf, are you interested in taking up each other's hobbies? Do either or both of you enjoy long bicycle rides/races, or participating in local theater groups? Are either or both of you musically inclined? While mutual interests can bind you together and also help you find compatible friends, having different interests can be fine as long as no one feels left out.

Maybe you're both movie fans; does this mean you go out to movies two or more times a week, or that you subscribe to movie and pay-per-view channels, or that you buy DVDs by the dozens and carefully catalog every last one?

Hobbies and interests can bring couples together or tear them apart, so it's a good idea to know what you're getting into in this regard.

Religion

This is, or certainly can be, an extremely critical factor in relationship compatibility. Are you religious yourself? Is it important to you that your partner be equally so? Is it important that you be of the same faith? Do you have similar levels of spiritual practice? If one of you spends every spare moment at the church/temple/ mosque and the other person never darkens the door of a religious establishment, trouble could be brewing.

If neither of you is especially religious, you may be quite compatible on this score, but don't forget that this is something that can change. Ted Turner, creator of CNN, divorced Jane Fonda after several years of marriage, in large part because she "got religious on me with no discussion at all."

Also, even though you may not be an active participant in religious practice at the current moment, if you have children you may want to change your habits. This, too, bears some advance discussion.

Finding that Special Person



Where Should I Look?

If you go where you're most yourself, that's where you're likely to find a significant other with the same interests and values that you have. This means both that you can find love in a very ordinary place and that it may not be as difficult as you think.

Your workplace may be a good option, if there are enough people there that dating a co-worker isn't likely to disrupt your career if the relationship ends. If you're still attending school, there are lots of potential partners at community colleges and universities – including on-line universities! If you're not in school, maybe taking a class (even a parks and recreation class) might put you into a situation where you can meet new people with like interests.

Don't forget the time-honored idea of being set-up by friends and relatives. Just be sure they know what kind of person you're looking for and that they take into consideration your preferences, and not just the things they like about the other person. After all, those who know and love you may be ideally situated to spot another person with whom you will be compatible.

Your church, temple or mosque is also a good place to look for a partner. Simply being of the same faith creates commonality and a foundation for a good relationship, and church outings and activities provide great opportunities for no-stress getting acquainted. You can

Divorce Hell

observe how the person of interest interacts with others, how willing he or she is to pitch in and get to work, and how he or she dresses on both casual and dressy occasions.

Today, on-line dating is a great way to widen the pool of candidates. Depending on the various services you use, you can find people of similar physical attributes (little people, for example), interests (cowboy/cowgirl sites), race and religion, and those that offer extensive psychological matching before you even email each other. One caveat, though: it's still called dating for a reason – you may have to exchange a lot of “winks” and go on a lot of coffee dates before you find someone who strikes a spark.

If you prefer real space to cyberspace, most metropolitan areas of any size have any number of singles groups. Some are based on interests, others on activities, and some simply provide opportunities to meet and mingle, such as weekly dances or picnics, bowling nights, ski trips, and the like.

If you really want to cut to the chase, consider speed dating or, for safety in numbers, group interactions such as lunch meetings for singles. You can also go the tried-and-true route of visiting bars and clubs (unless, of course, you neither drink or dance).

There are hundreds of clubs and organizations where you can meet people while indulging and expanding your interests. Whether you like crawling through caves, geocaching, learning to make sushi, singing in a choir or working backstage with a local theater group, participating in such activities will get you off the couch, out of the house, and into exhilarating, stress-free interactions with others.

If you're divorced and have children, an organization such as Parents Without Partners can be helpful on many levels, offering moral and emotional support, social opportunities for you and your children, and, of course, the possibility of meeting someone who is in a situation similar to your own.

Salvation

Another outstanding way to meet a soul mate is through volunteering. You'll be helping others and helping yourself at the same time, and there's no end of groups that will really appreciate and value your participation. If you love animals, consider working with the Humane Society or an animal rescue group. If you have a social conscience, the nation's shelters, soup kitchens and health clinics desperately need your help. You might want to be a tutor in an adult literacy program, help put on events and raise money for a health-related organization like a hospital or disease-focused non-profit, or help build trails in the mountains during a vacation.

Last but not least, you might even end up turning a friend into a lover. People you've known for a long time and enjoyed being with for months or years may have the potential to become more than a friend. Many very successful and longstanding marriages are between people who were friends first and noticed each other in a different way well into their friendship.

Now What?

Let's assume your eye has fallen on someone you find attractive and would like to get to know better. What is the next step, and how do you take it?

The first thing to do is to create an opportunity to spend some time in close proximity with this person. This might involve an actual, official "date" or it might be as simple as asking him or her, "So, are you coming to the company picnic?" (or work day at church, or the local 4th of July parade) and following up with a friendly "I'll look forward to seeing you there!" If you get a positive response, this will help you gauge the next step to take. Maybe you'll decide to take extra sandwiches or a couple of extra brownies to share at the picnic, or to suggest a quick snack after the workday is over.

Divorce Hell

If you know a little about the other person's interests, and they're congruent with your own, you might want to start participating in the same things – the local theater group, for example, or volunteering to serve meals to the homeless. This will give you both the opportunity to observe one another while you're engaged in an interest you share, creating common ground while you become better acquainted.

Asking for a Date

Asking for a date can strike fear into the most socially adept person – and if you're shy or out of practice, the very thought of it can be downright daunting. The main thing is to be specific but low-pressure, to leave the person an "out" in case your feelings aren't reciprocated, but yet to be specific so you can move to the next step.

Men Asking Women

Traditionally, men do the asking when it comes to dating. Some find it easier to do than others, and practice does make perfect, but for some it never gets really easy (this could be the reason some failing relationships go on and on and on...fear of change is a powerful emotion!).

There are many ways to approach asking for a date. You can be casual, as in, asking a colleague "would you like to go downstairs for a cup of coffee (or a sandwich)?" after a long meeting. Assuming she says "yes," you can get that cup of coffee and make a half-hour's worth of conversation. Depending on how it goes, you might invite her to do something else with you on the weekend or even farther away. For example, if you're discussing music you like and you discover that you have a favorite artist in common (who you just happen to know is coming to town soon) you might suggest going together to hear the

Salvation

artist perform, as in “I hear he’s coming to ____ (name of club) next weekend – would you like to go together to hear him?” If you’re a true planner, you may have even bought tickets way ahead of time in the hope that you can find a compatible person to go with you (other than your kid brother). If so, you’ll look like a great guy when you say, “I have tickets to _____’s concert on the 24th – would you like to go?”

If the answer is positive, you can go on to make arrangements to pick her up, have dinner before the concert, or whatever.

If the person who’s caught your interest isn’t someone you run into on a daily basis, you’ll have to either manufacture an encounter (such as at church or at another place you know she goes) or just pick up the phone and make the call. After a little introductory conversation, get right to the point: “I’m actually calling to ask if I could take you to dinner this Saturday, say around 6:00?” Then stop talking –it’s her turn. How quickly she answers and her degree of enthusiasm will tell you a lot about how much reciprocity is occurring. If you get an enthusiastic, “Oh, that would be great!” you can give a little sigh of relief and complete your plans.

If, on the other hand, you get turned down, pay close attention to the nature of the refusal. “Sorry – my dog is sick and I have to wash my hair,” indicates that perhaps her interest isn’t on a par with yours. Something like, “Oh, I wish I could, but I already have plans. Maybe we could do it another time,” or, better yet, “Oh, I wish I could but I already have plans. I’m available on the 17th, though,” isn’t really a refusal, just a rescheduling. If you’re also available on the 17th, go for it; if not, suggest another date or even a different venue – like, “Well, would you like to go to the Irish Festival next weekend?”

Two to three tries should be plenty to let you know if she’s interested or not; if she is, she’ll find time to do something with you, so don’t make things awkward by being too pushy.

Divorce Hell

By the way, though it might seem like the easy way out, unless you are very young, don't do the asking via email or text message. The exception would be if you met online, and/or if that's the way you generally communicate. Asking for a date on the telephone or face to face is the more considerate and adult approach, and besides, the response you get will give you a much better reading of the level of her interest.

Women Asking Men

Yes, it is okay for women to ask men out – most of the time. For one thing, it will clarify the situation so you're not pining away in your apartment or home, hoping against hope that the guy you've got your eye on will ask you out, when in fact he may have no idea that you're interested in dating him. Now you'll get to experience what guys have been experiencing for years: the agony and uncertainty of "will he, or won't he" once you finally get up your nerve and blurt out your invitation. By taking the initiative and asking him out, you'll soon know whether there is any likelihood of a relationship getting underway. If not, you can move on to greener pastures.

Many of the points covered under "Men Asking Women" apply to you, too. Be casual, but specific; don't keep blabbing on – stop talking and give him a chance to reply.

Before you ask, you need to try to read the situation of your intended, as well as any cultural imperatives that may apply to either of you. If he is very conservative, he may not be amenable to being asked out by a woman. And in some cultures, women asking men for dates is still not as acceptable as it is in others. Still, you should be able to think of some way to get to spend some one-on-one time with him, depending on how it is that your paths have crossed in the first place.

If you know him casually through family or neighborhood connections, you might test the waters with a question like, "I hear your niece is turning three this weekend – will I see you at her birthday

Salvation

party?" If he wasn't planning to attend, he may amend his plans! While you're both there, you'll have the opportunity to ask for a more specific, private time to spend with him.

Saying something like, "My friends and I will be having happy hour at Joe's after work on Friday – why don't you join us?" could backfire on you, though – that situation could be intimidating and he may not relish meeting the "gang."

Be prepared for the fact that the guy your attracted to may not have even been asked out by a women; he may be so startled that he won't respond appropriately. A female friend of mine once made an overture to a guy along the lines of "It seems like we have a lot in common... would you like to ..." only to get this response: "No!" Taken aback, she quickly dropped the idea, only to have him approach her later, and say, "I don't know why I reacted that way. I'd love to get together!"

What to Do on the First Date

NO MOVIES! That's right, **NO** movies on a first date. Preferably, no theater, either. No matter what new blockbuster is coming to town, there is nothing less likely to move a relationship in a positive direction than sitting in the dark, with no conversation, for the majority of your time together. You're not going to learn a darn thing about one another other than that you do or do not laugh at the same scenes. Save the movies for much later in your relationship – assuming one gets underway!

So what **SHOULD** you do on a first date? There are several ways to go. You could pick a non-traditional activity – like going roller skating (yes, at a rink!) or roller blading (if you have a lovely park or beach boardwalk handy), going bike riding (if you have access to a couple of bikes or know that the apple of your eye also has a bike). You could go bowling – at a local bowling alley or Wii bowling at home (bowling is a good excuse to invite another couple, too). Just about any activity you

Divorce Hell

would do on your own is potentially date fodder. If it's something you both already enjoy, it will put you both at ease; if it's something new to one or both of you, like climbing a rock wall at a local park, you can both be awkward and adventurous together. Use your imagination – the worst that will happen (if the other person is interested) is that he or she will veto your idea and suggest another activity.

What should you talk about? Well, there are several things NOT to talk about. Don't talk about work (whether you work together or not); don't talk about politics (unless you met at the local precinct committee meeting and know you're on the same page in this arena); don't talk about past relationships/marriages; don't talk about money and don't bring up sex.

Talk about books you've read, movies you've seen, plays you've attended, music you like, where you each are in your family's birth order, places you've vacationed or would like to visit, your favorite relative and why, whether or not you are or were close to your grandparents, who your childhood hero was – you get the idea. If you're afraid you'll be tongue-tied just from being in the presence of your person of interest, make a little list of conversation starters that you can consult discretely if things seem to bog down.

Ending the Date

When you were growing up, your mother may have told you, "Don't overstay your welcome" and the same applies to a date, especially a first date. Even if you're having a spectacularly good time, beyond your wildest dreams, don't make the date too long. After whatever activity you've been doing is concluded, have that dessert or last cup of coffee and then wind it up.

If you're invited in when you take your date home, either make your excuses or just stay for a very brief period. A goodnight kiss (or

Salvation

several) may or may not be in the cards – you’ll have to read the signals; it’s always better to err on the side of caution and save some mystery for the next date. No matter how attracted you are, don’t jump right into bed – you asked for (or were asked for) a date, not an assignation. No matter how expensive the date may have been, there should be no expectation of compensation of the physical kind. Get to know the person first, not just the body. There’s plenty of time for greater intimacy down the road; pushing the physical aspects of a relationship can impair the likelihood that it will ever really get off the ground. And besides, random sex is just not safe for either of you.

Always thank your date – sincerely – even if you’ve decided that the first date will be the last one. Don’t make promises you won’t keep – like saying “I’ll call you” when you have no such intention. Don’t say “we’ll have to do it again sometime” either; it’s not honest. Say something you can genuinely mean, even if you thought the date was a disaster; “thank you so much – the dessert was excellent” may be the best you can do.

Asking for Another Date

If things seem to have gone well, either one of you could suggest another date. The “askee” could say, “I’d love to do this again – and next time, it’s on me” or “would you be my date for the Heart Ball on the 25th?” If you get a positive response, then you can say “I’ll call you ____ (tomorrow, next week, when I get back from my business trip) and then DO IT. Or, less specifically, I’d love to do this again but my schedule for the next week is just awful. But I’ll talk to you soon!” (and mean it).

Going Dutch

In these days of gender equality, should you plan on going Dutch? Maybe, but probably not. If your finances are in poor shape, it's better to plan a date that will be inexpensive – have a picnic in the park rather than an expensive dinner at a restaurant (you'll probably get point for being romantic, too). If you expect your date to pay for his/her own meal, cover charge, or whatever, make sure that's understood up front – if you turn to him at the door of the event and say "I already bought my ticket ahead of time – they're \$20 at the door" that's very likely to seriously dampen his enthusiasm.

If you're seriously afraid that your date has overextended him/herself, you might be able to discretely give the maitre'd your credit card on your way to "powder your nose" – but you also run the risk of insulting your date. Better just to reciprocate later on in the relationship. Maybe your date is going overboard, but just really wants to impress you.

Moving On or Out

Okay – you've had several dates and push is coming to shove. How do you feel about continuing what's quickly becoming "a relationship"? Are you anxious to continue, or to put a stop to the whole thing? Are you on the same page with regard to whether you're ready for something long-term, or not? Is one of you in more of a hurry than the other to become exclusive, get engaged, move in together, or get married? And if you are ready, how quickly or slowly do you want and your partner want to forge ahead? What, if any, issues have presented themselves, and how are you dealing with them?

The Courting Process Begins



Getting Better Acquainted

The more time you spend together, the better you should be getting to know each other. As your relationship develops, you should be gaining new insight into each other's personalities – your likes and dislikes, your preferences and idiosyncrasies. You should be getting better and better acquainted with each other's friends and families. Maybe you've spent a holiday or two together, along with crazy Uncle George and weird Aunt Helen.

Do you like (or at least respect) each other's parents? Have you even met them? Just because they live across the country does not mean the wedding rehearsal dinner is the time for those important introductions. More important, how do you feel about the way your significant other treats and relates to his or her parents and siblings? Sometimes Mother/Son and Father/Daughter relationships are replicated at least in part in husband-wife relationships. A man who doesn't like and honor his mother may not, ultimately, like and honor his wife, either. Are either or both of you particularly close to your siblings? If one of you is and the other isn't, the disparity could cause friction—you may feel, at times, as if there are three people in the relationship.

How do you feel about the position each of you holds within your respective families? Is he the baby, spoiled by three older sisters and

Divorce Hell

dotting parents? You may be expected to deliver the same level of adulation. Is she the first-born, the “son” in a dress? Will her take-charge attitude begin to wear on you?

Do you like the same things? Are you on the same page regarding family get-togethers, hobbies, money? It’s never too early to notice that one of you is generous to a fault and the other is...well, careful with money. If there’s a discrepancy, can you work with it or will it cause you both grief?

Intimacy

Admit it – you haven’t even found that special person yet and you’re already worrying about this very special issue. How quickly do you hope things will “heat up” in this department? The trend today, and it’s especially true the younger you are, is that physical intimacy becomes part of a relationship almost before it IS a relationship. While this is obviously a very personal decision, my personal advice is that it’s better to make it later than sooner. Why would you share such a very important and personal part of yourself with someone you hardly know? If the relationship doesn’t progress, you can be left feeling embarrassed or even used.

On the other hand, the older and more experienced you are in the world of relationships, it may be that you’re able to discern much more quickly than in the past just where things are going and how likely it is that this is the real thing. You may even know, or have in your family, someone who met the love of his/her life and was engaged and then married in a matter of just a few weeks or months.

So...you’ve decided that the time is right; how do you broach the subject, or do you even need to? Things just may develop naturally, such that you find yourself naked between the sheets with no stress or worry at all.

Salvation

If not, one graceful way to approach the matter is to say something self-effacing, like “I never quite know how to say this, but would you like to spend the night together?” The other person can either accept your invitation, or gracefully refuse. If the refusal is not so graceful, that, too, will tell you what the future prospects for your relationship are. In that case, just tell yourself, “It’s his/her loss” and think about what signals you evidently missed along the way.

Moving Toward Engagement

So...you’re in love, you’re in agreement about things you like to do and you’re on the same page about intimacy – what’s next? You could go on like this forever (some couples seem to) but is that what both of you want? On the other hand, are you both on the same schedule?

The first thing, of course, is to make it official – that you want to get married – which means that one of you needs to propose, in some fashion or another. How you come to this agreement will depend on the type of relationship you have and how it’s progressed to this point.

Are either or both of you traditionalists? Do you want to experience a romantic, down-on-one-knee-with-ring-in-hand “I want us to spend the rest of our lives together” proposal? Or are the idea of getting married and the agreement to do so something that’s just “come to be” so that it’s just a matter of choosing a date and a venue?

If you’re the bride to be, are you comfortable doing the proposing? Is it likely to offend your partner? If you’re to be the groom, are you interested in creating a very special event just for the purpose of proposing?

Either way, there’s no limit to how creative you can be in the way you pop the question. Whether you hire a plane to do skywriting, bury the ring (or the proposal itself) in an ad, a crossword puzzle, a piece of mail, or an item of food, whether you prepare a hot bubble bath

Divorce Hell

complete with candles and rose petals, whether you bring it up on vacation, after a particularly spectacular night of romance, or over the breakfast table with neither of you looking your best, this is the stuff from which stories emerge that will follow you for months if not years or decades – so don't take this opportunity for granted. It may be (almost) the last romantic thing you ever have to do!

Consider a Contract

Before or after the wedding, having a relationship contract can be a very helpful, healthy thing to do. "What?" you may be thinking – "why could we possibly need a contract?" One very good reason is because it creates a non-confrontive, non-accusatory way for the two of you to address issues that are important to you without any blaming or name-calling; i.e., it can significantly minimize conflict.

For example, let's say your relationship is fairly new, but you've both been around the block before and there are a few issues that are very important to each of you. So you sit down to write a contract – just between the two of you, with no lawyers required (we're not talking about a pre-nuptial contract here – we discussed that earlier in the "Wild Prenups" chapter). Simply make a list of 5-10 (or more) items that you want to put on the table right now, in this early stage of your relationship.

Maybe you agree that you both should exercise more – so you write down "we will exercise together for an hour or more at least twice a week." Maybe it's important to one or both of you that, jobs, family, friends and children notwithstanding, you spend some "alone" time together. So you add to the contract, "The two of us will have a one-on-one date night at least twice a month."

If one of you has children and the other doesn't (or even if you both do), you might want to put in something about that – such as "I will

Salvation

only introduce you to my daughter after we've been seeing each other for at least three months." If there are going to be any hurt feelings about this, now is the time to discuss them, before it becomes a sore subject.

Maybe in the past the fact that one of you is a great cook has come home to haunt you – you seem to always be in the kitchen and romantic dinners out never seem to happen. You could add, "For every meal one of us cooks for the other, we will go out to dinner." If it's not happening, you have a completely legitimate, non-complaining reason to bring it up.

When you've written down everything you can think of for the moment, you should set a term for the contract – a month, a week, six weeks, 3 months – and sign and date it – "to be reviewed on _____," filling in the blank with the prospective review date.

When that date occurs, take out the contract and look it over. Have you been true to the things you wrote down? If not, why not? What do you want to do about it? That exercise clause, for example – maybe in a month you've only exercised together once. Without either of you throwing a stone, you can quite logically say, "We agreed to exercise together and we haven't been doing so. What shall we do about that?" Now you can recommit to the original agreement, amend it (maybe once a week is the best you can do right now), or even delete it (if you just can't fit in exercising together, you could agree to do it separately – or not). Even if one of you thinks the other has been malingering, having agreed to the concept in your contract can take the sting out of someone complaining bitterly about the other's lack of commitment and thereby causing an argument. As in so many other arenas of a relationship, your contract is only limited by your imagination and the number of issues, big or small, that are near and dear to your heart. You can keep this going for as long as you want, even after you're married.

Premarital Counseling: The Best Time and Money You'll Ever Spend

Yes, you're in love, and yes, you're committed to each other, and yes, you're getting married – but the time you spend in premarital counseling will pay dividends for a lifetime. Whether you do this with your faith leader, a psychologist, a social worker or other counselor, you're bound to learn a lot about each other and consider some aspects of married life that you never would have thought of on your own. People who do this for a living often also work with people who have divorced or are considering divorce, so they've seen the good, the bad, and the ugly, and they're ideally situated to help you focus on the most positive part of that equation. If it saves you even one major blow-up later in your partnership, the time you spend will have been well worth it.

Planning the Wedding



How Much to Spend

Ahhh, weddings. These days they can cost a little or a lot, be intimate ceremonies before a judge or other celebrant, involve taking the whole wedding party and dozens of guests to a castle in Tuscany or a beach in Hawaii, or something in between. How elaborate you want to make this production should depend on what works for you and all the people you would like to have witness this special event.

Is a destination wedding in your future? Plan to spend tens of thousands – and to have your friends and family do likewise, unless you can afford to foot the whole bill. Is this reasonable or will it cause “us and them” feelings between those who can afford to participate and those who can’t?

Do you just want to get together – officially – and plan to fulfill a lifetime dream of getting married at Disneyland or by an Elvis impersonator in Las Vegas? Will your friends and family be hurt if they’re not included, or will they be relieved not to have to attend yet another wedding (especially if you’ve already had one.)?

And, finally, is this shindig going to be on your nickel, or on the bride’s parents’? That alone can determine the budget for your big event.

Who Pays for It?

If you and your intended are well-established in your careers, probably you should foot the bill, especially if you're planning an elaborate event. For the sake of protocol, you can let your parents pay for a couple of significant items and you can cover the rest. For example, maybe the bride's parents want to buy the wedding dress and pay for the flowers, and the groom's parents want to host the rehearsal dinner. If they have the money and want to be sure they do as much for you as they've done for your siblings, don't feel the need to turn them down. Otherwise, plan your own budget and move forward accordingly. If you want to spend tens of thousands of dollars on your wedding, that's your business.

Who Plans It?

Although typically the purview of the bride and her mother, more and more grooms are taking an active part – or even the whole part – in planning weddings these days. After all, it's THEIR special day, too, and maybe the groom has more patience for or expertise in all those myriad details. But since it's jointly YOUR special day, don't let any parents get carried away with creating their own guest list and trying to dictate what kind of reception you'll have, unless those are tasks you're willing to relinquish.

How Long to Wait

There's no one answer to this question, either, though I don't recommend a seven-year engagement. Usually the period of time between engagement and wedding depends primarily on the type of wedding you're planning (big elaborate ones need to be planned farther into the future than small casual ones) and what's going on in your lives. If you need to plan around school (because you're either parents, students or teachers), a stint of military service, a parent in decline, or a move to start a new job or career, those situations can greatly affect how far out you schedule the wedding. Planning one year out is about average, but there's no right or wrong to taking more or less time to get the job done just the way you want it to be.

Where to Have the Ceremony

Again, this is a matter of personal preference. In some parts of the country almost everyone gets married in a church. In other areas, anything goes – parks, mountain tops, boat decks, beaches, wedding halls, hotels, or even your favorite retail store. I've heard of weddings at Costco, Wal-Mart, the library, and so on. Some people split the difference, holding the ceremony itself in a religious facility of their choice and the reception at a hotel or event venue.

In some groups, weddings held at exotic locations, such as on a cruise or in a foreign country, are all the rage. They're a lot of fun, a lot of work, and they can be very expensive – but they're sure memorable. More sentimental folks love the idea of being married in the church where they were confirmed, or by the rabbi who helped with their bar mitzvah or by the priest who baptized them as an infant (who might also happen to be a relative).

Divorce Hell

Where you have the wedding isn't as important as having the wedding, so let your preferences, your budget, and any considerations you have about friends and family guide your decision.

Enjoy the Honeymoon

Once all that planning and wrangling is over you and the light of your life deserve a truly exceptional honeymoon – whatever that looks like to you. It might mean a week alone in a place you've never visited before, a cruise to Alaska or the Panama Canal, or it might mean a trip to a beach resort with your blended family so that everyone feels included. Just remember that this should be a time to rest, relax and enjoy one another – not pack in 7-10 days of frantic sightseeing so that you come home more exhausted than when you left. Like the wedding, the honeymoon is another once-in-a-lifetime event that you hope to remember fondly, and not because it was a disaster.

Making Marriage Work



Marriage is Teamwork

Now comes the hard part. The pulse-racing, pheromone-laced adventure that is courtship is over; now you're just two old (or young) married folks with the rest of your lives stretching in front of you. Chances are you still have a lot of "getting to know you" to do, and there are likely to be lots of bumps in the road, if not outright chasms. But there are a few thoughts that can help you make it through, on a stronger footing and more in love than ever.

Let God Be Your Guide

When you have a spiritual basis for your partnership, there's always someone to lean on – the Higher Power. The two of you are not in this alone; there's someone who wants you to succeed even more than you do, and He's there to consult whenever you need help. If you put God first (whatever you call Him or Her), your partner second and yourself third, you stand the best possible chance of having a long and loving marriage.

Three essential components of a solid marriage are (1) a strong faith in God; (2) hope based on the promises of God, and (3) unconditional

Divorce Hell

love. It's not "I love you FOR" or "I love you BECAUSE" – it's just "I LOVE YOU" – period! If you ever need to remind yourself what love is, just read Corinthians 3, verses 4-8 and 13. Between faith, hope and love, love is the greatest and drives the other.

Remember, wedding vows are a promise, and we must keep our promises even when our feelings change; feelings can deceive you. Promises are important because our word has to stand for something. God doesn't go back on his promises and we, being made in His image, shouldn't go back on ours, either. When you do the right thing, your feelings will catch up. If you wait for the right feeling to come along to do the right thing, you never will DO THE RIGHT THING.

Nurture Your Relationship on a Daily Basis

Remember how you complimented your partner at every opportunity when you were courting? Just because you've said your marriage vows, that's no reason to quit looking for the best in everything he or she does. You can never be too generous in noticing all the nice things your partner does for you and makes you feel, whether it's a "thank you" for the clean clothes in your dresser or a positive comment on the meal you came home to after work. When we feel appreciated, it's easier to appreciate other people – and when positive words and attitudes are rampant, we're all less likely to get steamed over the small stuff.

If you remember the motto "Treat your family like friends and your friends like family" you'll be well on the way to having a loving and grateful spouse. If you wouldn't snarl at a friend over his being a little late meeting you for lunch, don't do it to your wife or husband. If you wouldn't think of keeping a friend waiting without calling ahead to provide a heads up, extend that same courtesy within your family. Legal ties are not a license to take each other for granted – so don't! (This will stand you in good stead with any children you may have, as

Salvation

well. Courtesy begets courtesy, and it sets a standard that will last a lifetime and reap many rewards, both personal and professional.)

A kiss when you leave, a hug when you return and lots of recognition for the work your partner is putting into your life and your relationship is like money in the bank – it will help you through the lean times when you're wondering, "what ever made me think this could work?"

How to Avoid the Seven-Year Itch

It's easy – just make every year the first year of your marriage! When you consistently love and honor the person you've chosen as your life partner, both of you will be less tempted by the grass on the other side of the fence. Don't let things become routine, don't take each other for granted, and always make plans to spend time together without the kids, without your friends, and without your families. The two of you are the essential family unit, and if you take the time and effort to make sure the foundation is found, even the winds of boredom, financial stress, illness and heartbreak will not be able to destroy what you put together when you said "I do."

Memorize this sentence and say it often: "I'm sorry"; will you please forgive me?" Make a game of who can say it first, or most often. Mean what you say, say what you mean, and always keep a sense of humor. If you work constantly on being a caring, sharing, open, trusting and loving person, you're almost sure to realize that you married the very same kind of person!

Vows

Speaking of saying “I do” – what kind of vows do you want to make to one another? Do you treasure the time-honored ceremony common to most religious weddings? Even many civil weddings include much of the same language. Or, if you’re creative and want your wedding to be distinctive, consider writing your own vows. You can customize them to the most special things in the unique relationship between the two of you, and your celebrant can add whatever “legal” language your state requires to make the whole thing official.

Whether these words were actually in your own wedding ceremony or not, keep this list handy and refer to it when things seem a little rocky.

*To have and to hold from this day forward...
For better, for worse...
For richer, for poorer,
In sickness and in health,
To love and to cherish
Until we are separated by death.
As God is my witness, I give you my promise.*



I’m just a guy who has experienced two divorces of my own before finally getting it right. I don’t pretend to have all the answers and solutions – just ideas that I hope will help others. While writing this chapter I was pleased to learn that I had a lot to learn – so there’s more hope for me!

SPECIAL NOTE: This 40-page Salvation Guide is also available for purchase as a downloadable PDF at:
<http://www.irionbooks.com/hell-series/divorce-hell/>

*“They say you can’t teach an old dog new tricks.
I say you can teach an old dog, a new dog, any
dog.”*

—Charles G. Irion



Charles G. Irion is an author and founder of Irion Books which includes The Hell Series (*Remodeling Hell*, *Autograph Hell*, *Car Dealer Hell*, and now *Divorce Hell*). Inspired by real-life events, these books are true stories created by actual (Hellish) events that infuriated Irion to the point of wanting to expose the demons through his writings. He is donating all of the net proceeds of his Hell book series to victims of fraud.

Irion has also co-authored eight murder mystery novels with the world's deadliest mountains as the backdrop. His participation in a 1987 expedition to Mount Everest was the impetus behind The Summit Murder Series. The book series includes: *Murder on Everest*; *Abandoned on Everest*; *Murder on Elbrus*; *Murder on Mt. McKinley*; *Murder on Puncak Jaya*; *Murder on Aconcagua*; *Murder on Vinson Massif*; and *Murder on Kilimanjaro*.

Irion is the founder of U.S. Park Investments, a company that owns and brokers manufactured home and RV communities. Over the past 30 years, Irion has also garnered a large collection of recipes from resident

campers. More 350 of these can be found in his book *Roadkill Cooking for Campers – The Best Dang Wild Game Cookbook in the World*.

Irion holds a Masters of Business Administration in International Marketing and Finance from The American Graduate School of International Management, and Bachelor of Arts degrees in both Biology and Economics from the University of California, Santa Barbara. As an explorer, Irion has visited more than 60 countries and is an accomplished SCUBA diver. He is also the founder of a children's dictionary charity, a founding member of Phoenix Social Venture Partners, and past president of a local Lions Club.

To learn more about Charles Irion and Irion Books, please visit: www.charlesirion.com and www.irionbooks.com.

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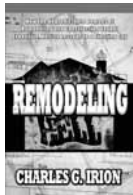
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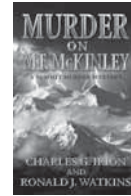
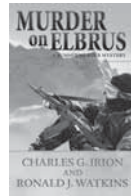
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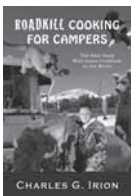
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