

The Pact - We Have A Stake In Each Other

by Mark & Barb McNally and Harry & Rose Brown
(Excerpted from 1st Quarter 1992 *Matrimony* magazine)

This is a story about two couples, Mark & Barb McNally and Harry & Rose Brown, who knew the value of daily dialogue but could never quite get the daily part right. Almost daily, or most of the time, but not daily. This caused frustration and anxiety in both relationships. However, eventually daily dialogue did become a way of life. Here's our story:

Mark & Barb: We were encountered in August of 1976. We dialogued for 180+ days after our weekend. But eventually we settled into a routine of dialoguing on the weekdays and skipping Saturdays and Sundays. Neither of us was comfortable with this routine, but it was more regular than most couples dialogued, so complacency set in and 5 on and 2 off became a way of life. Our routine was like being on a diet where we were careful through the week then pigged out on the weekends. There wasn't any net gain (or loss); at best we were holding our own.

Harry & Rose: Our weekend was in May of 1977. We also bought dialog on the weekend and we became a waiting game. Who will suggest dialog first today? There was constant suspense wondering which of us would finally say "let's dialog". If neither did, we were off the hook for the evening. I (Harry) was in constant anxiety waiting it out. It was driving me crazy. Our relationship was suffering and discouragement and often frustration set in for me (Rose). I knew I wasn't being responsible to our commitment to dialogue.

Mark & Barb: Well, that's where the four of us were back in the summer of '82. Each couple dialoguing some of the time, which was good, but neither couple dialogue daily, which wasn't so good. We happened to be the Region Board Coordinators at the time. At a County Board meeting, John & Suzann Taglieber, the County Coordinators, challenged each couple in the county to daily dialog. That's all of the pushing it took for us to make the decision to dialog daily. However if daily dialog was (and is) good for us, it should be good for the other couples on our Region Board, right? Neither of us handle rejection well and were afraid of the reaction of the others on board when we challenged them to daily dialog. We wanted each couple to be the best they could be, not for us, but for themselves. And that's what we asked for. Some construed this to mean we were asking them to dialog daily (we had some very perceptive couples on our board). None outrightly rejected the idea, but they didn't openly embrace it or us either. Toward the end of the evening we cornered Harry & Rose and suggested a Pact. We'd each dialog daily, but if for some reason one of us decided not to dialog today, we'd would call the other and explain why.

Harry & Rose: We remember a community meeting on a warm August night in 1982. We anticipated the usual opening prayer with new prayer requests, dialogue, sharing, a push for recruiting and other business, etc. When Mark & Barb presented the challenge to dialogue daily, I (Rose) thought maybe, but really I had little hope of actually doing it. Our past history with daily dialogue spoke for itself. I saw it as a mountain that was impossible to climb. When I (Harry) heard the challenge from Mark & Barb, I groaned. I thought of community, and if there was no other way, I'd give in and resort to dialogue. I was angry at John & Suzann for passing down the edict. We weren't alone, most of the other couples on board didn't seem too be overjoyed about being challenged to daily dialog either. There were a few audible groans and grumblings heard but as the evening wore on, we all knew that each of us individually had to give up the excuses and just do it. We also knew that we needed the support of one another. Later that evening Mark & Barb asked us to make the Pact. I (Rose) recall Mark saying "We challenge you" I don't ever recall anyone saying "We challenge you" before then, so it made an impression. I guess the time was right to say yes to dialogue. I also longed for more intimacy with Harry and knew dialogue could do that for us. I (Harry) looked at it as "that's simple- no complicated rules to remember", so we said yes. Well, that was in August of 1982- now in February of 1992 we're both still dialoguing daily. Neither of us has had to make that phone call, although there have been times we've dialogued just to avoid making the call. We each took the pact seriously. We respected each others commitment.

Mark & Barb: For us the commitment to daily dialog has made our lives simpler and more rewarding. Simpler because we've one less decision to make each day. The decision to dialog today was made in 1982, so that's one decision we don't have to make today. But daily dialog hasn't made us a perfect couple. We still have highs and lows, but with daily dialog the highs are more frequent and the lows aren't as low. And daily dialog hasn't always been easy to accomplish. Our jobs cause us to travel; we've worked shift work and overtime. To overcome these obstacles, we've written before going to work, at lunch time, or whenever 10 minutes is available. Then when we can, even if our heads are hitting the pillow, we find time to share our letters. If we know we're in for a busy Saturday we'll dialog before we're out of bed in the morning. Dialog is a way of life for us that we hope will last another 9 years or more. There's a certain security in daily dialog. It's a foundation that we can build on and work on.

Harry & Rose: For the first six months, I'll have to admit that I (Rose) dialogued because I didn't want to hear Barb's "Oh"!! on the other end of the phone. She has a way of making it sound like someone knocked the wind out of her when she hears disappointing news. But now, I dialog daily with Harry for me, him, and us. We are really so much closer now than we were before Marriage Encounter. Dialogue makes the difference for us. It's so easy to get lost back in the modern world doing our own thing. It's tough even now to find the time to write our love letters and dialog. But when I hear about friends splitting up after many years of marriage, I am really thankful that we have dialog to share our fears, concerns, and joys and draw us closer together. I don't want to think about where we would be without our 10 and 10. I just thank God for leading us down this path hand in hand.

What happened next: We started our daily dialog then and although it wasn't easy for me (Harry), the one part that I found to be very easy was the removal of anxiety about if we were going to dialog that day. It no longer became an "if" but "when". In addition to not having to explain to Mark & Barb about why we wouldn't dialog, we started to reap the benefits of everyday dialog. Our life didn't become one long honeymoon but it did get better. We communicated on all sorts of stuff - at all levels from information (and even a few clichés) all the way to real feelings. I wouldn't want you to read all of Rose and my dialogs though - some were and still continue to be surfacy. Then there are the ones that really help us see where the other is coming from and from these we grow closer.

Some Problems: I (Harry), travel occasionally in my job. It would be nice if Rose could go with me - but when she can't, we write daily, using a list of questions we make up in advance. We then catch up when we're back together. Another problem is finding good questions. For a long time, I took it as a personal challenge to come up with a question without resorting to the calendar or to use a list of questions passed down from others. We thought this helped make the dialogs more worthwhile. Now we're willing to accept questions from anyone and we re-cycle old ones that we've used before.

Mark & Barb and Harry & Rose: We've dialogued at least 3468 times in the nine year since the start of our pact until February 11, 1992. This doesn't count conventions and workshops when we've dialogued several times a day. Three dialogs in one day doesn't allow us to take two days off, so we keep it up every day with no credit being built up for tomorrow.

We know there are many of you who have dialogued daily many more days and years than us. We applaud you. Now for the rest of you, we implore you to make the decision today to dialog daily. Make a pact, or whatever else it takes, but put yourselves first. Go to a couple that you really care about, someone special in your lives that are not dialoguing daily. Ask them one on one to make a pact with you for the sake of both of your relationships.