

# Program helps spouses to rediscover their love

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

Professional counseling hadn't solved their problems. So, after 19 years of marriage, "John" and "Brenda" (whose names have been changed for this story) decided to separate.

"Things fell apart. We got more and more angry at each other, and weren't talking much at all," Brenda recalled. "We weren't doing anything together anymore, either."

So, in October of 1989, John moved out of their Southern Tier home. It appeared that the couple was headed toward a legal separation.

Then their miracle happened: Retrouvaille.

Three months after John moved out, he and Brenda agreed to attempt patching up their differences through the Retrouvaille program. The effects were pleasantly astounding: two weeks after they completed Retrouvaille, John and Brenda were living together again.

"We discovered how much we really did care about each other," said Brenda.

Indeed, discovery is what Retrouvaille is all about: the word is French for "rediscovery." Over a seven-week period, Retrouvaille encourages couples, whose marriages have become troubled, to rediscover their mutual love.

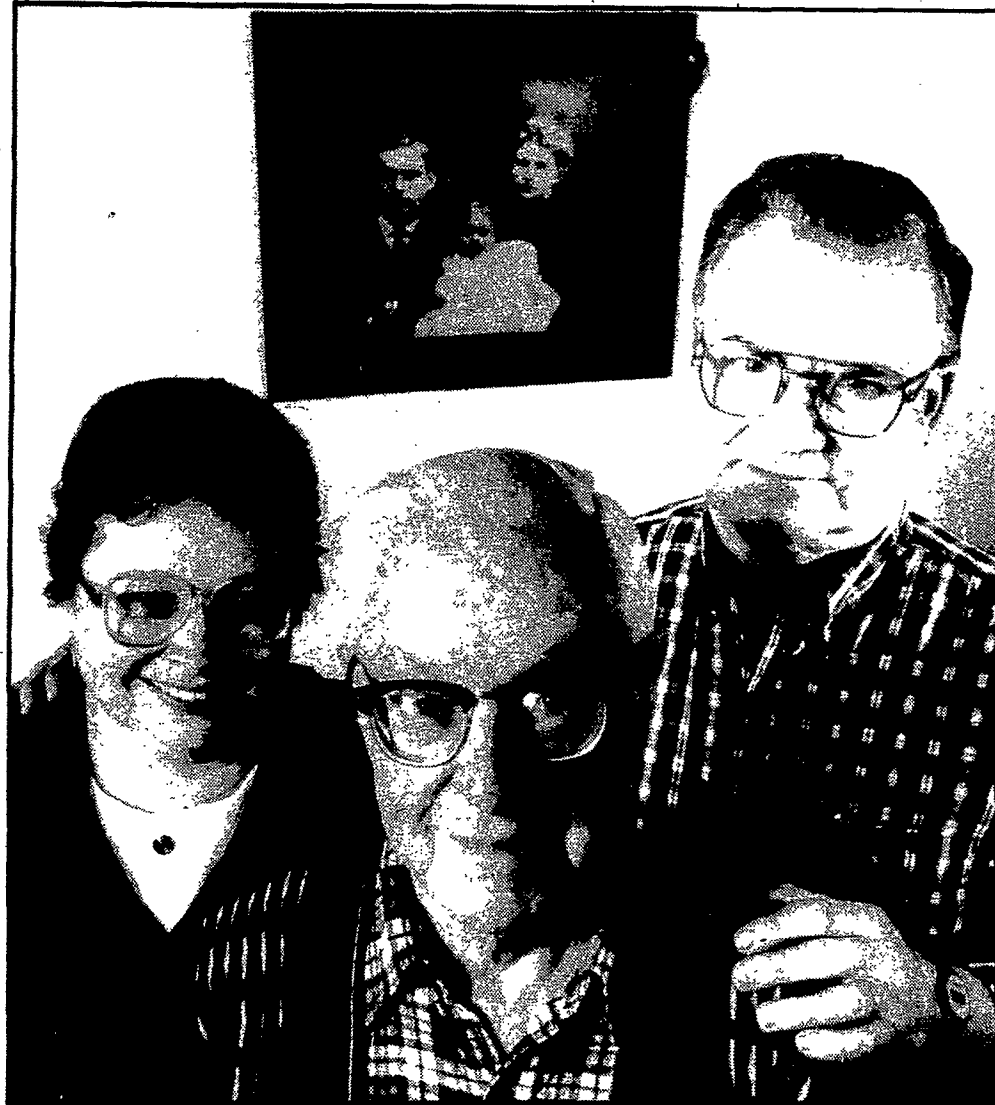
Three Retrouvaille programs are offered annually in the Rochester diocese. This year's first program, which involves 13 couples, will conclude near the end of this month.

Retrouvaille's pivotal segment comes right at the beginning, when spouses spend an entire weekend at a hotel in downtown Rochester. There, a core team of three married couples and one priest present a number of in-depth lectures dealing with specific areas of marital relationships.

Couples then adjourn to their own rooms for reflection. This type of privacy prevails throughout the weekend. Participants are never required at any time to share their problems with the rest of the gathering.

"(Retrouvaille) eases couples into talking. We teach them to communicate in a safe mode," said Jerry Monaghan, who coordinates the diocesan Retrouvaille program along with his wife, Trudy. The Monaghans are parishioners at Our Mother of Sorrows Church, 5000 Mt. Read Blvd., Greece.

Retrouvaille's opening weekend is followed by six optional Sunday afternoon follow-up sessions on consecu-



Trudy (left) and Jerry Monaghan (right), coordinators of the Retrouvaille program in the Rochester diocese, are joined in their Greece home by Father Leo Klem, CSB, one of the program's team priests.

Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

tive weekends.

The program's chief strength, John observed, is that it focuses on positive actions — such as forgiveness and acceptance — rather than the difficulties which lead couples to seek out the program.

"You're discussing feelings only," he said. "No feelings are right or wrong; people learn to respect the feelings of their spouse whether or not they agree with those feelings."

John, for one, finds Retrouvaille's approach much more effective than marriage counseling.

"Marriage counseling escalated our problems, because we confronted the problems without examining the feelings," he remarked.

The program, which began in 1977, now offers more than 50 Retrouvaille organizations in the United States alone. Retrouvaille also exists in countries such as Canada and Australia.

Other than a \$25 registration fee, there is no set cost for the program. In-

stead, couples may pay on a free-will basis to cover hotel and meal costs.

Although it is predominately a Catholic program, Retrouvaille is open to couples of all ages and faiths. It is also available to couples who have already become divorced from each other.

However, if marriage problems are related to substance abuse or the like, professional help is required prior to Retrouvaille.

Yet the most important prerequisite, the Monaghans pointed out, is that both spouses must be willing to participate. Only then can the healing process begin.

The beauty of Retrouvaille, according to Trudy Monaghan, "is just the willingness of the couples and the courage to say, 'We're hurting and we're going to do something about it.'"

"It takes a lot to say, 'We're not making it.' Your pride gets in the way," her husband concurred.

Father Leo Klem, CSB, added that Retrouvaille would also not be successful without the religious base from which it operates.

"You can't do it without God," said Father Klem, who serves as a team priest with the Rochester-area Retrouvaille program. "Marriage is something sacred that comes from God. It's impossible to live it without God."

EDITORS' NOTE: For couples interested in learning more about Retrouvaille, call the Monaghans at 716/621-2901.

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