

FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE

Vows Revisited: The State Of the Unions

Catching up with five couples
 from our columns.

By LOIS SMITH BRADY

In 2001, after nine years of writing the Vows column every week since its inception, I moved to Aspen, Colo., where my husband had gotten a great job. It was a perfect example of how marriage is like a three-legged race. For better or for worse, you are tied to someone else, and once in a while you have to go — or in my case be dragged — in the direction of your partner. I did not want to move, even though I was able to keep writing columns occasionally. We arrived in the early spring, just as the bears were coming out of hibernation. One of my first nights in our new house, I stood in the kitchen, watching an enormous hunchbacked bear trying to claw down our backyard fence, hoping to get at the garbage cans — or us. I called 911, screaming hysterically. I did the same thing the next night, and the next, until one morning, a "bear counselor" sent over by the police department rang my doorbell. He gently explained that in Aspen, a bear in your backyard is not an emergency. A bear in your living room, maybe. I would have given anything in those first weeks still to be in New York, covering weddings with nothing but butterflies and tipsy bridesmaids as the wildlife.

There are lots of things I miss about attending 32 weddings a year. I miss hearing the big dreams of brides and bridegrooms, how they are going to live in a six-bedroom apartment on Park Avenue by the time they're 30 or walk across Russia together or wait until their 50's to have babies. I also miss the talks of those who officiate at weddings. I remember one priest who said: "A man who gives in when he's wrong is wise. A man who gives in when he's right is married." This particular priest had a dark view of married life. Marriage, he said, is "full of mystery and loaded with problems."

Now, like many couples who have appeared in Vows, I'm living the day-to-day life of a spouse and a parent, juggling work, children, problems and mysteries. It's nothing like being a bride. You blend into the crowd; you never wear white, since by noon, you're covered with jelly stains. It can be as humbling as being passed by a unicyclist on a narrow, steep hiking trail, which has happened to me in Aspen — twice.

Twice before, around the anniversary of the first

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Peggy Cullen and Andy Matlow,
 married Sept. 25, 1999

C. M. Glover for The New York Times



Justin Lane for The New York Times

Joy Rosenthal and Makanda
 McIntyre, married Dec. 10, 2000



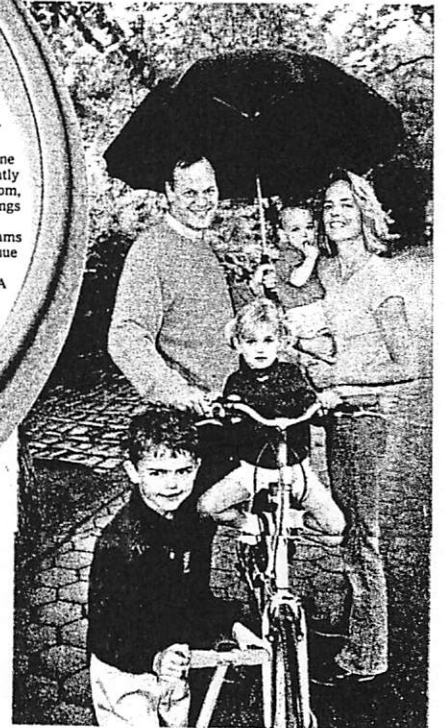
Justin Lane for The New York Times

Jane Katz and Herbert Erlanger, married April 28, 1996

Janet O'Brien
 and Joao Paulo
 Garcia,
 married
 Oct. 3, 1998



Gordon M. Grant for The New York Times



Maureen Sherry and Steve Klinsky,
 married April 22, 1995

Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

The State of the Unions

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Vows column in 1992, Sunday Styles has checked in with couples who have been featured to see how their own three-legged race is going. Some describe marriage as the feeling of being Super-Glued to another person; others say the bond feels as loose as grass blades tied around their wrists.

Brides and bridegrooms always glow. But these updates of couples are stories of the afterglow, or in some cases the aftermath.

Peggy Cullen and Andy Matlow Sept. 25, 1999



Marty Katz for The New York Times

AT Peggy Cullen and Andy Matlow's wedding, everyone was crying and smiling and hugging and saying things like "It's a modern-day fairy tale."

In the 1970's, Ms. Cullen and Mr. Matlow had been penniless, footloose college lovers. When she accidentally became pregnant, they gave their infant daughter up for adoption and went their separate ways. Twenty-five years later, with the help of a private investigator and the Yellow Pages, Ms. Cullen arranged a family reunion in her tiny Upper West Side apartment, inviting Mr. Matlow and their daughter, Raychel Ella Wade, above center, by then a struggling actress in Los Angeles.

Mr. Matlow, who was divorced, and Ms. Cullen, who had never married, promptly fell back in love. "It was like the pause button had been on for 25 years and we pushed play," Mr. Matlow said recently.

Ms. Wade was the maid of honor at the wedding. Everyone imagined the three would go on to become a blissful threesome, connected in a way that would prove the power of both biology and forgiveness.

Today, Ms. Cullen, a cookbook author, and Mr. Matlow, who designs and builds houses, live in Great Barrington, Mass. In the three and a half years since their wedding, Ms. Cullen, 50, said, "the biggest surprise for me is that it's as good as it is."

At home, Mr. Matlow, 53, is in charge of grocery shopping, meal preparation and gardening. Ms. Cullen calls herself the Minister of the Interior and does all the cleaning, decorating and sewing. They are as inseparable as they were in college, eating every meal together.

"My days were very solitary in the city," Ms. Cullen said. "When I went crazy, I'd walk to Fairway, stand in a long line and get my little blast of humanity, then get back to the computer."

Their relationship with Ms. Wade has been like a blast of reality. Ms. Wade, who turns 30 this month, now lives in Manhattan and owns Cheek to Chic, a makeup consulting business. Right after the wedding, the three went through a honeymoon period where they saw each other often, marveling at their many similarities. They all talk as fast as auctioneers and have the same singing voices. "I thought it was too good to be true," Ms. Wade said.

It was she then went through a difficult period when she didn't want to see Ms. Cullen and Mr. Matlow, needing time, she said, to think about what to call them (she settled on Peggy and Andy) and whether to refer to their house as home (she doesn't).

For her, the reunion has both answered questions, like where her gravely laugh came from, and created mysteries. "It gets really confusing," said Ms. Wade, who was raised by adoptive parents in Vermont.

"Everything you thought was true becomes blurry. You think you know your family is and all of a sudden, you realize you have a bigger family and you have to redefine everything."

She added, "It's not a fairy tale." Today, the three are communicating again — mostly by e-mail. Ms. Cullen said that getting to know Ms. Wade has been both a wild ride and a slow process. "I have all these instinctual feelings for Raychel, yet I didn't raise her," she said. "It's not like I know what she went through in junior high. We're creating our history now."

Right after the wedding, Ms. Cullen and Mr. Matlow discussed having a child together but decided, again, that the timing wasn't right. "It was like everything came full circle," Ms. Cullen said. "Then, we were too young. Now, we're too old."

Janet O'Brien and Joao Paulo Garcia Oct. 3, 1998

EVERYTHING was fabulous in the beginning," said Janet O'Brien of her marriage to Joao Paulo Garcia, a pony-tailed Brazilian. During the first year, he worked as a private chef in the Hamptons, occasionally helping out with her business there, Janet O'Brien Caterers. They could often be seen driving around Sag Harbor or East Hampton together in one of her white vans, laughing, hair blowing around, looking like a television commercial for Champagne.

Then, in the second year, he opened Amazonia, a funky Brazilian restaurant on Montauk Highway in Southampton.

Suddenly, it was as if he had moved to the rain forest. "When you work in a restaurant, you're gone," Ms. O'Brien said. "Joao was coming home at 3 a.m., 4 a.m. It was ships in the night. The basics of life are really important: going to bed together, getting up together, eating together."

The restaurant quickly took all the romance out of their life and their conversations. "All we talked about were bills and his liquor license and the health department," Ms. O'Brien said.

Then Mr. Garcia's 9-year-old son from a previous relationship moved in. "I became an abandoned wife and a single mother all in one breath," Ms. O'Brien said.



Edward Keating/The New York Times

By the third year of marriage, she was doing everything by herself. "I went to dinner parties every Saturday night, alone," she said. "I went to movies on my own. Joao was always at the restaurant. And on his one night off, he was quite happy to sit and watch television. I hate television with a passion. He wanted a TV in the bedroom! I said, 'I'm sorry, you've got the wrong wife.'"

A skier, she had always traveled to Colorado several times a year. She continued to do that, by herself. Mr. Garcia hates cold weather. "Your life is meant to change after you get married, but my life didn't change very much," she said. "I'd just say, 'I'm going to Aspen, honey.'"

At home, she spent all her free time surfing — alone. Mr. Garcia hates cold water. "I learned you've got to play together," Ms. O'Brien said. "I didn't know that before we got married."

By the fourth year, the only thing they did together was argue — about Amazonia. "We weren't having any fun and we were losing money," Ms. O'Brien said. "It was a disaster. Money is the biggest split-up of anything."

Finally, last spring, they decided to close

the restaurant, and end the marriage, too. "He moved out within a day," she said. "We were just exhausted. It was just like, stop."

When asked why he thinks their marriage ended, Mr. Garcia replied, "I wasn't home for years."

Ms. O'Brien added: "I recently ran into a friend, Brian O'Leary, who used to own the Harbor Rose restaurant in Sag Harbor. He said, 'You and Joao were so in love, so in love. And then you opened a restaurant.' He didn't have to say anything more."

Today, they are buddies who still call each other every day. If she needs help carrying coolers over sand dunes to a party, or just wants someone to share a beer with, she calls him, and vice versa. "We talk a lot," said Mr. Garcia, who is working as a private chef again. "We have a good time, we're always laughing and making jokes. But our marriage just didn't work. And you've got to move on if it doesn't work."

Both dream, often aloud and in each other's company, of finding a new mate. "I still think falling in love is great, and I would do it again," she said. "I'm smiling here right now. I'm like, 'Where's the next one?'"

Jane Katz and Herbert Erlanger April 28, 1996

JANE KATZ wore blue swimming goggles down the aisle when she married seven years ago. An aficionado of both swimming and silliness, she has spent her life pool-hopping around New York, in public pools from Coney Island to the Lower East Side. If you emptied her pockets today, you would think you were looking at the contents of a 10-year-old's backpack: miniature plastic flippers, a bag of jacks, pens with frog-shaped erasers. Life is too serious, she says, not to have a yo-yo with you at all times.

In their marriage, she and Herbert Erlanger have cemented their tradition of silliness. Their parties are B.Y.O.B. — bring your own bathing suit — or B.Y.O.G. — bring your own goggles. It doesn't matter that they live in a cramped Manhattan apartment with no swimming pool.

"Being silly goes on, making light of even serious situations," said Dr. Katz, who just turned 50. "We'll go to a restaurant, I'll kick him under the table, he'll kick me back, we'll start a food fight. It doesn't matter where we are, the non-manners are the same."

It is hard to imagine Dr. Erlanger, a tall, strait-laced anesthesiologist in his mid-70's, kicking anyone under a table. But seven years of marriage to Dr. Katz have changed him. He has learned how to walk gracefully in flippers, for one thing, which they like to wear to parties.

"When you get married, you're forced to join in each other's life and become a we," he said. "That's not easy. But it is healthy."

Eight months after their wedding, Dr. Katz's mother, also a swimmer, died. "I never thought I would be so upset," Dr. Katz said. "We were like sisters. Of course, she was 39 forever, even when I was 39." Even today, she remembers her mother with a



Edward Keating/The New York Times

lighthearted weekly ritual. Thursday evenings, Dr. Katz, her father and Dr. Erlanger go to her mother's favorite coffee shop and order wine with four glasses, turning the fourth one upside down. "If the waiters don't understand why there's an extra glass, we

say, 'That's my mom there.'" Dr. Katz said.

After work — Dr. Katz is a physical education professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York — she and Dr. Erlanger usually meet for dinner at a restaurant around 10. They never cook. "Our days are long but the years fly by," Dr. Katz said.

Dr. Katz, who now calls herself a senior mermaid, spent last year writing a book, "Aqua Fit," which will be published this month. She is also busy these days taking care of an even older mermaid, her aunt Charlet Oberley, who has Parkinson's disease. "I always bring her something colorful and fun, like paper turkeys at Thanksgiving," Dr. Katz said. "And Herb sings with her. You take care of the people who took care of you. It's the cycle of life."

Joy Rosenthal and Makanda McIntyre Dec. 10, 2000



Nicole Bengtson/The New York Times

WHEN Joy Rosenthal, a children's rights lawyer, married Makanda McIntyre, a jazz musician, she thought he would live to be 120.

"He cooked fat-free meals at home every night," Ms. Rosenthal McIntyre, 44, said. "He exercised six days a week, three days on the NordicTrack. The other three days he would do exercises that included standing on his head."

Their first few months of marriage were idyllic. He was her mentor, she, his muse. She would lie on the rug in his studio while he composed songs, often about her. He encouraged her to start writing poetry and fiction and also to be more meticulous about cleaning the house. "He had nine planets in Virgo, he was the ultimate perfectionist," she said.

Their only disagreement was about their Washington Heights apartment, filled with African art, musical instruments and views of the George Washington Bridge. It was also filled with pictures of Dr. McIntyre's deceased first wife. "I said, 'You know, Makanda, I just can't deal with this,'" Ms. Rosenthal McIntyre remembered. "So he put the pictures in the foyer and we called it the shrine."

Being health-conscious, he weighed himself every morning. Six months after they were married, he got on the scale and said, "I'm on my way up." So, he headed right for the NordicTrack. "I was eating breakfast in the kitchen and he said, 'Are you going to be here when I get off, love?'" Ms. Rosenthal McIntyre recalled. "I said, 'I hope not.'"

She was rushing off to work. They had a plan to meet at 2 p.m. that day and when he didn't arrive, she headed home, praying. When she opened the door of their apartment, the first thing she saw was their messy bed. "When I saw the bed unmade, I knew he was dead," she said. He had collapsed on the NordicTrack at age 69.

The funeral service was filled with performances by Dr. McIntyre's musician friends, "the same people who played at the wedding," Ms. Rosenthal McIntyre said. "My father walked me down the aisle in a white dress and then six months later, he walked me down the aisle in a black dress."

She hated being alone in their apartment. "I didn't know what side of the bed to sleep on," she said. "I didn't know what to do with his stuff. His pants were hanging on the door. His watch and wallet were on the bureau. They stayed there for a month." She turned the foyer shrine into a photo

gallery of him. "I wrote Makanda letters every day for a year," she said. "I cried a lot. I couldn't live without him, so I said to myself, 'You don't have to.'"

At the time of his death, they had been going through fertility treatments. After he died, she tried to conceive one more time, using his frozen sperm. "I thought, 'His name will be on the birth certificate,'" she said, her voice still full of hope. But she did not become pregnant.

Today, she has begun dating again — tentatively. "Makanda's spirit and I are still together," she said. "What I'm working out now is, how I can be with Makanda and still give myself wholly to somebody else?"

Maureen Sherry and Steve Klinsky April 22, 1995

MAUREEN SHERRY KLINSKY used to be known among her friends as the runaway bride, having broken off a few engagements at the last moment. Before her wedding to Steve Klinsky, she panicked to the point of paralysis. "I had it bad," she said. "I had the invitations in the envelope, and I literally couldn't mail them. My sister mailed them."

Though she made it down the aisle, she was still terrified. "You're heading into a dark zone," she said. At first, their married life was glamorous rather than dark. She was a managing director at Bear, Stearns; he a partner at Forstmann Little. On vacations, they did things like fly to Paris for a few days, then head down to Zimbabwe to ride horses in the wilderness.

They don't do that anymore. They now have three children, ages 6, 4 and 1, and an Upper West Side apartment full of sofas that double as trampolines. "Having kids is a humbling experience," said Mr. Klinsky, who currently manages his own private equity fund.

It was especially humbling for Ms. Klinsky. After their first son was born, she couldn't decide what she wanted to be — a working mom or a nonworking mom. That decision was pretty much made for her. "I came back to work after my maternity leave and there was a guy in my seat," she said. "Do you stay and fight it or do you accept it and head out to the playground?"

She headed to the playground and wrote a nonfiction book, "The Glass Ceiling Club," about a group of working mothers on Wall Street. But the book's publisher canceled it. "It was so bad because I had a two-day old baby," she said. "So I took the news lying down."

Now a full-time mom, Ms. Klinsky does not travel by Town Car or even taxi anymore. "I have my bike rigged up for three people," she said. "I have a little European seat in front; my 6-year-old rides there. And I have a baby seat in the back. We are like a traveling circus show."

Yet, she dresses fashionably, believing that after children, "it's very important to stay in touch with your inner babe."

Before they started a family, the Klinskys almost became runaway parents, worrying that children might ruin their marriage. "We thought, 'Is a child going to take away from our feelings for each other?'" she said. "Three kids later, it is true that your heart seems to grow additional chambers. Your heart just swells more and more with each child."



Edward Keating/The New York Times

A Note to Readers

After Today, For Better, For Worse, a column by Lois Smith Brady that periodically updates the lives of a couple who have been profiled in the Vows column, will appear in the Weddings/Celebrations pages of Sunday Styles.