

Thoughts on the end of my twenty-five year marriage to Mary Ann McCleary

When I left my wife Mary Ann and our family home in Bethesda on Hallowe'en of 2006 none of our children were speaking to me. Suzy was, however, still speaking at me. As Mary Ann sat there passively, Suzy spewed a stream of four-letter vitriol and invective that admitted no interruption and took no breaks. Mary Ann was not doing anything to stop it; I rather suspected that she was in sympathy with whatever Suzy was saying. Arguing or interrupting was impossible, and to do anything physical would have been against my character, and would have certainly invited charges of child abuse.

At that point Jack and Naomi were long gone from the house. Mary Ann's father John was more than a year dead, and Suzy was in her senior year of high school. The family didn't need me, and it was pretty clear that they didn't want me either. Their unspoken verdict was that I had failed as a father. I put the blame elsewhere. They had failed in matters of civil behavior and relationships, and their career and academic achievements were below their capabilities. I was the only one who would challenge their highly cossetted self-esteem by saying so. I actually needed no longer say anything – my very presence was taken as tacit criticism. They were uncomfortable around me. It was time to start over.

Mary Ann and I seldom talked any more about our relationship. We had been through five episodes of marriage counselors in the course of our 25 years together. The drama always played out the same. Mary Ann would get so mad at me for something or another that she would stop talking to me for days and weeks on end. Sometimes I did not know what she was mad about; sometimes I did and thought that it was something we could talk about, but something that certainly didn't warrant the Ice Queen treatment. After a couple of weeks I would tell her quietly that I was leaving, I had enough. Then, after another week or so, she would then ask if we could make up. I felt a moral obligation to try to make it work so long as we had a family to raise. I would agree, provided we got counseling (again). We would go to the counselor who would invariably be unsuccessful in getting us to talk about our problems. However, since we had reconciled, we would continue to muddle along together. I recall some of the circumstances. In one instance I had not bought her a Mother's Day card. I can place the second episode, about 1990, by the fact that I was still working at Honeywell but we were already in the huge house.

Living together is not the same as love. I would tell Mary Ann "I love you," and she would either not respond or come back with the most lifeless rendition of the same three words that one could imagine. Certainly never accompanied by a hug, and absolutely never a kiss on the lips. She has beautiful, full lips but she abhors intimacy. She would not show it, and she was uncomfortable if I attempted to. An attempt to snuggle in bed would be met by a curt "let me sleep" or even stronger "don't touch me."

On the other hand, she demanded the ritual of affection. She would get extremely irate if she did not get a Valentines or Mother's Day card or an appropriate present on her birthday. The last huge fight we had had before I left concerned birthdays. I had been trying for two months to arrange a family vacation for our joint birthday, December 19, 1998. I wanted to go someplace warm, perhaps a beach in Mexico, or go skiing together. She absolutely refused to agree to anything or to contribute any ideas. In frustration I arranged a ski vacation for Jack and his friend David. We drove to Killington, in Vermont, for the best part of the week. The Ice Queen treatment which greeted our return home lasted through Christmas, New Year's, and well into the new year before I again said I had had enough and said I was leaving. As always, after a week or so she asked me to stay. With three kids at home I would have felt I was abandoning my parental responsibility if I did leave, so I agreed.

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It was painful for Mary Ann to ask me to do things for her. It was always prefaced with “Can I ask you a favor?” though it was usually the most natural thing in the world for a husband to do, such as dig a hole in the garden for a new plant. The problem was reciprocation. She had a deathly fear of being in my debt, as if I might ask for something in return which she could not offer. I, conversely, am quite self-sufficient and rarely asked her for anything that might be considered a favor. The things which I should not have had to ask for were not there for any type of compensation.

It was clear that things were not right. Mary Ann spent a great deal of time at work, and the time she was not working she spent watching television and doing a few household tasks. She had never had very much time for me, and it was now less than ever. I did what I could to free up her time. In 1998, when my business partner didn't work out, I simply folded the business. I was contributing ample income through the rental properties I had acquired over the years and through my management of stock market investments. We were comfortably in the top one percent of earners nationwide, and neither of us have very expensive tastes. We did not need my income. It was hard to get Mary Ann to give up keeping the books and paying the household bills. Her method for doing so involved a telephone bill payer; it was very time consuming. For more than a year she had resisted my suggestion that it would be much more efficient with Quicken Billpayer. I finally made something like a decree and that I was going to do it. It freed up a couple of evenings a week for her, but she chose to devote that newfound time to everything except me. The most frequent scenario was that I read in bed waiting for her, and was then forced to accept an explanation that she was too tired to give me any attention when she finally arrived there, despite the fact that she had done nothing except watch TV, and that I had generally invited her upstairs earlier.

Our last year together built to a crescendo of failures. I was enrolled in graduate school at the University of Maryland, and signed up for a study abroad course in anthropology that took me to Argentina for three weeks in January 2006. Naomi had been home over Christmas, and had gone shopping with me – more than that, encouraged me to go shopping – for a 25th wedding anniversary present for Mary Ann. We went to her favorite jewelry store, Na Hoku, with a Hawaiian theme, and got a lovely yellow and white gold pendant with a plumeria design. Our anniversary would be January 24, so I hid it away. Since I was the one who paid the bills, I kept the receipts as well. I put this receipt with the rest.

For whatever reason, Mary Ann looked through the receipts herself, and happened on this receipt. She saw the amount, \$2,500, and from her own knowledge of how jewelry stores work deduced that it was not returnable after January 14. She went into a frenzy. She called Naomi to ask where I might have hidden it. Naomi of course had no idea. Mary Ann was terrified that she might not like it and we couldn't get the money back. The fact that two and a half thousand dollars was not very much to us, and she had never in our time together returned any jewelry I bought her, and that Naomi had been in on the selection as an added assurance that it was probably in good taste, did not enter her mind. She did not consider asking me via email, which was certainly possible. She enlisted Suzy to go through all of my things looking for that pendant.

Suzy did not find the pendant. I forget where I hid it, but I apparently did a fairly good job. Probably in the garage. In any case, Suzy was ransacking my closet and found a surprise. She probably found a

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couple of surprises, but the most significant was a shotgun. Mary Ann is absolutely phobic on the subject of guns. Absolutely unable to discuss them, or to accept any argument that they might be useful under any circumstance. I was in the Army and know how to use them. I went through the race riots in Watts and Hunters Point during the 1960s, and am of the opinion that the possibility exists that civil unrest will recur in our society. In any case, a \$200 shotgun represented a trivial investment for the kind of protection that would be absolutely unavailable if a real emergency presented itself. I reasoned that what Mary Ann did not know would not hurt her, and to be honest, I was pretty fed up with her nonnegotiable stands. This was something that could have never been discussed, so I simply avoided the discussion.

All hell broke loose upon my return from Argentina. We negotiated a compromise whereby the shotgun was kept upstairs in the attic and the ammunition behind a wall. Fine with me – civil disturbances usually give you a fair amount of warning. I gave her the plumeria necklace, which did look good on her. But the relationship had taken yet another blow.

With only Suzy at home, and her in her senior year, we were somewhat free to travel. Mary Ann agreed to a trip to Costa Rica. I had been long talking about finding a place to retire. We did not need the large house, and Mary Ann knew that I thought it was too big even for a family of five, and certainly too big for empty-nesters. More than that, it would be too attractive of a place for the kids to return if they were not making it on their own. I had strong feelings on the subject. Once they were out of the house, I thought that it was a bad idea to allow them to come back. Better, if need be, to give the little bit of money to help them on their way to independence.

The proposed idea of the trip to Costa Rica was to get away from it all for a week and to look at places to retire. Mary Ann handled all the arrangements. She rented a house in Escazu, one of the nicer suburbs. She made sure that it had Internet connectivity so she could stay in touch with work.

The way it worked out, she spent virtually all week on the Internet. No time for me, so I used the time to explore. The two of us did get out one day, mid-afternoon by the time she was ready, to go to the top of the Poas volcano. The tour book said it was interesting to see the volcano itself and that the view from up there was great. Having started late, we arrived at 4:00 just as they closed the place in our faces. Going back down the mountain, me driving and Mary Ann navigating, we got lost trying to get back on the freeway. I was not terribly concerned, because we were clearly driving east along the north side of the valley. San Jose city was in the middle and home was on the south side. We might not know the roads, but we weren't lost. We were, however, stuck in increasingly thick traffic, inching our way through villages. When we saw a cop, we asked directions and got home. To me it had been an interesting adventure; to Mary Ann it had been a nightmare. We went back up the mountain a couple of days later, got some good pictures, and carefully threaded our way back down the way we had come.

Way up on the top of the south valley wall, high above our rental house, was a restaurant with a view of all San Jose. We went there to celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary. We had driven up in fairly dense clouds, but the weather cleared when we arrived. The view was spectacular and we had the place to ourselves. The service was impeccable. And we had nothing to talk about. Twenty five years together and the conversation hung like lead. We had nothing in common. The children were scattered and uncommunicative, and talk about the future was uninspired and uncomfortable. She expressed the ritual

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concerns about my having a couple of glasses of wine before driving down that hill, and then we went home.

That weekend we went down to the coast at Manuel Antonio. Mary Ann had found a really fancy hotel at the top of the bluff overlooking the Pacific. It was a 15 minute walk down to the beach, but well worth it. I went several times. The weather was not fit for sunbathing, so Mary Ann stayed in the hotel. We took a tour of the national park with the very alert guide who was able to point out lizards and birds which we never would have seen on our own. We then headed back to San Jose.

On our last day Mary Ann pointed out that we hadn't looked at any real estate. That was true; she had been tied to the Internet all the while we had been there. Although we had talked about it, I certainly hadn't wanted to push her for us to see anything. I was surprised that Mary Ann proposed that we should do it.

In my explorations I had discovered a real estate office, so we went to talk to them. An agent showed us several properties, including one buildable lot would have been ideal for a retirement home. We took the literature, had quite a long talk with the developers, and told them that we would talk about it when we got home to Washington. My heart was not into the prospect of a gated community away from everybody, but I feigned interest enough to see what would come of it. I had been slow rolled often enough by Mary Ann to be convinced that she would never agree to it. The only suspense was discovering her excuse. Sure enough, after the salesperson called her a couple of times back in Washington, the deal quietly died.

The true reason, I am convinced, is that Mary Ann does not want to retire. She did not want to retire when she was married to me because it would have entailed spending time with me. As should be clear from the above, she was ill at ease with me. Mary Ann's work is her anchor in life. It is her retreat. My role in setting it up in 1992 had been fairly minimal. I assured her repeatedly that she should take the risk. We could afford to lose some capital if the company went bust, and that the company represented her best opportunity for the kind of independence she had always spoken of. Once it was going, she systematically, thoroughly and emphatically excluded me from its operation. I would have liked to have been involved. Work in her company requires a knowledge of business, foreign trade, computers, and foreign languages, all of which are among my strengths. Nevertheless, she absolutely did not want me to be involved.

Although I always got along well socially with her three partners, Charles, Dan, and Tom, she was insistent that they did not want me anywhere near the business. If that was her attitude, I am sure that she convinced her partners. Whatever the case, I pursued my own business successfully, although hers had a much more unique franchise to exploit and had the potential to be more lucrative. I had sensed her lack of trust in me for a long time, and this business with her company only brought it into sharper focus. Ironically, she does not trust her partners either. She constantly griped about their ethics in dealing with clients, their willingness to overbill, and their lack of conscience about taking extended vacations with their families, leaving the other partners to carry on. I could never convince Mary Ann that she should simply follow their example, at least with regard to vacation time.

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My wedding ring was a barometer of the health of our marriage. It had been a personal defeat to me when my first marriage failed. I thought long and hard about what I could have done to prevent that. I resolved it would work with Mary Ann. As a symbol, I never took my wedding ring off, even to show to somebody. It remained in constant contact with me for more than ten years, an emblem of my commitment. However, commitment or not, love never grew in Mary Ann's heart. She was pleased that I was there and contributing to our wealth, which mattered a great deal to her, but she never gave her heart to me. Her conduct was as blameless as she could make it, but without warmth. She made sure they kids saw the pediatrician, got to school, attended sports meets, etc., but she never talked much with them or with me. Though we made a ritual of eating together, there was little dinner table conversation. Sometime midway through our marriage I got something under my wedding ring which caused my finger to itch. I took the ring off to give it air. Mary Ann made no remark, and it stayed off for increasingly long periods of time.

During the latter half of our marriage there were only occasional lapses in the elaborate protocol of non-communication. One of those occurred as we were talking about the real estate in Costa Rica. Mary Ann suggested that the reason I wanted to move there might be to get a Latin mistress. What a revealing statement! She knew that our relationship was anything but romantic, and that I am a romantic at heart. I answered quickly that no, if I wanted a mistress, I would already have already had one in Bethesda. I didn't take it further. I knew very well from conversations early in our marriage that Mary Ann could not have tolerated my having another woman. She would not have missed my love – she didn't want it in the first place – but she could not have borne the embarrassment, the loss of face, associated with having an unfaithful husband.

The thought of having affairs had crossed my mind, of course. My observation is that they usually end up, at a minimum unsatisfactorily, and often enough in disaster. They inevitably involve deceit, and I'm simply not very good at it. Therefore I never cheated. I had had a couple of episodes in my single life when I had two girlfriends simultaneously, and rather than exulting in it, I felt that I was being dishonest and invariably ended one relationship rather quickly so I could focus on building something serious with the other. I have believed all my life in a one-man, one-woman relationship, bound together by love and children. The advice I give my kids, and which I follow myself, is not to waste your time in a relationship that isn't going anyplace. That has often meant having an empty bed for long periods of time as I looked for a relationship that I could enter without knowing from the beginning that it would have to end. As I reflect back, this approach has also given me a remarkable degree of control over my love life. No woman has ever left me or cheated on me. I credit this extreme luck to the fact that I have avoided getting into unworthy relationships, and I have tried to be open and honest with the women I have loved. And I have been faithful.

We did not have a summer vacation in 2006. I was not working on much serious. I should have taken my comprehensive examinations for a Master's degree in statistics at the University of Maryland, but I put it off. I had no idea what I would do if I got the degree, and no stomach for studying for it. I dabbled at a computer instruction program for private schools. I didn't push it terribly hard, and the schools I talked to were not terribly interested. They assume the children know how to use computers without being taught. Raising the question of how effectively children use computers touches on uncomfortable questions about the rest of the curriculum.

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Mary Ann and I had very different views on money. It is her nature to worry, and she is constantly concerned that she will die poor, spending her last days forgotten in a nursing home like her grandfather did. This craving for money, and not knowing what else to do with her time other than pursue money, drives her to continue to work. Although she never criticized me to my face, she complained to other people that by not working I was not holding up my end of the marriage. She felt that I should be doing something to earn a salary. For my part, I felt that I should be doing something meaningful. In any case, I was doing neither. I was, however, actively managing our stock portfolio, which was doing quite well. Throughout our marriage I had managed a string of rental properties which I had acquired before and during our marriage. I sold the last of those in 2001 and had our assets in the stock market, and spent a fair amount of time researching stocks. Mary Ann never understood stocks, never trusted the stock market, and never considered my stock market earnings to be the result of real work in the same way as her W-2.

I have off and on had some nice cars. When Mary Ann and I married I owned a Mercedes 450SL sports car and a Mercedes 600 limousine. The former was a lot of fun; I drove it for 8 1/2 years and actually sold it at a profit. The latter was a money pit which I got out from under by giving it to the church early in our marriage. As the children were growing up we owned a series of practical family cars, but as soon as Suzy was leaving home I had an itch for another beautiful car. I bought a blue 2001 BMW Z8. The car itself was rare enough, and the blue color very hard to find. I went to Florida to pick it up, and on the way back planned a weekend with my friends Edward and Susie Kinney in Savannah. Since we had not had a vacation, I invited Mary Ann to come down and drive home with me.

That weekend was miserable for her for several reasons. First, though she didn't at first express it, and although objectively we could easily afford it, she thought that the car was a miserable waste of money. That accusation came out repeatedly after I moved out in November. Secondly, Edward and Susie are quite social people. We went out to several clubs in Savannah and fell into conversations with some of the denizens of the barrooms. Edward, Susie and I were quite at ease, Mary Ann stiff and miserable. When we left, she complained about how uncomfortable the car was for the entire, long drive up to Bethesda. To sum it up, that weekend was absolutely no fun for her and she had not made any effort to make it fun for anybody else. I think she resented that the rest of us enjoyed ourselves anyhow. Mary Ann had never had much interest in my friends. We kept quite separate circles of acquaintances, the only overlap being Mary Ann Fisher, our neighbor, whom I had known prior to our marriage, Sue Jacox, mother of one of Jack's friends and an employee of my company, and Edith Purdie whom I had known as an independent consultant.

Suzy continued belly dancing as she entered her senior year at Walt Whitman high school. The leader of her troupe was Karen McLean, an attractive divorcee in her 50s, an interior decorator with a decidedly sour attitude toward men. The other members of her troupe were all older than Suzy and had similarly bad experiences with men. Suzy had adopted the attitude that men were useless, abusive, and certainly not to be trusted. She made a horrendous accusation against her brother, one which neither she nor Mary Ann ever articulated explicitly for me. I believe Jack when he says it is nothing serious, but nobody has ever told me any details. I suspect he saw her naked in the shower or something like that. Whatever the reason, Suzy rather publicly accused her brother of being a sex criminal. Once I recall she told me that all

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men abuse their wives, and it has been like that throughout history. I countered with a few questions. Did I ever abuse her mother? Did her maternal grandfather ever abuse her grandmother? On either side? How about her aunts and uncles? She refused to answer, but refused likewise to change her stance. Dogma is dogma. Whereas earlier in her life Suzy and I had talked frequently and easily, our discussions much more frequently took the form of arguments. I was the only person in her life who would ask her to question the stream of propaganda to which she was subjected on all subjects politically correct, from global warming through diversity and subjection of women. Rather than question the dogmas, she simply shut me out. I'm still out.

Part of the problem was simply a matter of my calling her on her hypocrisy. In one example which sticks in my mind, she insisted on being driven to a health spa where she could work out. She flatly rejected my common sense observation that walking the mile and a half would be good for her. She insisted on being driven to school, when once again the walk would have done her good. I offered repeatedly to walk with her, and she refused every time. I do not think she ever walked that one mile to Walt Whitman High School. She also refused to take the bus which stopped at the end of our street, because it came too early for her, and she refused to learn how to drive because cars pollute the environment. She found no contradiction in her demand to be driven instead. Mary Ann gave in and drove her to school. Sometimes, frequently even, after Mary Ann had made this concession I wound up doing the driving, since Mary Ann did have to go to work and I had nothing pressing to do. I have to confess that I often use the occasion to rag on Suzy for taking advantage of us. I never accused her of being pudgy, which a less generous person might have done, but I did suggest the exercise would do her good.

We had failed our children in several ways. Most visibly, they all smoked. They did not respect their bodies; as I noted above with Suzy, they did not exercise with any regularity or particularly control their appetites. They did not show self-restraint or respect for their parents. They would curse you to your face, and if they did not want to hear what you had to say, simply cut off all contact, a process quite similar to the Ice Queen treatment with which I was so familiar. Mary Ann and the wider community of Bethesda applied a therapeutic model to all such behavior. We sought expensive psychiatrists to explain it and remedy it. I was the odd man out – I thought it was a matter of character, and that we as parents had failed our children by not teaching them character. In any case, I was a voice in the wilderness. The children were out of the house and there was not much I could do at this late date.

Mary Ann did not support my disciplining the children. Naomi lied vehemently and habitually. She threw tantrums. At one point, when she was perhaps five, I was fed up and smacked her bottom. Mary Ann said she was calling the police. I invited her to do it, and she backed down. But that was the pattern. Mary Ann found every lie Naomi told to be somehow believable. Lourdes the housekeeper and I made it clear that we didn't believe a word of them, but Naomi slid through experiencing no discipline.

I attempted to require that the kids finish their homework before watching TV; get up before noon on weekends; get physical exercise; be called to account for obvious lies; make their beds; clean up their own messes rather than leave it for Lourdes; keep a civil tongue when talking to us parents. The upshot was that the kids learned that there were no consequences for whatever they might do. Now that they are adults I am sure they encounter consequences every now and again, such as Jack's inability to ever find a paying job in the capacity of a college graduate, and equally sure they find it was to blame everybody but

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themselves for the problem. Though I haven't heard it, I would not be surprised to find that they have devised some rationale for blaming me. Here it is, kids. We didn't discipline you. We never required that you develop character.

We did not indulge our children any more than families in the neighborhood or in school. All went to summer camps and belonged to a swimming pool. As a teen Jack went to summer snowboard camp in Oregon a few times and to Nicaragua with me. Suzy went to Haiti and Peru for community service (admittedly, with me, which imposed some small limit on what she could do). Jack accompanied me on expensive bicycle vacations in Canada three summers in a row; Naomi joined for the last one. We offered these experiences freely, and did not ask that the kids do anything in return.

A significant part of the divide between my children and myself concerned pride in our culture. I trace my ancestry back five centuries along some lines, through the Mayflower. I am proud of what they accomplished. I am proud of what the European civilization developed culminating in the ideas of the Enlightenment. My children, conversely, were taught pretty much that white people, and especially men, and especially Christians are historically evil. I mentioned elsewhere that Suzy condemned us all as wife beaters. In school they studied the evils perpetrated on Japanese-Americans interned at Manzanar, overlooking the treatment of Chinese and British prisoners by the Japanese in Manchuria and Singapore. They lamented the treatment of Indians, without reference to, such instance as the massacre of my ancestors at Fort Seybert, West Virginia, or the unpredictable truth that the Indians were enormously susceptible to European diseases. They learned of the anti-Semitic horrors which killed six million during the Holocaust, without the balance of the six million or so killed in the Ukrainian Holodomor of 1931-32, led by Soviet Jews such as Lazar Kaganovich, or the ethnic cleansing, the brutal removal of Arabs which preceded the establishment of the state of Israel. The history they learned was not wholly incorrect, but it was very one-sided. The education they received seemed to me to systematically undercut my moral authority as a parent and to reject any assumption that I might have learned some morality through my Christian heritage.

The children would present, but not defend the positions which they learned in school, from their friends and perhaps the media and their mother as well. They would not answer my rebuttals, simply painting me as morally deficient for parting from the party line. They cut off communication. "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child!" They had no appreciation for the silver spoon that had fed them – best of schools, supposedly the best of psychological care, and attending the best of colleges, fully paid for by the proceeds from selling real estate I had bought before marrying Mary Ann.

Mary Ann made the beautification of our house a perennial project. From the time we moved in 1989 she always had some renovation afoot. First we needed a pond in the garden, with some goldfish. Next it was spiffing up the living room, a space which nobody used, on which she spent a couple of years' planning. It turned out that one of the tenants in rental houses was a carpenter, and knew a master woodworker. We made the introductions, and he came up with a plan to rework the living room. It was a lovely piece of work, several thousand dollars' worth, though even after it was completed there was still never much of anybody in the living room because the house was simply so big we didn't need it. The cats helped Mary Ann's other projects along by urinating on the family room carpet. I worked manfully to try to remove the smell, but Mary Ann's nose was too sensitive, and nothing would do but that we get

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hardwood floors. They repeated the favor in the master bedroom, with the same result. After everything that could be reworked had been reworked, Mary Ann started to fill the house with decorative pieces. Her taste was good, and we could certainly afford it, so I went along. It wasn't my priority, but it kept the peace.

The last beautification effort, however, was over-the-top. She engaged Karen McLean (Suzy's dance troupe leader, above) to redo the family room. Karen proposed some oversized sofas to replace the Swiss ones that I had bought in Germany thirty years prior. I had paid \$5,000 in 1972 money for absolutely the best possible leather furniture, and we had successfully reupholstered it three times. The kids had grown up romping on that living room set; it had been the center of our family life. Now Mary Ann wanted to replace it with some tacky, bloated modern stuff. I was strong in my resistance. I told her I hated the idea. She would not relent. It is true that I did not go in that room very often because the television is there. I have never watched television, and of course television was the symbol of the disunity in our relationship. Every time I wanted to spend time alone with Mary Ann, she was always tied up with some "must watch" television program. I found it the height of irony that, at the time we split up, the program in question was "Sex in the City." There may have been sex in the city, but not much in our suburb. The unhappy compromise was that we got my Swiss furniture reupholstered in leather and used it to replace the old sofas in the living room. Thereafter I never went to the family room to sit on the bloated new furniture, spending my time instead reading on my favorite sofa in the living room. I am sure that I looked aloof and disdainful. I was.

That was the backdrop as of the end of October 2006. Fewer and fewer things tied me to the family, and more and more things were separating us. I had been keeping myself prepared mentally and physically for whatever might come. Mary Ann called me her "young body husband" because I was religious about working out with the weights and the exercise bicycle I kept in the basement. I did keep my body in shape. I was trying to improve myself in other ways, broadening my mind by doing graduate work in education, anthropology and statistics, and improving my singing by participating in the church choir. Suzy's amazing screed, which I mentioned in the opening paragraph, was the triggering event. If Suzy no longer needed me, nobody else did and it was time to go. I retreated into myself, thinking for about a week how to bring the subject up. Mary Ann did so for me, asking why I was so reserved. We sat down and had a surprisingly brief conversation on one of those ugly new sofas. My opening gambit was to say that the marriage wasn't working; if we were going to keep it, it would have to be a lot looser. She answered as I knew she would, saying that she could not accept a "loose" marriage. I responded saying that it looked like divorce was the only option, and she agreed. We agreed that I would move downstairs to the empty apartment, where her father John had lived, that night, and move out of the house as soon as possible.

We got the kids on a conference call to tell them. Suzy was still at home. They did not express surprise; they said they had expected it. A year or so later, over the dinner that Suzy permitted before I left for Ukraine, saying she would feel bad if I happened to die without ever seeing her again, she expressed shock to learn it was I who had decided to leave. It was clear that Mary Ann had confided her dissatisfaction with me to Suzy, confirming the evidence of her behavior towards me.

Bad-mouthing

I do not know the degree to which Mary Ann shared her thoughts on our marriage with the children. It never came up in my conversations with them. On the other hand, they could not help but notice the coolness.

Only one time did Mary Ann talk me down in my presence. In the early 90s she and I were alone in the kitchen as she conversed by phone with a family member. She started going on about my shortcomings. I was shocked. Shocked that she felt what she did, and doubly shocked that she would say it in my presence. I glared at her. That may be what women did in Fishtown and Croyden, where she grew up, but where I'm from you don't do that if you have any respect for your husband. She went on. I pinched her hard. She jumped, and stopped.

She attacked me. How I could dare to pinch her? I asked how she could dare to insult me like that. I said that her psychological attack on me was far more damaging than my pinch. The subject ended, and she never did it again. Not in my presence, at any rate. Evidence is that it did go on behind my back.

As best I recall, we had that conversation on Friday October 27, 2006. Saturday, October 28 I went looking for a house to rent. Sunday the 29th I signed a contract. Tuesday the 31st I sat home alone giving out Hallowe'en candy, and Wednesday the first the movers took me to 11408 Empire Lane in Rockville. Inevitably there was some stuff that I left behind. When I came back to get it, I found that Mary Ann had already changed the locks. She was not home, and she had charged daughter Naomi with watching me to be sure that I didn't go any place in the house or take anything unauthorized. I gathered my stuff, petted Shady, our cat, for the last time and left. I was back about two more times, first to get bicycles and other stuff from the garage, and several months later to get the convertible hardtop for the Z8. That was the last I have seen of that house.

I had not given much thought to the mechanics of divorce. Mary Ann proposed that we use an arbitration process called "collaborative divorce." She located a lawyer and went through all of the process in a very thorough way. Following her lead, I located a lawyer who also practices collaborative divorce. In the end we assembled a team of five Jewish ladies of a certain age. Although it was ostensibly as unbiased as possible, the Jewish lady who was supposed to be representing my interests seemed to be rather tepid in doing so, whereas Mary Ann's seemed fairly aggressive. Since the kids were grown, the only issue before us was dividing the community property. The yardstick for allocating it

was the lawyers' educated guess as to what the courts would decide, and the accountant's judgment as to the best way to approach the situation as far as taxation was concerned. Taxation was not a big deal, so it came down to a fair split of the community property.

I had had several hundred thousand dollars' net worth when we married in 1981. I owned a house in Washington DC, two houses in Maryland, half interest in a house in Reston, and had a fairly decent stock portfolio. Mary Ann, 11 years younger, didn't have anything except a Toyota Corolla that was partly paid for. We had done pretty well over the course of marriage, acquiring a couple more pieces of real estate, building our equity in the real estate, and each establishing pension funds. I had insisted that Mary Ann and her partners set up the pension system at the earliest possible moment, and they did so.

Thoughts on the end of my twenty-five year marriage to Mary Ann McCleary

By 2006 we had sold all of the rental real estate. Our assets consisted of a sizable stock portfolio, our two pension plans, the large house in Bethesda, and Mary Ann's business. The business was the sticking point in our negotiations. She found some algorithm for valuing small businesses, which put the value of this entity which was earning her \$300,000 dollars per year at only \$25,000. I considered that ridiculous. Common sense says that an asset should be worth some multiple, not a fraction, of what it earns. Our negotiations dragged on. At one point Mary Ann and I finally agreed on a settlement, shook hands on it, after which she backed out of it. I got disgusted. I had been planning on a trip to Ukraine, and I simply got my ticket and went. Time was on my side, at least the way her mind worked. She was earning money and I did not have a job. Our stock portfolio was booming, but she did not give me any credit for managing it, and instead saw me as a liability, potentially taking half of her salary. She came back to the table and agreed on pretty much the terms on which we had shaken hands, and then backed out once again demanding \$5,000 for some silly thing, I forget what, without which we had no deal. Disgusted, I gave her the 5K and it was over. The final decree came through on our common birthday, December 19, 2007, as she turned 54 and I 65. I got my pension assets and half of our stock portfolio. She got her company, her pension, the house, the other half of our stock portfolio, and custody of the trusts we had set up for the kids.

There was some curious interplay during the divorce. Mary Ann said at one point that I "at least could have waited until Suzy was out of the house." If that was the worst she could say, I reflected how weak the relationship truly was. She certainly didn't act like a woman scorned. She didn't even say "I loved you." She acted as if she had known this was coming for a long time, and went about the divorce in a very businesslike way. Nonetheless, she frequently wore the 25th anniversary plumeria pendant, a fact on which I never commented. I had the sense that she would have been just as happy to forget the divorce and reenter the loveless, somnambulant albeit unchallenging relationship which we had had for the past decade.

Following up on the financial settlement, I filed the joint tax return for 2006, the last year we were together. Mary Ann had said she would do it, but made no progress as the April 15 deadline approached in 2007. A year later the IRS came back for more money. I had failed to include a 1099 for the money from her father's estate. She demanded that I pony up half of what the IRS wanted. However, this time I had the power. She had gotten her pound of flesh in the \$5,000 extorted for concluding the divorce. I was perfectly happy to let her fight this thing out with the IRS. She has an unnatural fear of authority. So far as I know, she wrote them a check for the amount they had asked and that was the end of it. Of course, both these minor money fights left some ill will.

Mary Ann had gone into the divorce proceedings at one point saying that I would be "the best ex-husband ever." She would not say that today. These two little money deals, involving amounts that are insignificant compared to our separate net worths, have poisoned our relationship. We have also been divided over the children. Jack moved back from Portland in 2008 and Mary Ann had him convince my roommates in Rockville that it was okay for me that he moved into that house, when I was in Ukraine and had not been consulted. I was outraged that Mary Ann would do such a thing and told Jack no, he was not welcome, please move out. As Mary Ann well knew from many years back, I did not want to coddle an adult child who should be making his own way in the world.

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Mary Ann later let him move in with her, a move which she came to regret when she could not get him out. In my last attempt ever to do her a favor, sometime in 2009 I tried to convince Jack that coming to Ukraine would be a good idea. He could work here as an English teacher and learn something of a foreign culture. Mary Ann undercut this offer in a way that made Jack angry with me and made me look like a fool. Mary Ann and I have not spoken since and my relationship with Jack is distant. I understand that after I invited Naomi, Mary Ann took it on herself to invite the two children who were not speaking with me to Oksana and my church wedding in Paris. How amazingly inappropriate – just plain ludicrous! I doubt they would have wanted to come, but I sent an email politely telling them that a wedding is the bride's day, not an occasion to mend issues with a prior family.

Perhaps the most singular thing about our divorce is that it was so late in life. I left on the eve of my 64th birthday. Most people achieve a certain level of resignation by that stage. A marriage may not be perfect, but there is a tremendous amount of inertia holding it together. What moved me to leave?

There were surprisingly few external pressures holding us together. Our parents were dead; we had satisfied their expectations of us. We had few friends in common. The church was my domain; Mary Ann rarely went there. She had no involvement whatsoever with my friends from the University. She never had much to do with my professional friends, and she made sure that there was an arms-length distance between me and her business partners.

We had only a couple of sets of friends in common, associates from my days with the Washington Independent computer consultants Association, Sue Jacox from St. Andrews and friends of my friend Mary Ann Fisher whom I had long ago introduced to Mary Ann. We did not see these people often. None of my relatives lived in the area. We got along well with her relatives, a couple of whom I really enjoyed, but with whom we only infrequently socialized.

We did not have interests in common. I loved to bicycle, to boat, to dance and to swim. She did not like any of it. I enjoyed reading and studying foreign language. Once again, she had no interest. She took piano lessons after I set her up with an outstanding teacher one year as a Christmas present. However, she had to discontinue the piano when she strained the tendons in her arm. That event was also somewhat divisive. In his last year, her father had to be rolled over every night to prevent his getting bedsores. I encouraged Mary Ann, I begged her to let me do it because it was too physically demanding for her. However, she was resolute, and stayed with the task until it disabled her, and incidentally took her away from the piano, which appeared to me to be her only interest outside of television. When she could no longer play the piano, she actively resisted my efforts to get her to study Spanish, something she could have done and something which would have indicated some commitment to my interests for our common future. Generally speaking, there was nothing to get her out of the house. She occasionally gardened, and she did accept my help with the heavy work of digging, pruning and the like. I got out for classes at the University of Maryland, choir practice, boating and biking.

Cutting then to the bottom line, we did not have anything much holding us together. I characterized it at the time as a relationship with a figurative dotted line down the middle on which was written "cut here."

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I remember one memorable phrase from years ago, a friend of my mother's saying "If I knew I was going to live this long, I would have gotten divorced years ago." We had an empty existence and there was no suggestion that anything would ever change. Mary Ann steadfastly refused to discuss retirement, she resisted any notion that we might ever sell our monstrosity of a house, one which had been excessively large even for a family of five, and she didn't have much interest in travel.

I wanted children in my life. I believe that children are the purpose of our existence. I had long said that success in parenthood is measured in grandchildren. You are successful when your kids are stable enough to marry and raise their own families. In 2006 there was no promise of this. Jack had been saying ever since he was a boy that he had no intention of having a family, and nothing seemed to change. My daughters were so nasty to their boyfriends that I could not believe either of them would ever be asked to get married, and if they were, would produce grandchildren.

In the context of grandchildren, I had mentioned to Mary Ann maybe 10 years back that it didn't look terribly promising for our own grandchildren, and that I might like to get involved in some activity with adoptive grandchildren. She literally shuddered in her vehement rejection of the question. It was totally out of consideration, off the table forever. I do not see that she has any interest in grandchildren. Her mother never had any particular interest in them either. We never dropped the kids off with the grandparents so we could do something. When Mary Ann's mother was dying of cancer I proposed that our kids should go and say goodbye to their grandmother. Both Mary Ann and her mother ferociously rejected that suggestion. She played no significant role in any of her grandchildren's lives, except for the granddaughter, Shawn, whom she was

Status Ten Years After Leaving

None of my children are married. The prospect of grandchildren looks as dim as ever.

Jack is living in Portland, supposedly working as a drug counsellor. He is invisible on social media, has not answered my email for five years. Though the Internet indicates that he can be contacted through a counsellor referral agency, they do not recognize his name.

Suzy appears to be sharing an apartment in Husby, a suburb of Stockholm with a large population of Somalis, Eritrians, Iraqis and Afghanistanis. Last I heard she was studying to be a social worker – only about 20% of such immigrants are employed. She, too, is invisible on social media and does not return my emails.

Mary Ann has not returned my calls or email for seven years. I have called and written her on major matters such as Naomi's divorce and minor ones such as to request that she send us the Seibert family Christmas ornaments so I can share a bit of family history with my son Eddy. No answer.

Naomi and I talk. She is successful in a job that she loves. More than that, she has taken control of her life.

I think a lot about how their upbringing contributed to my children's present situations. Some blame has to go to us parents, but much of it should go to their society. I have reviewed many books on the topic, most recently "[Save the Males](#)," "[The War Against Boys](#)," and "[The Gardener and the Carpenter](#)."

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forced against her will to raise, who grew into a hellion, from whom nobody has heard since her grandfather died in 2005. As Mary Ann herself grows older, the thing she talks about is security in retirement, not about grandchildren, and not about travel or enjoying life. [Japanese have a different view of romance](#), and over time I came to appreciate how Japanese Mary Ann was.

I concluded that if they were going to be any children in my life, it would not involve Mary Ann. In fact, it did not appear that I could do much at all meaningful all remaining married to her. Inertia would have been the only thing to keep me in the marriage. I had been working to keep myself in good physical condition all my life, and this was the moment to take advantage of it. I still felt young at 64, and I resolved to prove that I could still be young. I left.

I lived the single life as a divorcing man in Rockville for only 10 months. I am a quick study. Within three months I had pretty much determined that there were not likely to be any women with children, or who wanted children, who wanted to marry me. In fact, there were very few who wanted anything to do with marriage, and even fewer who would have treated it as an honest partnership. There were some who would've liked a bit of financial support in their declining years.

I got to know the bar scene quite quickly, and equally quickly concluded that older divorced guys were a drug on the market, and that even had I been quite a bit younger there were no women who were interesting in the first place. I took dance lessons. Pretty much the same story. I joined all of the Internet dating sites, and wrote some fairly clever ads for craigslist. I bought tickets to the opera and ballet and advertised for cultivated ladies to accompany me. A couple of pleasant women answered, but they were, as one says on singles sites, BBW. Broadly built women; 200 pounds and up. I treated them like ladies, but certainly could never have considered any sort of romance.

I had two roommates in my house in Rockville, Lan and Christie, a couple of delightful young women in their late 20s. Lan especially invited a number of friends by the house. We got along quite well, conversing easily at barbecues and parties. My read on the situation was that they would have never considered me as a romantic interest. Every young woman applies some sort of an eligibility template to men she meets. That template is to a large degree culturally defined, and American culture simply would not admit a guy my age as a boyfriend or potential husband.

It was no more than three months after moving out that I concluded I would go overseas. I took a vacation in Costa Rica in April and took a hard look at the possibilities there. Although I love the country, I didn't see much promise of meeting a woman who would consider herself an equal partner in a marriage. By that time I had ordered some Russian language tapes from Pimsleur and resolved that I would at least take a look at Ukraine, Russia and Moldova. As summer approached, and Mary Ann and I appear to be closer to a divorce settlement, I investigated language schools.

Russia has a reputation of being a country of fairly hard-edged people. Besides that it is cold, and getting a visa is expensive and difficult. Ukraine and Moldova looked like better bets. Moldova is a small place without much in the way of language schools. It came down to two Ukrainian cities, Odessa and Kiev. When Mary Ann reneged on the divorce agreement upon which we had shaken hands, I immediately

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called language schools to see what I could set up one short notice. The one I found was in Kiev, and that's where I went, the first of September 2007.

The years since have been eventful. I became involved, first in the Toastmasters, then in the Anglican Church, and then in Rotary. I took Russian lessons off and on for a year, and taught English in several different places. I worked a year as a volunteer webmaster for the Ukrainian Association of Pensioners. I did the editing and translating for stock market analysts.

In all the organizations I was involved with I was constantly in the company of young women. I asked the interesting ones for dates; quite a few went out with me a few times, and I had a couple of girlfriends along the way. In September 2009 Oksana Badovska showed up in Christ Church, where I was leading the service. My friend Michael Bedwell has an eye for attractive girls, and was soon escorting her to church, Toastmasters, Rotary, and various cultural events. Oksana and I became acquainted and quite soon started to see each other, and by December we were living together. We were married in September 2010 and had a son, Edward, on October 15 2011. I find it ironic that I, who walked away with well less than half of the marital assets, am confidently starting a new family, whereas Mary Ann consumes herself with worry about her old age.

Life is never settled, never sure. However, I can say at this point with absolute certainty that the decision I made in October of 2006 was the right one. I traded a future of certain stagnation for an uncertain future with the possibility of a better life. I prepared myself to take advantage of opportunities, and an amazingly wonderful opportunity came up in the form of Oksana Badovska. We tell each other how much we love each other several times a day, pray before every meal, and have made raising Eddie a fully 50:50 proposition, except when his dotting grandmother insists on taking him for herself. There is much more to be told, but it is in a new story. The old story ends here.