

What does a perfect marriage look like? What makes a marriage successful? — even if that a realistic question. I am not a psychologist, therapist or a religious counsel, but I can say with confidence that anyone can spew out and even try to quantify all of the traits that comprise a good marriage. Try to follow their proven plans and methods and you will be like millions of people trying to lose weight bouncing tends from program to program.

I didn't know it at the time, but Brandt and I were a conduit that helped start the best marriage I ever have seen, and honestly, I did not know what I was witnessing it until mom died. After my she passed quietly in the night, which was a relief since she predicted 30 years ago that she would die in a fire, I started seeing her marriage to Harvey more objectively.

My current failed marriage has been a huge turning point in my life. I am learning to love myself, and as a result I am seeing clearly what I want in a relationship. I am experiencing a total reassessment of my priorities in life, and that is dictating the kind of people I want in it, and not. If and when I enter a serious relationship in the future, I want exactly, in a nonspecific sense if you know half of what I do, a relationship like the one my mom and Harvey had.

Mom put her life on hold to focus and raise her two boys after the divorce. She did have a couple dates as we got older, but nothing serious. Not even the poor car salesman who gave her a good deal on a car for a date only got a second dinner night out with her. Single mom's gotta do what they gotta do. Then there was the party in Denver.

I am drinking beer with my wife and brother at mom's company Christmas party when this bouncy, ultra happy dude with huge smile and infectious laugh approaches us. We literally knew no one, so it was a surprise. After introducing himself as Harvey, he tells us how great and funny my mom is, and he loves working with her. Then after all of the nervous chat and accolades for mom, he found his nerve and asked if it would be okay to ask her out. To be honest, that was kinda cool in itself.

No brainer, I thought. Our response was an immediate and simultaneous yes. My thoughts were about how it is time for her to have a life of her own. Go for it dude. He was thrilled and maybe a little inebriated, but it was all good. That's the first time we met the Harv.

They became best friends. I have memories of them laughing and joking and having a grand old time together. Mom would tell me about all of the crazy and fun things they did. Then they married. It was low key and was followed by a family gathering at their home in Denver. Fireworks were provided by Chip and Brandt to the tune of Hootie and Blowfish. That is all I am saying.

Every marriage has its trials and tribulations. Let's get real. Personalities, expectations, wants, needs, addictions, finances and of course, why is the toilet seat up? Mom and

Harv had those times, too. I am not privy nor would I go into anything I know about these valleys, but it is obvious that they worked through it all. And kept the joy flowing.

I observed that they each had their own strengths and weaknesses that they used to counterbalance each other; tag-teamed if you will. Mom and Harv were exceptional at making time for each other, especially at the end of the day. They planned their meals, some extravagant, sat on their country patio and had Toddies beginning at 5-o'clock sharp, swam in the pool and I don't want to know anymore. From the darkness outside the screened in porch, they said they could hear the toads, unidentified scary sounds only a rural South Carolina forest could provide, and occasional gun shot. And if you were nearby the house, you could hear the call of the wild, "Harv! Harv! Harv!" Poor Harv.

I personally liked getting in the pool at night because the water was warm, and I could stand in the water with my head just out of the waterline so the bats would not hit me while flying by. That was so cool, but I digress.

Mom and Harv found each other. They allowed each other to be themselves, for the good and the not so good, and they appreciated everything about each other. They really and truly loved each other unconditionally.

They loved finding new ways to enjoy each other and spend their time at home together, which they truly treasured. One time, they had removed a storage shed leaving a nice square cement pad by the pool. They got the idea to put up a screened tent on top of the pad and fill it with a table and chairs. I think they had music out there, and mom was always telling me about how they were going to add to it. I loved her calls to me announcing that they were at the Copa. The biggest feature was that they could sit outside without being slayed by South Carolinian mosquitos. She called it the Copa Cabana, or just the Copa.

If you are wondering; yes she did sing that Manilow tune out loud and it was not pretty. Didn't matter, she was happy. And when mom was happy, Harv was happy.

There are other stories that I could use to highlight how they happily lived, most of which should not be in public but enjoyed only by family at the dinner table. Honestly, dinnertime is really not appropriate either but you don't know us. I mean, there were incidents involving chicken in bed, and Harv lying down possibly unconscious behind the hot tub in a rainstorm, mom reaching for her lighter to light her Christmas candle at the midnight church service instead of waiting for the Christ's candle flame to make it our way. And there were great moments, too. There was the time I drove them to see Christmas lights on what was dubbed as the booze cruise, Thanksgiving when we all hung out while Harv fried the best turkey I have ever tasted, and of course watching their boxer, Bailey, lick the backs of toads at night, froth at the mouth and get high.

Mom exuded love even when she was being pissy. She bound us all only as she could, and the life stories we tell of her are almost endless. Although much of the stories she

left behind are hedgehogs, the true ones are all funny, dysfunctional, epic, well-known, and, well, that's my mom.

As mom's health began to decline, Harv had a new role in the marriage. He had to take care of mom's increasing care. Harv, like any caregiver, was probably exhausted and spent at times, but he loved her so much that he never faltered. What was more amazing is that he had surgeries and procedures for himself at that time. There were times where they were both incapacitated, but Brandt and his family were nearby to fill in the gaps.

As the sun was setting on mom's last years, life got tough for the both of them physically. Between them there were more surgeries, hospital stays and home care. Brandt, Tracy and specifically their kids did a lot to help them out. Addison became especially close to mom. Addison documented her last years in pictures and videos. These were invaluable to me because I could not be with them much. And the most important aspect of the recordings that I did not anticipate was hearing my mom tell stories about her and Harv revealing how they interacted with each other.

Picture all of the challenges they had and how those were enough to depress anyone. Yes their circumstances became more difficult, but what I noticed is that despite it all, there was positivity for the future mixed with embracing the realism. There was laughing. They bantered. She yelled at Brandt a lot, but had good reason. She seemed mad at him, but she would give me a side-eye and a little grin afterward. Mom was recorded telling some of the greatest and oddest stories you can imagine. They were only scenarios she could get into. Her rants had us all in stitches.

During covid, while mom was hospitalized, I was fortunate to be able to visit her alone. We held hands. I was seriously concerned about going in because I was wondering if this would be the last time I see her. It didn't end up being my last visit by far, by the way. During our visit, we talked seriously about a lot of things. She caught up on my sad life and then we talked about her life. She spoke mostly about Harv. She said she had less concerned about me and Brandt when she passes, because we are "good boys" and are self sufficient. In my mind, mom did her job and did it really well.

When she spoke of Harv, she spoke with love. Not only the tone of her voice was there love coming out of her for him. I couldn't mistake that emotion emanating from her. Mom was most concerned with Harvey's life after she dies. She apparently had been thinking about this a lot longer than we all knew. She wanted to make sure Harv would be loved and cared for after she is gone. She obviously knew that Brandt, Tracy and the kids would all be there for him 100 percent if he decided to stay in South Carolina instead of returning to Colorado.

Mom passed a year ago since this writing. She got her wish. Harv is in South Carolina and is enjoying the hell out of the kids. Brandt and Tracy are stellar to him considering his challenges and their hectic schedules. They are the epitome of a beautiful family unit.

Mom and Harvey. They lived their lives for the enjoyment of life and for each other. In the big picture, Mom loved her Harv, and he loved his Trish. They stood through it all together, they leaned on each other. Both, individually, would be hard to live with, yet they appreciated each other regardless. Neither had to change who they were for the other. They chose to laugh, to live and to love. My mom's passing shed a lot of light onto me regarding what can be left behind after a spouse dies. Her death put a spotlight on their marriage over the years that I did not see before.

In talking to Harv since she passed, it's painfully obvious that he still misses her dearly; to the point it's painful. He and I have cried together over the phone. Harv misses her as much if not more than I do. They were so close that I think his biggest difficulty for him is learning how to live without her. His role has changed. Love is the key here.

What did I learn? What are the key takeaways I have from watching mom and Harv's marriage from beginning to end? I learned that first, you must love yourself and be comfortable in that. Do not marry someone who won't accept, love and appreciate you just as you are. Obviously that goes two ways. Laugh as much as you can, especially at yourselves. Demonstrate and proclaim your love, don't hold back. It should well up in you enough so that you want to tell the world. Share your passions and dreams with each other and act on them. Do not take life too seriously. Find someone to share your life with, who you both can lean on and hold when it is needed. Say I love you, and mean it.