Roger & Kathy

## IN MY JAOE LOVE, LESSONS, LAUGHTER

hapter 1



**O**ne of the best feelings in the world is to love and be loved in return. When that experience happens, when love is reciprocal, when the person loves you for who you are and not what you can give, it is fantastic, amazing, and wonderful. If you've ever fallen in love with someone who's in love with you, you know what I'm talking about. It happens to most of us at least once in a lifetime.

## Three cheers for love!

The love story of my wife and me began more than thirty years ago, in a place far away. It began in college. I was single and looking. My eyes and heart were open for love. Soon, good news arrived. In a conversation, one of my friends told me that one of her friends would be willing to go out with me if I asked her to. Excellent! My room was on the third floor of the men's dormitory, and in front of my window, students would pass on their way to the cafeteria to eat such delicacies as veggie meat, caffeine-free Coca-Cola, and sugar.

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Lots and lots of sugar.

One afternoon I came up with a brilliant idea. I made a sign with this girl's name on it and put it in my window to send a message. The sign had glitter, because you can never go wrong with glitter.

The master plan worked.

She saw my sign and waved.

So, naturally, I asked her out . . . and she said yes!

Just a couple of problems:

- She had money.
- I was a student.

The word student in the ancient Greek language means "one who does not have a car or cash." Also accepted is "one who borrows clothes from their roommate." I only had about \$30 to my name, and I thought it was more than enough.

I liked this girl with black hair. We needed to have this date. Have you ever been so attracted to someone that you overthink and overprepare? No? Me either.

I went to the bank and exchanged my less than \$30 for smaller bills and put them in a money clip, so that at least it would seem like I had more cash than I really had.

Finally, date night arrived. I went to pick her up in my borrowed car, and we were off. It was a magical night. I was sure no one had ever invited her on a date like mine before. I took her out to eat at an extra-special place. It's the only restaurant where two people can eat for \$10 and there's still money left over. Which one is it?

If you said McDonald's, you're wrong.

We're Hispanic.

It was Taco Bell.

Love at Taco Bell

We ordered two burritos. As I look back now, ordering burritos is probably not a good idea for a first date. You can't be Mister Rico Suave with sour cream on your chin. First of all, it is impossible to eat a burrito without getting food on your face, fingers, or clothes. There is a law that few know called "The Taco Bell Burrito Law," which says: You will not eat me with a spoon or fork. Burritos just taste better when they go from your hands to your mouth. Second, it is very difficult to develop a romantic conversation with salsa and sour cream on the sides of your lips. That experience does not say, "Kiss me under the moonlight."

We were in the midst of our burrito feast when three of her friends came in and greeted us from afar. They didn't say anything, but their gaze spoke volumes, and their stare said in capital letters, "Did this guy bring you here, really?"

I smiled awkwardly, and we finished eating the burritos and left.

When I said goodbye to her, I gave her a little kiss on the cheek. What a night! I have to see her again, I thought to myself.

I don't know about other cultures, but there is a rule in Hispanic relationships that says you have to bring a gift on the second date. Since I was still a student, I was racking my mind thinking about what to give to my future black-haired queen. Eureka! I'm going to give her a stuffed animal—but not just any stuffed animal. This would be a special stuffed animal. I had seen an advertisement on television that came in handy. A fast-food restaurant was offering the following special:

If you buy a combo of fries, hamburger, and soda, you get a free stuffed animal.

What a deal!

After finding loose change in the couch, I asked a friend to take me to the fast-food establishment. I complimented myself on being so bright and romantic. I ordered the combo, and on the way back to college I destroyed that food.

I ate the fries, as any normal person would. I threw away the burger in the trash (or out of the window of the car, I don't quite remember) because I'm a vegetarian. I drank the Coke, because I am balanced.

After I was done with my meal, I retrieved the teddy bear. It was white with a red heart in the middle of its teddy bear chest, with the name of the fast-food restaurant on it.

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Of course, I ripped off the label and got ready for my second date.

I went to pick her up and sent her a message to let her know that Prince Charming was in the lobby.

When she came down the stairs, I smiled and asked her if she would go outside with me. In a very romantic voice, I thanked her for agreeing to go out with me a second time and said, "I have a special gift just for you, my queen." I gave her the stuffed animal, a hug, and a wink.

The rest, as they say, is history.

That girl and I, today, are married.

Applause, please . . .

A round of applause for love.

A round of applause to finding your match.

A round of applause for unconditional love.

She and I are married today.

To other people.

You thought we were married with each other? No!

That was the last time we went out. The worst part was that she kept the \$3.99 stuffed animal.

We live in a world where we use filters so that our photos make us look better. Our posts on social media present an alternate personality. We are what we want to be, not what we really are. When I talk about relationships I always tell this story, because it taught me a lot. What three lessons did I learn from that particular fleeting relationship?

**1**. Find someone who loves you and accepts you as you are. It's dangerous for anyone to fall in love with who you pretend to be.

- Love at Taco Bell -

**2**. The more acting at the beginning of a relationship, the more disappointment at the end. Like actors, it is impossible for us to live in assigned roles for the rest of our lives.

**3**. Order Sprite instead of Coke next time. Caffeine is not good for you.

Next, let me tell you the true love story.

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**Reflection Questions** 

**1**. What is the weirdest or most humorous thing that you have given your partner, that you thought was a good idea at the time, but now you understand it was not? How did your partner react to receiving this gift?

**2**. Why is it so difficult for us to live authentic lives? In what ways do we try to avoid revealing who we really are even after we are married? What characteristic or story of your life would you like to tell your partner, but haven't for fear that it will change their perception of you?

**3**. One of the most important concepts in this chapter is that it is difficult (or dangerous) to connect with who your partner pretends to be. What steps can we take to be more authentic?

List three practical steps.



Why is my spouse not normal like me? Sound familiar? Need some help?

This book is for you!

Be believe our story can help you. Why? Because ours is a familiar story.

We are not a unique, special or exceptional couple.

What we do have is a love that has sustained us for almost 30 years. Along the way we have learned certain lessons we share in this book to strengthen, encourage, and bless your life. In a humorous and practical format Roger and Kathy will provide help and hope for all kinds of couples. Even ones who aren't normal.

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married for over three decades, parents of four, grandparents of several and still trying to figure out how relationships work.

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