Lessons From a Second Marriage

She Traded Her Cat

(for me)

Ray Hoover



CHRISTIAN LIGHT
PUBLICATIONS

Copyrighted material. May not be reproduced without permission from the publisher.

Contents

1 God Writes a Love Story

Introduction 1

Chapter 1 God Writes Ray's Story 3

Chapter 2 God Writes Jeanie's Story 17

Chapter 3 God Writes Our Story 25

2 The Hurdles in Step Relationships

Introduction 35

Chapter 4 Cultural Perceptions 43

Chapter 5 Grief 47

Chapter 6 Comparisons 49

Chapter 7 Defining the Relationship 51

Chapter 8 Wide Family 55

Chapter 9 Changes in Parent-Child Relationships 61

Chapter 10 Sharing Memories 65

Chapter 11 Dealing With the Deceased Spouse's Possessions and Family Heirlooms 69

Chapter 12 Stepparent's Adjustments 71

Copyrighted material. May not be reproduced without permission from the publisher.

3 Overcoming the Hurdles

Introduction 75
Chapter 13 Four Foundations to Consider 79
Chapter 14 Communicate, Communicate, Communicate 83
Chapter 15 Don't Force Children Into a Relationship 87
Chapter 16 Find Ways to Maintain the Existing Parent-Child Relationship 93
Chapter 17 Distribute Heirlooms and Update Your Will 95
Chapter 18 Establish Your Own Identity 97
Chapter 19 Be Thankful 99

Copyrighted material. May not be reproduced without permission from the publisher.



1

God Writes a Love Story

Copyrighted material. May not be reproduced without permission from the publisher.

Introduction

Ten years after my wife Jeanie and I were married, I was asked to speak at a "Marriage After the Death of a Spouse" retreat. One of my topics was titled, "Building Relationships With Teenage and Adult Children." At first it seemed straightforward and routine. But after receiving feedback from our children and hearing other people's stories about step relationships, I realized a better understanding of this subject is greatly needed, and there are few resources to turn to.

One of our daughters wrote, "The world has come a long way in discussing/educating/writing about things that used to be severely misunderstood and silent (like birth, death, adoption, etc. . . .) but remarriages have a [long way] to go."

Copyrighted material. May not be reproduced without permission from the publisher.

This is my story about marrying Jeanie five years after my first wife Elsie died and about the challenges our family faced that came with it. Every second marriage is unique. I suppose some second marriages have come together perfectly and stress-free. But all the second marriages I'm acquainted with have one thing in common—the families all wrestled with the adjustments that come with reconciling the past with the present. If you find help or hope for your journey from my experiences, give God the glory.

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5–6).

Copyrighted material. May not be reproduced without permission from the publisher.

Chapter One
God Writes Ray's Story

It was Christmas Day 2014, and Jeanie and I were having our first phone conversation. "Do you like cats?" she asked.

"I do like cats," I replied cautiously.

I went on to describe Susie, our cat for many years but now deceased. Susie was a neutered male, but he was named before we knew his gender. Since he was already used to being called Susie, we kept the name.

Susie freely roamed our fifty-acre farm, hunting for birds, mice, and other small rodents. Sometimes, he ate table scraps, but mostly, he fended for himself and thrived

Copyrighted material. May not be reproduced without permission from the publisher.

on the freedom of the outdoor lifestyle, even in our cold Wisconsin winters.

Susie never came into the house, so when I said I liked cats, I was thinking about Susie—low-maintenance, self-sufficient, friendly, and outdoorsy. For me, Susie defined the ideal cat.

Jeanie, on the other hand, was thinking about her cat Abbie, who was exactly the opposite—a neutered female, high-maintenance, independent, and pampered, plus she lived indoors.

To make a much longer, more complicated conversation shorter, when Jeanie later said yes to my marriage proposal, she understood it meant trading Abbie for me. Giving up her cat was just one of many adjustments she needed to make when she married me.

Jeanie and I were married in 2015, and while we've never looked back and have been blessed beyond our expectations, it has not been without things to work through. And so, the cat story, perhaps more humorous than substantive, was a harbinger of challenges that unfolded.

During the four years prior to that Christmas phone call, I had become relatively satisfied with single life. I liked

Copyrighted material. May not be reproduced without permission from the publisher.

the freedom. I liked the flexibility of being able to serve on the staff at Maranatha Bible School, a winter Bible school in Lansing, Minnesota. I was more free than most ministers.

It wasn't until Kristie, my youngest daughter, left for a term of voluntary service in Virginia that I started thinking: *Do I really want to spend the rest of my life coming home to an empty house?* I decided, *I don't think so*.

But I need to go back to 2009 to start this story. While my daughter Kelsie was a student at Maranatha, she became friends with the matron, Jeanie Hershberger. Jeanie was from northern Indiana and attended the same church my oldest daughter Katrina did. While visiting Katrina later that year, Kelsie met Jeanie for coffee and further solidified their friendship.

In April of 2009, we learned Elsie's cancer had recurred, and we began the heartrending journey that ended on July 24, 2010, when she passed away.

In one of the last conversations Elsie and I had, she asked what I thought I would do after she passed away. I said I would probably just stay single.

Copyrighted material. May not be reproduced without permission from the publisher.

She replied, "No, I'm sure you'll want to get married. Make sure you give the girls enough time to work through things, but no, you'll want to get married again."

That conversation was loaded with thirty-one years of faithfulness to each other. I can only imagine the agony she felt before she asked that question. It probably went something like this: *When I'm no longer here, he'll be free to marry again. I hate the thought of him being with someone else. When I'm gone, it won't matter to me, but it does matter to me now. Is part of loving my husband giving him the freedom to get married again? Should I talk about it or just not say anything?*

I was no more comfortable hearing the question than she was asking it. I knew other widowers remarried, but at the time, I felt I couldn't and wouldn't, which was what I told Elsie. I meant it too.

She was more realistic. "I'm sure you'll want another wife. Someone I thought of is Kelsie's friend, Jeanie Hershberger."

Those may have been the hardest words Elsie ever said. That was the end of the conversation.

I didn't push Elsie's suggestion out of my mind. It was forced out by the heavy fog of grief that rolled into my life

Copyrighted material. May not be reproduced without permission from the publisher.

after the funeral. My concern was survival, not marriage. Even after the fog began lifting, I gave no thought to Elsie's suggestion. Further, I came to enjoy some aspects of being single. Without a wife, I had more time for the Lord's work. Time alone was time alone with God, and I appreciated that more and more.

In the fall of the year Elsie passed away, Jeanie came to our area to spend the weekend with Kelsie and two of Kelsie's friends from Bible school. I interacted with Jeanie as little as possible. I didn't want to give her any reason to think I had any interest in a relationship, because I didn't. But Kelsie's friendship with her deepened. When Kelsie got married in 2013, she asked Jeanie to be her personal attendant at the wedding.

Again, my goal at Kelsie's wedding was to make it obvious that Jeanie was nothing more to me than Kelsie's friend. (Jeanie said later that her main goal was to make sure I knew she was Kelsie's friend and nothing more.)

Over this time, Katrina and Jeanie also became close friends.

When I eventually started thinking and praying about possibly getting married again, I didn't consider Jeanie above

Copyrighted material. May not be reproduced without permission from the publisher.

anyone else. My prayer was always that if God wanted me to marry, He would make it very clear. Mostly, I was content with my single life.

Maybe I shouldn't have been content. After Kristie moved out, I became a living commentary on what God said about Adam in the Garden of Eden: "It's not good for man to be alone."

It wasn't good. I learned to maximize my efficiency in clothes and laundry. Do the math. If I have twenty pairs of socks and twenty changes of underwear, I only need to do laundry half as often as with ten pairs of each. So, for a six-week term at Maranatha, that meant I could get by with doing laundry only twice during the entire term.

My shirts got washed when they were dirty, not just because they were worn once. In summer, they got washed more often than in winter.

I won't share any numbers on how often bedsheets were washed. And for dishes, it's obviously more efficient to wash them once a week than every day.

After Jeanie and I were dating, I told her about my efficient methods of housework. She said, "You know what,

Copyrighted material. May not be reproduced without permission from the publisher.

Ray? You really need a wife!" I was in no position to argue the point, so I left it at that.

But I'm getting ahead of my story. Kristie left home in July of 2014. The morning she was to leave for Virginia, she and I went out for breakfast and had a good last time together. We had never discussed the possibility of my getting married again. I decided this might be a good time to ask her how she would feel about it.

She was honest. "I would be happy for you, but it would still be really hard to accept," she said. It wasn't until ten years later that I learned the depth of despair my question put into her heart.

A month later, in August, I met with Katrina one weekend in Elkhart. She was talking about Jeanie and how Jeanie had helped her with some things and how much she appreciated her.

"Well, that's interesting," I said. "In one of my last conversations with Mom before she died, she suggested Jeanie as someone I might want to consider marrying in the future."

"Fascinating," Katrina replied. She didn't encourage or discourage the possibility. She did say Jeanie was satisfied with her life and might not want to get married.

Copyrighted material. May not be reproduced without permission from the publisher.