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Story of a Quaker Project

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Marriage Enrichment Retreats

Story of a Quaker Project

By

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About the Maces

David and Vera Mace have spent almost forty years making a vital relationship of their own marriage, and, because of their inherent sense of purpose, consequently have enriched the lives and marriages of innumerable persons in some sixty countries around the world.

David Mace's first degree was in science from the University of London. Earlier family influence led him on to Cambridge University, a degree in theology, and work in a mission church in the slums of London. Vera, already in youth work, joined him after their marriage in the work of the mission church. From that point on theirs was a partnership which focused on counselling persons in trouble. Later, a PhD. in sociology for David and a Masters degree with a thesis on Christian marriage for Vera, moved them into full time marriage guidance work. (Two children, a war causing forced separation for a time, and a pacifist stand by David which also made life more difficult, only strengthened them in their

life's purpose.) Before leaving Britain permanently in 1949, they had set up more than one hundred marriage guidance centers and achieved their goal of recognition for the Marriage Guidance Council.

It would be impossible to enumerate specifically here all the activities of teaching, published writing, training seminars and travels the Maces have shared. Theirs has been a life of richly varied experiences and shared responsibilities.

From 1960-67 the Maces served as joint Executive Directors of the American Association of Marriage Counsellors. At present they are members of Summit Friends Meeting in New Jersey, currently living in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where David Mace is Professor of Family Sociology at the Behavioral Sciences Center, Bowman Gray School of Medicine. David Mace delivered the 1968 Rufus Jones Lecture, Marriage As Vocation. This pamphlet and the project it presents is an outgrowth of that experience.

"How important is it that Quakers should have good marriages, and what should Friends General Conference be doing about it?" This question was asked at a gathering of ten married couples, all of them Friends, representing both the U.S. and Canada.

What brought these couples together was the common bond that all had been leading marriage enrichment retreats at which six to eight couples, all with stable marriages, spent an intensive weekend sharing marital growth around the theme "communications-in-depth about relationship-in-depth."

The project of which they had been a part dates back to the 1968 Rufus Jones Lecture, Marriage as Vocation. [A] The impact of the Lecture and the weekend following resulted in the Religious Education Committee of Friends General Conference sponsoring a project to train couples selected by Yearly Meetings to lead marriage enrichment programs in their own regions. The first group was trained in 1969, the second in 1971, and, as the majority of them met again the consensus grew that this project had been sufficiently tested to provide the basis for a more extensive movement within our fellowship.

A number of concerns emerged that can best be expressed as questions:

Do Friends reaffirm their traditional belief in marriage and the family as the foundation unit of the Meeting?

Do Friends believe that their mission to spread love and peace in the world begins with the practice of love and peace in their own primary relationships?

Are our Meetings doing their utmost to make use of modern knowledge and experience in the preparation for marriage of those for whom they accept responsibility?

Are our Meetings satisfied with what they are doing for the care and support of the marriages of their members, and that divorces that occur could not have been prevented by any means that lay in their power?

Would Friends in positions of leadership be willing to demonstrate their support for this project by participating in retreats at which they can examine with others the potentialities for growth of their own marriages?

Those who met at Pendle Hill were not in a position to answer any of these questions in a definitive way. It is clear that answers would vary from one Friend to another and from one Meeting to another. They felt, however, that it would be appropriate and timely for these

questions to be more widely considered. Moreover, their own experiences of marital growth, resulting from their sharing with other married couples, had been so rich and rewarding that they felt they had "good news" to pass on, and were constrained to do so.[B]

THE PLAN

Yearly Meetings throughout the United States were invited to select with care a married couple for a weekend of training at Pendle Hill, the Quaker study center near Philadelphia.

During the six months following the training each couple would have the opportunity to conduct a marriage enrichment retreat arranged by their Yearly Meeting. Then all the couples would reassemble at Pendle Hill to share their experiences. The project would be evaluated, and further action would depend on whatever judgment was reached.

We two were asked to lead the two training weekends. Our decision was to begin with an actual retreat for the group of couples since this experience would, in our judgment, provide the best training we could give them.

PREMISES FROM EARLIER EXPERIENCES

In 1962 Joe and Edith Platt, a Quaker couple who helped run a retreat center called Kirkridge, invited us to conduct a weekend for married couples. We were at that time joint Executive Directors of the American Association of Marriage Counselors, so this was a challenge we could hardly evade. Although we had been involved in many lectures and conferences about marriage, and plenty of marriage counseling, a retreat for married couples was a new venture. However, we accepted the invitation, conducted the retreat to the best of our ability, and learned a great deal in the process. There is no need at this point to go into detail about the procedures we followed for we improved on them considerably later as we gained further experience.

The first Kirkridge retreat was successful enough to encourage the Platts to ask us to come again and again. We then began to receive other requests as it became known that we were available for this kind of leadership, most of them being under religious auspices. The retreats generally began on Friday evening and ended with Sunday lunch. One, for Methodist ministers and their wives, lasted five days, and proved to be the inauguration of a nation-wide program now being run by the United Methodist Church under the title "marriage communication labs."

These experiences brought us into close touch with many "normal" married couples. Our practice was to insist that the retreats were not for couples with problems, but for those who considered they had satisfactory marriages and wanted to explore their potential for further growth. As counselors, we had previously dealt only with marriages in trouble. Now we found that many of these "normal" couples were settling for relationships that were far short of their inherent potential. Some exhibited the same self-defeating interaction patterns which we were accustomed to finding in couples with "problems"--but either they had accepted these poor patterns as inevitable, or the conflicts they caused had not yet reached crisis proportions.

Matching our observation of these couples with some of the research findings on marital interaction, we arrived at four important conclusions:

1. Only a small proportion of marriages came anywhere near to realizing their full potential. Lederer and Jackson[C] suggest that the proportion of "stable-satisfactory" marriages in our culture does not exceed 5-10 percent.

2. Most married couples desire, and hope for, the achievement we have

called "married-in-depth." Early in their married life, however, they find their growth together blocked by interpersonal conflicts which they either cannot understand or are not prepared to make the effort to resolve. They settle for a series of compromises, resulting in a superficial relationship.

3. As time passes, the couple either accepts this unsatisfactory situation, or it becomes progressively intolerable. They are usually so "locked into" their self-defeating interaction pattern that they are quite unable to change it by their own unaided efforts. Some seek marriage counseling, but often too late for it to be effective.

4. This tragedy of undeveloped potential could be avoided in many instances if married couples had a clearer concept of the task of marriage and did not have to struggle in almost total isolation from other couples going through the same experiences. The potential of married couples for giving each other mutual help and support is very great; but it is unable to function because of an unrecognized taboo in our culture.

This taboo, hitherto unrecognized as such, prevents married couples from sharing their intramarital experiences with other couples. In many settings married couples form friendships with each other, enjoy social contacts, even work together on projects; but there is always a tacit understanding that they do not reveal to each other, further than is unavoidable, what is going on in their husband-wife relationships. Complex mechanisms for evasion and mutual defense exist. Some of these are familiar, strong hostility in one partner when the other appears to be revealing too much; making jokes to relieve tension when some inner secret of the marriage accidentally breaks to the surface; silence or withdrawal when "outsiders" appear to be probing too deeply. These defense systems work so well that it is not unusual when a couple begins divorce proceedings for others in their circle of acquaintance to express astonishment in such terms as "We are amazed! We had no idea that they were having trouble!"

We could speculate about the reasons for this taboo: a protection against public humiliation, since we all want others to feel that we can manage competently such a basic undertaking as marriage; a safeguard against exploitation, since a discontented marriage partner offers fair game to a predatory third person; a link with our sexual taboos, since difficulties in marital adjustment often have a sexual component, and any suggestion of sexual incompetence is deeply wounding to our pride. It could reflect the traditional tendency to regard the family as a closed "in-group"--an attitude not without advantages for its strength and stability.

What we are concerned about, however, is that this taboo is being maintained with a strictness that goes far beyond its usefulness in our changing society. It is depriving married couples of help and support from each other, at a time when marriage has become much more difficult and demanding than it was in the past. Indeed, we believe that with the emergence of the nuclear family as the norm in our Western culture, the individual marriage has been deprived of the supports derived from the extended family of the past precisely at a time when our rising expectations of highly rewarding interpersonal relationships are subjecting it to demands it is often unable to meet. In the larger family groupings of the Orient, despite their hierarchical structure, a great deal of help and support can become available to the individual couple in times of trouble from those with whom they share a common corporate life.

It may well be that the new "life styles" being experimented with today--mate-swapping, multilateral marriages, and group marriages, for example--represent attempts to enable the individual marriage to break out of its isolation and to gain better communication, interaction and needed support from other marital units.

A striking illustration of this trend toward deep sharing between

married couples has come to our notice from an unexpected quarter. Two married couples from a conservative Christian background decided to meet and talk together, with complete detailed frankness, about their sexual experiences. A series of such meetings was held, the conversations taped, and subsequently published in book form.[D] The couples, after careful consideration, decided not to hide behind a cloak of anonymity, but to use their real names and disclose their identity.

Confronted with this new trend, we take the view that the taboo against the sharing of husband-wife experiences between one married couple and other married couples can with impunity be relaxed in appropriate situations with benefit to all concerned. Between such couples the development of great warmth, empathy, mutual understanding and support, can contribute significantly to the enrichment and growth of the individual marriages involved. This is essentially what happens in marriage enrichment retreats.

COMPARISON WITH THERAPY AND ENCOUNTER GROUPS

"How do our marriage enrichment groups differ from group marital therapy on the one hand, and from encounter groups on the other?" These questions are raised by many people. What are the answers?

Group therapy for married couples is now widely available, and its effectiveness has been established. Our marriage enrichment groups differ from therapy groups in three important respects.

First, marital therapy is undertaken with couples who have serious problems, often because the individuals concerned suffer from personality disorders. When marriages are not stable a good deal of pathology may emerge in the course of group interaction. Severe conflict between husband and wife may have to be permitted to surface and be handled openly by the therapist.

The second important difference is that therapy groups generally continue meeting, on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, over a long period of time--as long as a year in some cases. Moreover, individual couples may also undergo counseling (individually, conjointly, or both) in association with the group therapy either before being admitted to the group or concurrently with the group experience.

The third difference is in the leadership pattern. Therapy groups are led by professionally qualified persons--psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, social workers, marriage counselors. They play a fairly directive role. The leaders are often male and female co-therapists, but are seldom husband and wife. The role model aspect of the enrichment group, as well as the participatory aspect, are therefore much less pronounced and the group is less free to find and follow its own direction.

An enrichment group consists of several married couples not in need of therapy meeting on an intensive basis but for a limited time period. In our opinion such groups need not be led by professional therapists; although, other things being equal, that is of course a decided advantage. We have come to the conclusion, however, that effective leadership can be given by lay couples if they are carefully selected and trained.

The encounter group, a general descriptive term, is intended to include many variants. We have participated in such groups, studied their procedures, and adapted some of these to our marriage enrichment retreats. Couples who have been involved in encounter groups adjust quickly and easily to the methods we use in marriage enrichment, are generally very cooperative, and an asset to our groups.

There are two significant respects in which our marriage enrichment retreats differ from encounter groups. First, encounter groups are composed of individuals, while our groups are confined to, and led by,

married couples. This distinction calls for different approaches. There is a greater complexity in the leadership, and a greater complexity in the group itself. The encounter group is confined to interactions between separate individuals and usually these individuals have not known each other before joining the group and probably will not continue association afterwards. By contrast, we have at least three kinds of interaction: between individuals within the group, between couples (including the leading couple) within the group, and between husband and wife within the marital unit.

This multidimensional aspect of the enrichment group not only makes it more complex, but also increases its potential. This is particularly true after the experience is over. From our knowledge of encounter groups we are aware of the problems encountered by the individual who, after experiencing a new and invigorating openness and warmth in interaction with others returns home to an atmosphere in which a similar quality of relationship cannot be sustained unless there are already friends and associates at home who have had the benefit of earlier encounter experiences. In the case of our marriage enrichment retreats, the experience is not gained by an isolated individual, but by a preexisting social unit, so that new levels of openness and warmth which the couple have experienced in the group can continue to be maintained after their return home. This would suggest that the "casualty rates" for couples would not be nearly so high as for individuals. We know of no precise study that has investigated this, but our general impressions would seem to confirm it.

The second significant difference between encounter and marriage enrichment groups raises a somewhat controversial question. Encounter groups are more ready to evoke negative interaction between participants, while we place major emphasis upon positive interaction.

If our judgment of encounter groups is in this respect inaccurate we are open to correction. We have, however, gained the impression from many sources that an important technique used in these groups is to provide opportunities for the participants to secure cathartic release of their pent-up hostilities, including hostilities engendered by, or projected upon the group leader or one or more of its members. We recognize that many people in our culture are pregnant with suppressed hostility or rage, and that the provision of properly controlled opportunities for its release may constitute a commendable service; and since the group members are generally strangers who will not be personally and socially involved later, no entangling complications are likely to follow.

For our married couples, the situation is different. We do not mean that they do not have hostile feelings toward each other. They often do, and this comes out clearly and unmistakably. We do not mean, either, that healthy discharge of these feelings might not be good for them--in our therapeutic work with individual couples in conjoint interviews, we make full use of such controlled opportunity for cathartic release with ensuing interpretation. It is our considered opinion, however, that in the particular context of our enrichment retreats, unrestrained discharge of hostile feelings should in general not be encouraged.

Our reasons? One, the shortness of the available time might not permit the proper resolution of such episodes. Two, a couple who have openly discharged rage against each other may well react later with deep feelings of humiliation that are not easily assuaged. Three, coping with this kind of explosive emotional discharge could be alarming for lay leaders not accustomed, as the therapist is, to the expression of deep feelings which normally are not displayed in public. Four, other members of the group could be similarly disturbed and diverted from full participation in the main purpose of the retreat. This complaint has actually been made, and we think justly, by participating couples in a group where a violent and prolonged emotional episode took place.

We have been criticized for taking this position, but have not been persuaded to change our considered opinion. That opinion is reinforced by another conclusion, namely, that when genuine positive interaction is

promoted, negative emotion, even when it is strong and intense, tends to dissolve and wither away. Couples have told us how their fierce hate melted in the atmosphere of warm and loving support engendered in the group, and with the stirring of compassion within them, they began to see each other in a new light. We are inclined to the view, after hearing such testimonies, that in deploying our therapeutic armament we have given short shrift to the power of love not only to cast out fear, but also to turn away wrath.

LAY LEADERSHIP

Our decision to train lay couples for leadership was not hastily made. In fact in the early years during which we were leading retreats we knew of no other couples who were doing so. After seven years we felt that we knew what we were doing. Although we expected criticism from some of our professional colleagues this has not developed to any significant degree, and we are now entirely satisfied that we were justified in taking such a calculated risk. We know of no case where our lay couples have encountered crisis situations which they were unable to handle with wisdom and skill.

STRUCTURING THE RETREAT

These retreats require a minimum of organization and structure, but that minimum must be firmly insisted upon. We strongly favor the residential weekend retreat, although we have met with groups of couples for separate evening sessions spaced out over four to six weeks. This approach was found to be less effective, but decidedly better than nothing for couples who cannot get away from their homes.

We would regard five or six couples as the optimum number, but seldom have we enjoyed this luxury. Usually we have had to accept our upper limit of nine couples, in addition to ourselves, making a total group of twenty. Often more couples apply than we can take, and the organizers plead with us to accept the maximum number because family crises can compel couples to drop out at the last moment. Two couples short at a retreat planned for five couples would leave only three. Therefore our normal procedure has been to ask for six to eight couples.

Although the selection of the couples has been left to the organizers we insist that husband and wife both undertake to come together, which means that if one has to drop out, both do so; we insist that they come only on condition that they both continuously participate in the entire retreat, from beginning to end.

No requirements regarding age, race, vocation, education, or socio-economic status are made. There are advantages in having a homogeneous group of couples, but there are also advantages in a heterogenous group. Our groups have included one engaged couple and one honeymooning couple who came straight from their wedding as well as couples old enough to be retired. They have included highly qualified professionals and blue-collar workers, PhD.s. and high school drop-outs.

Couples coming to our retreats should have what they consider to be reasonably good and stable marriages since our purpose is not to provide group therapy, but to foster marital growth. The reason for this requirement is that we do not believe that group marital therapy can be attempted on a short-term basis, and it is not the purpose in these retreats. Many couples come to these retreats with a good deal of apprehension, and some have told us that they would not have come at all had they not been assured that it was definitely not for "problem couples." Despite all our efforts, couples with severe marital problems do get in occasionally under the wire and we found no way of avoiding this.

We are often asked to provide preparatory material for the participants, including books to read, but we do not think there is any way to

"prepare" for this kind of experience and recommend to read might convey the impression that we are going to engage in intellectual discussion, which is not the case.

We ourselves do not "prepare" for the retreats and do not ask the couples to do so either. It is an adventure in sharing into which we all move together, ready to take it as it comes.[E]

This does not mean, however, that our sessions are totally "unstructured." A timetable is worked out by the group, not imposed upon it. Obviously it has to be planned in relation to the place and the circumstances of our meeting.

INTRODUCTION TO THE FRIENDS' EXPERIENCE

In the living room of "Waysmeet," the house at Pendle Hill in which we held our first training retreat, there was just room for ten couples to sit in a wide circle.

"What we are going to do here," we explained, "is to experience together a marriage enrichment retreat. We hope this experience will be meaningful to you all personally, quite apart from the fact that you will be learning how to conduct a retreat yourselves after you return home. We know of no better way to train you than to let you go through first what others will later go through under your leadership.

"However, we shall be working together at two levels. At any point we can break off and examine together, objectively, what has been happening to us subjectively. You can ask us as your leaders any questions you wish, about what we are doing, or why we are doing it.

"Our goal is very simple and very clear. As married couples we are here to engage together in communication-in-depth about relationship-in-depth. Everything we do will be done with the intention of sharing with each other the directions in which we want our marriages to grow. How far we travel will be decided not by us as leaders, but by you as a group. No one will be put under pressure to do anything he does not wish to do, or to say anything he does not wish to say.

"Our function as leaders is to be 'participant facilitators.' We are in every sense members of the group, and will fully share all the group's experiences. We do not wish to be treated as experts or authorities. The only way in which we shall exercise our role as leaders is to help the group to achieve its goal, or to tell it if we think it is not taking the best direction toward that goal. We make no claim to be infallible. If at any point you don't agree with us, it is your duty to say so. If in any situation we don't know what to do next we shall say so frankly and ask you to help us.

"Now we are ready to begin. The first thing we must do is to get to know each other as couples. The sooner we get well acquainted, the faster we can move toward our goal."

Most of the first evening is devoted to the process of getting to know each other. Our favorite method is to ask the couples to volunteer in turn to be freely questioned by the group. We usually volunteer first, and make it clear that we are prepared to answer the most personal questions. We indicate at this point that we would like to be called by our first names, and we hope the others will agree to do the same. The questions then begin, and when there are no more, we ask another couple to volunteer. We prefer not to go round the circle in order, or take names alphabetically. Everything is done voluntarily as far as possible, to encourage spontaneity.

Time goes quickly as the questions come thick and fast, and it is usually necessary to limit the questioning, or to ask for brief answers. It should be emphasized that the participants are free at any time to ask each other personal questions; this understanding creates a climate

of openness which emphasizes the goal of communication-in-depth.

THE GROUP IN ACTION

Assembled again on Saturday morning, we begin by preparing our "rolling agenda," as one of the trainee couples called it, in order to keep a record of what the group members want to talk about. The aspects of marriage they want to include for discussion before the weekend is over gives us clues to the issues that are important to them. The list with which one of our trainee couples started their retreat was:

What is the state of our marriage now? How have things changed as our relationship has grown?

What are the memorable experiences in our lives that have enriched our marriage?

What have we found to be the most effective ways of handling conflict?

What do we feel about a depth relationship between one of us and another person outside the marriage?

Have we found ways of sharing that have contributed to our spiritual growth?

We ask the group members if they have any "concerns" explaining that if members of the group feel unhappy, or anxious, or angry, about anything that has happened, they have a duty to share their feelings with us all otherwise the fellowship will be broken. Situations have occurred in which someone had a concern that another member of the group also had and neither was expressing.

As a group cannot function effectively without openness to each other on the part of its members, neither can a marriage grow without the same kind of openness between its partners. This is what every married couple should be doing every day--raising issues that need to be discussed, and being honest about disturbed or negative feelings.

There is a sequence of events that is typical of most retreats. Nearly always, we begin with general discussion of some aspect of married life. At this stage we are testing each other, so we take refuge in generalizations. A common theme is the difficulties of raising children. We can all commiserate with each other about the problems of the generation gap for it is "safer" to talk about parenthood than about marriage. If the talk does focus on marriage, such topics as working wives or overworked husbands or the sharing of household tasks can be discussed without risk.

The group will move at its own pace from the superficial testing stage to the deeper sharing. The leaders can facilitate this process, but it isn't helpful if they try to hurry it. "Personalizing" the discussion by using such questions as "Mary, did you raise that subject because it's an issue between you and Tom?" or "I wonder if any couple could give us an example from their own experience of what Harold has been talking about?" is helpful.

Once a couple have shared some situation in their own relationship, one of the leaders can ask "Did any of the rest of you identify with Peg and Larry as they were talking?" This will help other couples to share rather than discuss, and move the communication to a deeper level. A phrase we often use is "making yourself vulnerable"--an act of trust by sharing a problem about which the couple feels some embarrassment. The group's response to this is invariably warm and supportive with an effort to help by sharing similar problems which others have experienced or are experiencing. Sometimes a major breakthrough is achieved when the leaders are willing to be vulnerable.

This process of deep sharing must not be seen as an orgy of humiliating confessions. Not at all. The areas where the growth of a marriage is blocked are almost always sensitive ones which we tend to keep hidden because they make us feel inadequate or defeated. It may well be that a way out is not really difficult to achieve, but as long as we are avoiding the whole problem we are not likely to find a solution. Bringing the issue out in the open, in the presence of other couples eager to help because of similar problems may suddenly break the log-jam and move the relationship along the path to enrichment. This happens quite often during retreats, and the results are usually decisive and lasting. The resolution may come for a particular couple when they are alone together later reporting it to the others; or it may actually come in the supportive atmosphere that the group is able to generate. Such experiences are deeply reassuring and rewarding for all the participating couples.

FACILITATING EXERCISES

The use of simple "exercises" in these retreats has been found to be very helpful. What they do is to break up our stereotyped and often rather sterile patterns of interaction when people get together. They are simply devices designed to bring about couple interaction--sometimes for all the couples in the group together, sometimes for one couple at a time.

A good example is asking each couple to draw a picture of their marriage. Paper and crayons are made available, and the couples scatter about the room and work on their pictures. They may choose to do this verbally (discussing the drawing together as they go along) or non-verbally (working at it together in silence). When all have finished, we come back to the circle of chairs, and each couple in turn lays their picture on the floor and explains it to the group. This is an activity the couples always seem to enjoy; and it enables us to learn a good deal about each other. The leaders, of course, also draw their picture, and display it with the others. We have accumulated quite a collection!

One of our trainee couples introduced dancing. Lights are dimmed in the room, a record is played, and all the couples dance, each couple improvising whatever movements express their mood. They then sit round and report on what the experiment meant to them.

Occasionally when we are faced with a controversial subject (for example, "How far are you prepared to allow your partner to go in friendships with the opposite sex?"), we might ask all the couples to discuss this privately together for ten minutes, and then report to the whole group what conclusions they have reached.

Another kind of exercise is what we call "dialogues." A volunteer couple sit in the center on chairs or on the floor facing each other, and talk back and forth on a subject chosen by the group but accepted by them. Some topics have been "How do we deal with conflict in our marriage?"; "How do we overcome fears of intimacy?"; "What are our procedures in decision-making?"; "How do we meet each other's dependency needs?" The subject should of course focus on husband-wife interaction.

It is best for the interchange between the couple to be slow and deliberate. Indeed, it is helpful for each to allow a period of silence before replying to the other (learning to pause in this way is a very helpful means of making husband-wife discussions more effective). Sometimes two or three couples may volunteer; all sit in the center of the circle (the "fishbowl," as it is sometimes called) and the dialogue is taken up by each in turn. While the dialogue is going on, other members of the group should not intervene or in any way act as an "audience." The general discussion comes afterwards, and provides an opportunity for others who identified with the couples in dialogue to share what they felt.

An interesting variant isto ask if another couple will volunteer to sit with the couple involved in dialogue, and to function as alter egos (Latin for "other selves"). The alter ego on each side listens carefully to what is going on, and intervenes from time to time to verbalize deeper levels of communication and interaction that are not being expressed in words. Playing the alter ego role requires some insight and skill, but it is highly effective when well done.

Another exercise for individual couples is "positive interaction." A very simple device, it is usually highly effective and often deeply moving. For this reason we often make it the last activity on Saturday evening. It can either be carried out by about three volunteer couples, or all couples may agree to take turns. The couple sit facing each other, holding hands, and are asked to tell each other, simply and directly, what they specially like about each other, being as specific as possible. Surprisingly, it turns out that very few couples have ever done this before, and everyone finds it a heartwarming experience. We think we have encountered here another taboo in our society--married couples spend infinitely more time telling each other what they don't like about each other than what they do like. Most of us have a strangely inhibited self-consciousness about spelling out in detail what we mean by "I love you."

We generally conclude the retreat with a short session of perhaps half an hour in which we share with each other new insights and the rewarding experiences we have had together. This may appropriately be followed by a Quaker meeting for worship.

These exercises are no more than illustrations. Leading couples are inventing new ones all the time, and there seems to be no limit to their ingenuity. The books by Herbert Otto and Gerald Smith, listed in the bibliography, are full of good ideas.

In essence, these were the experiences in which we and our nine trainee couples were involved during the crowded hours we spent together at Pendle Hill. Before they took their departure, we enjoined them not to try to repeat anything we had done unless they could do so entirely naturally and comfortably. They would develop their own patterns of leadership, and these would be more effective than anything we had taught them.

EVALUATION AND REAFFIRMATION

The follow-up retreat at Pendle Hill was much more than a reunion or season of rejoicing. We undertook together an intensive evaluation of what had been experienced. One couple, for example, had had to cope with a marriage in serious conflict so we set up a role-playing re-enactment of the situation to serve as a learning experience for the whole group.

We also tried to pool our ideas about the best way to plan and lead marriage enrichment retreats. Our agenda covered the following areas:

Organizing the Retreat. Time, place, cost, recruitment of couples, size of group, preparatory materials.

Methods and Techniques. Introductions, agenda, directing discussion, dividing up, special exercises, crisis situations, evaluation.

Leadership Roles. Qualifications, goals, training, couple teamwork, preparation, vulnerability, follow-up.

Future Plans. Further retreats, training new leaders, cooperation with other groups, books and materials.

Other Areas for Enrichment. Retreats for youth, premarital couples, parents and teen-agers, solo parents, senior citizens, Meeting members.

A number of issues of particular concern to the group were extensively discussed. One was the distinction between our retreats and group marriage counseling on the one hand, sensitivity training and encounter groups on the other. Another issue concerned our emphasis on positive interaction, and the discouragement, though not avoidance, of overt expression of negative feelings between members of the group. We also discussed what causes marriages to get "stuck" so that they cease to grow. This led us naturally to consider the limitations of lay leaders without training in marriage counseling, and how to make effective referrals to professionals when this seems to be indicated. We also talked about the use of silence, so natural to Friends, and how far non-Quakers could accept this.

In all our discussions we were looking forward. There was a confident assurance that we had found something of great importance that must be communicated to others--to the Society of Friends generally, but to the wider world as well.

THE SECOND ROUND

Another training program was organized and a second group of couples were invited to Pendle Hill. On a Friday evening in November 1971, therefore, another wide circle of married couples assembled in the familiar living room at Pendle Hill; later went forth to conduct retreats arranged by their Yearly Meetings; and returned triumphantly in April 1972 to report to one another what had happened.

Six of these couples were new. With them we invited two experienced couples from the first group of trainees. Our idea was that they might help in the training of the other six, and be ready then to graduate as trainers in later regional programs.

We have used this method in training couples before, encouraging a couple conducting a retreat for the first time to team up with another trained couple, each supporting and helping the other in shared leadership. This is a good learning process; and now we were applying it at the level of training potential leaders, in the expectation of making ourselves dispensable. A movement of this kind should not be allowed to focus on personalities. It will prosper best by involving many couples in a broad sharing of leadership responsibility.

We might have asked ourselves whether what had happened in 1969-70 could happen again in 1971-72. Would the high caliber of the earlier group of couples be sustained? Would they again learn quickly enough through the experience of one retreat to function as successful leaders? Would they come back with the same enthusiasm and delight? The answers to these questions would do a great deal to validate the plan we had adopted.

When our couples returned in April 1972, the answers were resoundingly in the affirmative. In one case, it was true, the local arrangements had broken down and they had not had the opportunity yet to conduct a retreat--but they came to the reunion just the same. (Their opportunity for leadership came later.) Reports from all the others, including the two "veteran" couples, had the same authentic ring of success that had been sounded so unmistakably a year earlier.

Quoting from the group:

"We felt our job was to provide some structure to help the experience develop, and then let people sort it out for themselves. Both of us felt it was most important to ride with the tone of the developing situation, and avoid any use of the more aggressive techniques of confrontation. Stan was worried on Saturday that the talk was too general. Then one of the wives broke through by asking if we could discuss something "... down here, where I am ... like SEX?" So we got there ..."

"We viewed our task as leaders to be one of creating and sustaining an

atmosphere in which each couple could speak personally concerning their marriage. We felt we best accomplished this task when we participated as a couple in the same way as we urged the others to participate."

"We regarded ourselves as facilitators. We tried to be creative listeners; to put questions to the group that would help them to share personal experiences; to bring about a change of pace when we sensed this to be necessary."

"We were quite relaxed. We tried to be perceptive of the needs of individual couples. We hope we didn't talk too much."

"We saw ourselves as equal participants with the others, and facilitators of a process which started well with frank, meaningful conversation. We did agenda-building at several points. Our aim was to create an atmosphere in which defensiveness could be replaced with tolerant acceptance, and trust and confidence could grow as we heard each other and learned from each other."

THE PROBLEM OF UNFELT NEED

"The underlying problem is the fact that the marriage enrichment retreat meets unfelt needs. People don't feel keenly that they need it. If you think your marriage is sound, you aren't strongly motivated to spend a weekend making it even sounder. To get the tingle of a potential deepening and enriching takes emotional impact. This means hearing from someone obviously sensible who is warmly convinced about it."

A number of theories were developed to explain this resistance to our project. In general, it is true that it takes problems to motivate married couples to seek help, just as it takes pain to induce many people to visit a doctor; and in both cases, action may prove to be too late to be effective. On the other hand, many couples with basically stable marriages are wistfully aware that their relationship falls short of their expectations. But it takes a strong stimulus, in the form of a cordial personal invitation, to get them to take the necessary steps to enroll for a retreat.

Whatever the cause of this reticence, expressing itself on occasions as resistance, it seems an inappropriate response to the needs and opportunities of our day and age and one of the many factors responsible for the alienation between young and old which is popularly termed the "generation gap." Our trainees were themselves mainly in the second half of life, and they well understood the "privatism" that is a legacy of our past. They themselves, however, had lost nothing, and gained a great deal by the efforts they had made to cultivate greater openness to others, both in their marriages and in their wider relationships, and they would lovingly invite other Friends to make the same venture. They would also plead with Friends to give stronger support to, and undertake more active participation in, a project to provide marriage enrichment retreats for the couples in the care of our Meetings.

Some views were expressed suggesting a special reticence among Friends. There seemed to be some foundation for two theories--first, that Quakers tend to be very heavily involved in social projects, sometimes to the neglect of their own family relationships; and second, that they tend to be somewhat puritanical in the sense that they consider it improper to open their private lives to others. There may be a deep dichotomy in attitudes of Friends here such as reported by one couple: "vivid impressions of honest encounters between those who regard the worship of God as a private affair, and those who feel the need to reach out to their Meeting community for personal support and a sense of communion which includes closer relationships with other Friends."

Like other Friends, we are finding that these experiences can release hitherto unrealized and untapped resources of spiritual strength and power. As expressed by one couple: "For two years we passed through a dark time in our family, trying to find resources to deal with a

seemingly insurmountable problem. At our first retreat, with the loving support of the group, we were able as a couple to recover our self-confidence, sense of worth, and well-being, and reaffirm our strengths to each other.

"The family problem has now been happily resolved, and we have found extra strength to participate fully in the expression of our Quaker concerns in the larger community. Our Meeting did much to sustain us through the bleakest times, and bring us back into clearness and light; but what helped us the most to help ourselves was our activities with the marriage enrichment project. We continue to nurture at home the new openness and depth we have discovered, and have committed ourselves to maintain the healthy growth that has been made possible for us."

CONCLUSION

What has been described in this booklet could easily be dismissed as a new fad that will gain limited attention for a short time and then be forgotten, but it may instead be the discovery of vast untapped resources that can raise primary human relationships to new and higher levels of richness and creativity. If this should be the case the loss of this great opportunity would be tragic.

The need of men and women today, as in all ages, is to learn to live together in love and peace--to build up rather than to tear down, to cooperate rather than to compete, to find meaning in life through open sharing with others rather than through narrow self-seeking.

Religion has always striven to further these goals, because they represent the spiritual development of man. But again and again the simple truths spoken by great religious leaders have been lost in the complexity of elaborate institutions and the lust for power.

Friends have been distinctive in their stubborn resistance to these diversions and distortions of the simple truth that we must learn to love God and man, and that there is no other path to redemption. In each new age, Quakers have found ways to witness to the way of love and the way of peace.

May it be that a central calling for Friends today is to respond to the disintegration of marriages and the alienation of the generations by finding in their own marriages, and in their family relationships, a new quality of creativeness based on a deep and honest sharing of life? Can love be spread abroad in the earth, if it cannot be nurtured in the close and intimate relationship between man and woman, the nuclear relationship where love begins and where life begins? Can one proclaim peace among the nations if unable to contrive to live in harmony with those under one's own roof?

The mood of our age is compounded of hope and despair. We have achieved so much, in terms of technological skill and power; and we have achieved so little, in terms of harmonious human relationships. We have created the power to make this world, compared with what it has been, a paradise for man to enjoy, but we have failed to make it possible for man to enjoy what has been achieved. With the threat of an atomic holocaust hanging like the sword of Damocles over our heads, we know beyond doubt that we must learn the art of living together in love and peace or lose all we have.

In such an hour, what can we do?

We can make a beginning. We can begin at home--with ourselves, and those nearest and dearest to us. We can strive to learn the great art of living in the school that has been provided for us. We can build relationship-in-depth at the foundations of human society: for in the last resort the quality of relationships in any community cannot rise to any higher levels than the quality of relationships in the families that make up the community; and the quality of relationships in any family

cannot rise any higher than the quality of relationships in the marriage that has brought it into being.

Yes, there is something we can do to witness to the power of love and peace. We can make a beginning. Marriage enrichment is such a beginning.

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote A: Mace, David R., Marriage As Vocation, F.G.C. 1969.]

[Footnote B: Reprinted in slightly revised form from Friends Journal, December 15, 1972.]

[Footnote C: Lederer and Jackson--The Mirages of Marriage, Norton, 1968, page 129.]

[Footnote D: Cicero and Fahs--Conversations on Sex and Love in Marriage, Word Books, 1972.]

[Footnote E: We have capitulated at times and have prepared a brief book list. A larger list appears in the appendix.]

BOOKS FOR FURTHER READING

There is as yet little in the way of literature about marriage enrichment. Here are a few books which have been found useful by leaders of retreats.

Bach, G. R. and Wyden, P., The Intimate Enemy. Morrow, 1969, (available in paperback). A belligerent but challenging book about marital conflict.

Clinebell, H. J. and C. H., The Intimate Marriage. Harper and Row, 1970. Perhaps the best book available on marriage enrichment.

Hastings, D. W., A Doctor Speaks on Sexual Expression in Marriage. Little, Brown, 1966. A reliable guide written by a psychiatrist and marriage counselor.

Lederer, W. J. and Jackson, Don D., The Mirages of Marriage. Norton, 1968. A challenging and unusual book on contemporary marriage.

Mace, D. R., Success in Marriage. Abingdon, 1958. An easily read paperback on the areas of marital adjustment.

Mace, D. R., Getting Ready for Marriage. Abingdon, 1972. A practical guide for the couple preparing for marriage.

Mace, D. R., Sexual Difficulties in Marriage. Fortress Press, 1972. A short and simple explanation of sexual inadequacy and the new approaches to its treatment.

McGinnes, T., Your First Year of Marriage. A very helpful guide for the recently married couple.

O'Neill, G. and N., The Open Marriage. A best-seller on some of today's new concepts of marriage.

Otto, H., More Joy in Your Marriage. Cornerstone Library 1969. A book full of practical ideas for increasing marital potential.

Peterson, J. A., *Married Love in the Middle Years*. Association Press, 1968. An excellent book on a neglected subject.

Rubin, T. I., *The Angry Book*, Macmillan, 1969.

Samuel, Dorothy, *The Fun and Games of Marriage*. Word Books, 1973. Thoughts on marriage as a depth relationship, written by one of our Quaker trainees.

Smith, G. W. and A. I., *Me and You and Us*. Wyden, 1971. A book of exercises (47 in all) for couples seeking marriage enrichment. Written by a couple who participated in one of our earliest retreats at Kirkridge, then went into the field as full-time family therapists.

West, Jessamyn, *Love is Not What You Think*. Harcourt, Brace, 1959. Written by a distinguished Quaker novelist.

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