

CHAPTER 1

THE GREAT UNCONSCIOUS

“Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.”

— Carl Jung

“All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone.”

— Blaise Pascal

Stove Top Betty

1979 was the last year General Motors made and sold ovens. Who knew that the same company made Pontiacs and electric stoves? There she was, though, that big metal box sitting tired but stout on our linoleum floor in the sixties ranch house my wife and I bought in the late 1990s.

We called that old oven GM Betty. She may have been a Kennedy-era relic, but she commanded a presence in our kitchen. Everything we did, whether chasing toddlers or debating holiday plans with the in-laws, was reflected on her dull gray belly.

She had plenty of electric horsepower left too, right up to the day our Home Depot renovation saw her being wheeled out. In those first few years of our marriage, GM Betty's coils never failed. She fired up hundreds of late-night formula bottles and held pots of spicy soups on her chipped grates.

Imagine if old Betty could speak, if all the appliances

in kitchens and family rooms could speak, with all the emotions flying and hurt feelings within all the relationships. She could have kept a marriage counselor busy for months. Those uncomfortable Sunday mornings, when my wife had been up earlier than me again, when the kitchen's sunlight, unfed kids, and dirty dishes exacerbated the tension from the previous night's fight. I had pissed her off with another flippant comment in front of friends, but did not know the extent of the damage until I got the morning elbows and stiff shoulder.

GM Betty became a symbol of those early years of my marriage. Everything was raw and new. I was thirty-three years old and had never permanently resided with a one-year-old, a dog, minivan, or someone of the opposite sex who did not share my DNA. Twenty-two years later, it is comical to consider what I thought I knew about love, myself, life, marriage, parenting, and adulthood. Maturity-wise, I was a high schooler.

Betty is a demarcation. She represents the end of marital innocence and the headwater entrance to deeper and much stormier currents. What happened in front of her indelibly changed my perspective, opinion, and ability to understand and embrace a mature marriage.

Teenager Inside

I had unfortunately mastered the ability to make adolescent comments about my wife and marriage when there were willing, friendly listeners and alcohol on hand. It seems so easy for me, for most men, to revert to our inner sixteen-year-old and puerile need for attention. The cheap, high school-like laughs we seek end up costing

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more than we think, though.

We jest about our spouse's driving record or the laundry, seemingly innocuous stuff. It is a sport to us, getting laughs like some standup comic by sharing personal data about our marriage that our spouse rightfully considers classified. This relatively innocent action, sharing more than we should, unaware of the impact of our words, is just part of the great adult unconscious that we inhabit. What does that mean? It means our adult attention lingers endlessly, precariously in thoughts, concepts, and beliefs, like a raft atop of the unfathomable sea and ancient feeling kingdom stirring below. "Ninety-five percent of our lives are lived unconsciously," says Dr. Robert Lipton in *Biology of Belief*. Entering marriage, especially in its early years, is an entrance into the timeless arena and halls of this great unconscious.

I had no idea of the puerile insecurity still living powerfully in me, the need that wanted others to embrace me. I could not imagine my words could hurt my wife's feelings back then, or that they poked her sense of self. It was just entertainment to the sixteen-year-old in me. How could I have known her sensibility, since I was clueless of my own?

I began to realize the real work of marriage was not between us and our spouses. It is in us and our deep-seated emotions. We are married to our old emotions. Our spouse is just a supporting cast member in a play that we must choose to enact.

Marriage is a relationship with self. Back in the kitchen with my wife in those early years, on the morning after a night out, it was like trying to kiss her

while she was getting a basketball rebound. Her elbows were flying and hips were checking while my regrets were building because I had hurt her feelings.

These uncomfortable exchanges happened so many times that I started calling that spot in front of Betty the “paint” and the “three-second zone.” I got “boxed out” of so many conciliatory hugs and apologies that I learned to tread lightly in front of Betty, especially when both she and my wife were grilling something hot.

As marriage unfolds, you wonder how all the emotion-infused debates and disagreements get started. The feelings and reactions and words get so big and intense over issues seemingly so small. What you will see, though, is that there is a whole other world, a literal kingdom of experiences and feelings breathing inside of you and your partner, just below the surface of interaction.

This topic about what rests quietly, mysteriously, inexorably, and so often unconsciously inside us all is what motivated me to write this book. When I started using my reactions to my marriage as the fuel to sit quietly longer, to do more therapy, my intuition and feelings showed me answers to every question I had. What did I want in my life? Why did I hate this and love that? Why did my wife and kids respond these ways?

I have been fascinated and obsessed with how many old emotions, sensibilities, longings, joys, and desires we all carry unsuspectingly into our relationships. I am in awe of both who we are and who we think we are when we cross the marital threshold. I am even more amazed at what is demanded as we move forward.

This is what I have been doing and teaching for the

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last twenty-three years, to go back inside our heart. Until you sit alone and linger in your old feelings, everything else is an illusion, jibber-jabber, psychobabble, and therapeutic wind that is wasting your money. Just sit. Just sit quietly alone with your eyes closed and back straight and listen to your heart.

Why? Why sit? Many resist the notion that just sitting will help. Some mightily disagree. I guarantee that these skeptics have either tried and it was uncomfortable, boring, or considered time wasted, or they are simply nervous about unwanted feelings and memories arising. I understand and had that same perspective. Your marriage, though, is asking for all of you, all your resources, capabilities, and abilities to perceive, grow, and learn.

The rational mind, the one being used to read these words, is not enough. It has limited scope and depth. No offense to that side of the brain, but it alone is not capable of handling marriage. As Robert Monroe says in *Far Journey*, if we use only our rational faculties, then we are “only partially successful using an incorrect standard of measurement.” It is beyond the rational and logical where we must take ourselves, and it is only by sitting quietly that we can grasp and access the resources, perspectives, and guidance to understand marriage. Eric Jaffe, in his article “Meditate on It,” describes the power of sitting. He says it “relaxes the heart and strengthens the mind’s ability to connect symbols and meaning.”

Lee Sannella, MD spent a lifetime studying meditation. In his book *The Kundalini Experience*, he summarizes succinctly how and why meditation is the only method to address the psychological, emotional,