

Can This Marriage be Saved?????

A Case Study

Can this marriage be saved, is the question posed to every couple seeking a divorce or separation of their marriage. Often the couples will each respond that they have irreconcilable difference and any attempt to save the marriage would be countless and to no avail. There are occasions when one member of the couple will proclaim that they did not see this coming and that it was a complete surprise to them. They claim they want their marriage and they are not willing to give up the spouse without a fight. This brief article will tell the story of a couple who found themselves in the throws of divorce and the wife never saw it coming. How do they address the issue of whether this marriage can be saved.

This is the story of Erica and Jim who were married after both finished college and lived together for sixteen years in what Erica thought was marital bliss. The two had grown up together in a small southeastern town where everyone knew everyone. Erica's family was well respected in the community and her father was one of the pillars of the small town, as well as a respected deacon in the local church. Her mother ran a local day care center where many of the town's people left their children while at work. Erica was considered a "good girl" and did not give Jim a second look because his family was considered to be living on the "other side of the tracks." His family did not attend church and there were ten children in the fatherless home.

Erica was sure she would find a husband at the university she chose to attend. In addition to getting her BS in education, she was also seeking her "Mrs." degree, as well. In other words, Erica expected to find her future husband while in college. Because she was a "good girl," very attractive and had saved herself for her husband, she was certain her prince charming was waiting to sweep her away on his white horse or chariot. Well, dated in college and thought at one time she fell in love and had found her husband to whom she had given herself freely. She was devastated when she realized her boyfriend

was not in love with her and had decided long before he came to college that he would not ever marry. He thought of himself as a Romeo who would “love them and leave them,” as he felt his father had done to his mother who was never married to his father. There was no way Erica could have known this since Jim was very popular, bright and unwilling to share anything about himself with anyone.

As one would guess, Erica returned to her small town without a husband and without any prospect of a husband. She was hired as an third grade teacher in the small town in which she grew up. Jim had completed his bachelor’s degree in business administration and had acquired a very substantial job. Jim lived in the metropolitan area near his job. He crafted a very sophisticated bachelor’s lifestyle for himself. He lived in a fancy high rise apartment where he entertained friends and colleagues. He was famous for having the best social gatherings in the city. In spite of all of the hype, Jim was still lonely and realized that something was missing in his life. You see, he was not raised in a Christian home and therefore, he did not realize that what he longed for was a special relationship with God.

By the same token, Erica was raised in a Christian home and attended church every Sunday because her parents expected her to do so. But while she was in church every Sunday, she too was lonely and desired to have a husband above all. She enjoyed teaching, it did not relieve the unrest and anxiety she felt. She wanted the American dream, a husband, two children, a home surrounded by a white picket fence in a well-manicured community. She excelled at playing tennis, a sport she took up in high school and continued in college. She often dreamed of playing tennis at the country club where she and her friends spent time in the sauna talking about nothing edifying or positive. They would have lunch and then go pick up their children from school as it was their week to drive in the car pool. In her dream, Erica did not work after her first child was born because she wanted to be a stay at home mom. What a life, thought Erica. But, in this small she felt she was destined to either marry one of the guys who worked at the steel mill or become an old maid schoolteacher.

One weekend Jim was summoned to come home to visit his mother who was very ill. He arrived in time to see his mother who died shortly after he arrived. He barely had enough time with her to witness her last words and instructions to him. She asked Jim to make all of her arrangements and serve as the executor of her estate. He smiled to himself about the estate. He thought to himself, what estate? He did not think she even owned the house she was living in. None of the children had the same father but he remembers his mother as a hard worker who encouraged her children to get an education. He began to feel sad and cry as he thought of losing the only parent he had ever known. He also felt guilty about not spending more time with her after he had finished college three years ago. In reality, he was ashamed of his family. They were county bumpkins who lacked style and sophistication.

Jim remained in town for several weeks after the death of his mother to take care of her business. He saw Erica at the funeral that was held in the church she attended. The town was so small that everyone attended the funeral. It was the right thing to do. Jim and Erica's eyes met each other at the wake and talked briefly. Each was impressed with how the other had matured and Erica was particularly impressed with the sophistication that Jim exhibited in his manner and in his attire.

During the weeks that passed, Erica and Jim got to know each other quite well. Neither remembered the other as particularly appealing, but each thought what a difference a few years made. They decided to date even after Jim had gone to the city. Erica visited him regularly. Jim also had to make several business trips to the hometown. As it turned out his mother had acquired property and left a will that provided a token of her love for each of the children. Jim's mother owned her own home and had quite a little nest egg to the family.

After a very short time, Jim and Erica fell in love and decided to spend their lives together. They began to plan a wedding that was quite elaborate. When Erica's father inquired regarding Jim's spiritual life or his relationship to God, Jim stated that he believed in God and was waiting to go to church after he was married. When the father

asked if they would receive any marriage counseling, they both declined. They felt they were educated and could figure their life alone. What more did they need. They were very compatible sexually and they both had a promising future

Exactly one year after Jim's mother died, he was marrying Erica in the very same church where his mother's funeral had been held. He could not help but reflect on that time and how his life just went full steam ahead. He realized that he wished his mother was alive to give him some words of wisdom. He was proud to marry Erica. She was a real catch. He had often observed her from a distance but because of his background, she would not even give a second look. Jim thought his mother would be proud of his accomplishment. He had captured a woman from one of the most prominent families in their small town

The couple married and Erica worked as a teacher until her first child was born, two years after they were married. They were living the life. Jim had been promoted twice in two years and he spent nearly three out of seven days on the road traveling. By the time their first and only child was born, Erica was eager to quit work and continue the second half of her dream. The first child was a daughter. The couple tried very hard, but never could have the second child.

The dream really began to fall apart by the time the child was ready to begin kindergarten. Tim was feeling the pressure of all of the traveling and had a series of little affairs in the cities he traveled to frequently. He encouraged Erica to get a job now that their daughter was attending school. Erica was not eager to work. She enjoyed the free and easy life, especially now that their daughter was in school. They argued about it and Erica began to find little tell signs of a husband who may be "playing around." They did not go to church nor did their daughter go to church except when she visited her grandparents. Jim was less and less interested in being intimate with his wife.

The relationship became more and more tense. Soon Jim asked for a divorce and confessed that he had been seeing other women and in fact one had become pregnant

with his child and the baby would be born in three months. He wanted to marry the woman. Erica was devastated. She knew they had problems but she had no idea it had come to this. She was in denial and insisted she would not allow him to divorce her. They had made a covenant before God and her family. She was embarrassed to tell her friends and family. Eventually Erica realized that she could not hold on to Jim. He tried to shock her by telling her about all of the affairs he had over the years.

The questions is, can this marriage be saved? Points of discussion include:

1. This is a classic case of a couple moving from separation to marriage to divorce. Discuss the implications.
2. What kind of marriage does Erica and Jim have – carnal, emotional or spiritual. Why?
3. Discuss the absence of a relationship with God by each couple. Did Erica have a relationship with God because she attended church regularly?
4. Discuss how the up bringing of each affected their relationship about marriage and morality?
5. Did either Erica or Jim form a vertical relationship with God before they engaged in a horizontal relationship with each other?
6. Was their marriage an “unlawful act” considering they married according to the laws of the state?
7. How can the Ellison model conflict resolution method be used to save this marriage?