

# Interviews point to characteristics of lasting marriages

By Cindy Liebhart  
NC News Service

When Claudia and Jeff Winters were married in 1959, Claudia's mother told her that "marriage is an 80-20 relationship — the woman must give 80 percent and expect back no more than 20 percent."

"But she was wrong," Claudia says. "It's really a 99-to-one relationship. And it's not one way. It flip-flops. Sometimes you give the 99 percent and get the one percent; sometimes he does. It's never equal at any one time, and it's not always fair."

"If you thought about it, you'd probably think, 'Well my turn has come, and now I want to be taken care of,'" Claudia continued. "But you don't think of it that way. I needed him and he needed me at different times, and we just did what we had to do."

Interviewed by Francine Klagsbrun for her book "Married People: Staying Together in the Age of Divorce" (Bantam Books, 1985), the Wintenses talk about their married life together — the struggles and fears, the sadnesses and joys.

Acquaintances since kindergarten days, Claudia and Jeff married when both were 22. Three children were born to the couple within the first five years.

Ten years after they were married, Claudia

pleading, Claudia decided to join Alcoholics Anonymous and was able to stop drinking. She attributes her recovery to Jeff's encouragement and his belief in her even when she could not believe in herself.

Jeff, too, credits Claudia's supportiveness as having helped him restore his own self-confidence. After years of school failures, Jeff dropped out of college, unable to make it. He began working a small farm that had belonged to his father and doing lawn maintenance for people in the town, both of which he enjoys.

But dropping out of college was a trauma that led him to feel inferior, like the "black sheep" of his family, because all of his brothers had graduated from prestigious universities and had gone into professions. He also was embarrassed to socialize with the same people whose lawns he tended.

Claudia, however, speaks with great respect and admiration for the qualities her husband possesses and the kind of work he does. She helps him build up his own self-image.

He says "she's the most supportive woman on earth."



Klagsbrun's book is filled with many personal accounts of couples in long, satisfying marriages as they have come to deal with issues that arise in day-to-day life together.

Her far-reaching exploration goes from the effects of children on a marriage to the effects of each partner's background on the relationship, from intimacy to power struggles, from the place of sex to the place of in-laws and friends.

Klagsbrun, herself married 30 years, admits that there is "no formula, no single recipe that when used in the right proportions will produce the perfect marriage, or even a working one." She does not necessarily agree with all of the patterns the couples she interviewed have established in their marriages.

But through her research and her interviews with more than 80 couples married 15 years or longer, Klagsbrun is able to identify common threads which weave through successful marriages.

These include an ability to change and tolerate change and, paradoxically, an ability to live with the unchangeable; an assumption

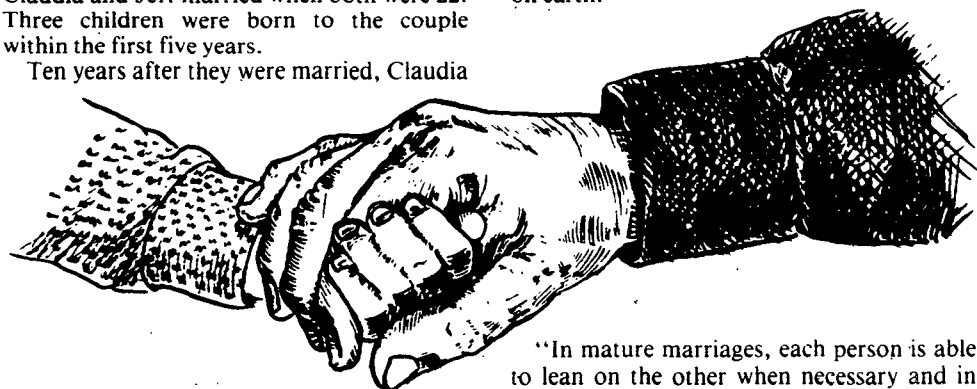
of permanence; trust; a balance of dependencies; an ongoing enjoyment of and interest in each other; a shared, cherished history; and luck.

Klagsbrun is convinced that "couples who stay together in spite of conflicts and changes make constant redecisions to be married."

But, she says, "while we marry one another, she and over, the person each of us is changes in response to events outside the marriage and events in the marriage...In ongoing marriages, while the partners change in many ways, each remains unchanged in the commitment to the marriage, and while the marriage changes, it remains, at its center, permanent."

"Married People" is an interesting book, filled with colorful anecdotes and helpful insights.

Readers may not agree with all of Klagsbrun's conclusions or see their lives mirrored in all the couples she interviewed. Nevertheless, the book provides ample opportunity for self-reflection and discussion among couples.



"In mature marriages, each person is able to lean on the other when necessary and in turn be leaned on when that is called for, to play child sometimes and parent other times," Klagsbrun writes. To her, the Wintenses "epitomize the interdependence that makes for a balance of emotional power in marriage."

They "are a team.... bolstering one another, succoring one another, exchanging pep talks and inspirations," she says.

became an alcoholic.

"I was heart sick over it," Jeff tells Klagsbrun. "I can't...well, I can't begin to express the kind of burden you carry in that situation. I mean, you know, when you deeply love someone, to have that between you. It has such an effect on your whole relationship."

After years of resisting her husband's



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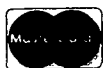
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