

Praise for
the
Surrendered
Wife

“Something magical happens when women read *The Surrendered Wife*. . . . Every girlfriend to whom I’ve given the book has said her marriage immediately turned the corner . . . for the better.”

—Fawn Weaver, *New York Times* bestselling
author of *Happy Wives Club*

“If there’s one book that can change the course of your romantic life, it’s *The Surrendered Wife*. The practical, common-sense reframes in these pages are a sobering reminder that to experience the marriage of your dreams, you only need to get out of your own way. . . . This book shows you exactly how to do that.”

—Kelly Brogan, MD, holistic psychiatrist
and *New York Times* bestselling author of
A Mind of Your Own and *The Reclaimed Woman*

“Startlingly revealing for anybody in a long-term relationship.”

—Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *The Independent*

“*The Surrendered Wife* is a title frequently invoked among Orthodox Jewish women, quoted during mom walks with strollers and discussed in WhatsApp groups. Premarital teachers recommend the text to young brides-to-be.”

—Avital Chizhik-Goldschmidt, *The Atlantic*

“I’ll admit, I was hesitant at the idea of what a surrendered wife was and if it was for me. But Laura Doyle’s work is light-years ahead of most professionals I know and is truly in a league of its own. I’m genuinely happier and more empowered as a person because of what I’ve learned. If you’re someone who’s read the books, gone to therapy, worked on yourself, but still feel stuck in your relationship, this light and breezy book is a must-read. It’s eye-opening, empowering, and effective.”

—Marissa Zwetow,
author and licensed marriage and family therapist

“Laura Doyle distills relationship wisdom into simple, practical Intimacy Skills™ that many women have overlooked or never been taught. Her tools help shift everyday interactions in ways that create more connection, desire, respect, and ease between partners. A refreshing guide for women who want to nurture both themselves and their relationships!”

—Ellen Fisher, host of
The Ellen Fisher Podcast

“This is a stunning book! As a marriage and family therapist for over thirty years, I recommend *The Surrendered Wife* to every woman I work with. Happy twenty-fifth anniversary to a book that continues to transform and transcend women everywhere. Laura Doyle’s work has changed my life. And it could well change yours.”

—Liz Hale, PhD, marriage family therapist

“Life-changing for this expert marriage counselor (now coach) and for all of my clients. Wisdom for the ages as we rethink and change all relationships for the better.” —Liz Sharp, marriage therapist

“*The Surrendered Wife* is a game-changer for many of my clients. I regularly recommend it even on our podcast because I believe in the core concepts of the things a man is created to need in his marriage. Laura is a brave woman—to say the least—and some things are not popular nowadays, but the differences between a husband and a wife are real and this book is so helpful to truly change a marriage!”

—Belah Rose, host of the
podcast *Delight Your Marriage*

“I’ve recommended Laura Doyle’s work for years and have interviewed her as well. Her method works because it goes against many modern ideas that have not strengthened families or marriages. Instead, she focuses on simple, time-tested principles, the kind that helped keep our grandparents’ and great-grandparents’ marriages together for generations.”

—Eddie Deen,
host of *The Deen Show*

*Testimonials from
Surrendered Wife Clients and Coaches*

“I’ve never felt more empowered—or more loved—after implementing the wisdom in this book. A big career, romantic marriage, and thriving family eluded me until I found Laura Doyle’s crystalized steps to a happy marriage and peaceful home. I read so many books before finding this one—save yourself years of effort and misery, this book is it!”
—Catherine Coote

“I had a different marriage by the end of *The Surrendered Wife* because I was a different woman. Within two weeks my marriage was radically different. My husband fell in love with me again, and I had a divorce-proof marriage. This book was the answer to my prayers.”
—Darla Ferreira

“Reading *The Surrendered Wife* was like finally being handed the Rosetta Stone of marriage—the missing key, the hidden code, the long-lost translation guide. Suddenly, the things my husband had been trying to tell me for years weren’t confusing, frustrating, or mysterious anymore.”
—Julie Karrer

“*The Surrendered Wife* book not only saved my marriage; it taught me how to honor myself as a wife and shined my heart on my husband’s great qualities instead of focusing on his mere mortal negative qualities.”
—Sue Prince

“This book was life-changing, transforming my marriage and my heart in ways I had previously thought impossible, and became the starting point for a whole new life with my husband.”
—Susan Minor

“*The Surrendered Wife* has provided a powerful examination for me to identify the reasons behind my exhaustion. . . . The book is relatable and, at the same time, profoundly eye-opening and inspiring. . . . Bring an open mind and a willingness to experiment.”

—Amy Davenport

“Chock-full of wisdom for women looking for the methods to create the partnership of their dreams, *The Surrendered Wife* is a magical, critical reference.”

—Adrian Michalski

“*The Surrendered Wife* book gave me a step-by-step guide, not abstract concepts, to become super happy and to change my marriage.”

—Malka Horowitz

“Not about surrendering to my husband but about the lifelong journey of surrendering my ego so that I can begin to embody a higher version of myself.”

—Crystal Lewis

“When I thought I was faultless and the victim, *The Surrendered Wife* gave me hope through practical ways to change myself that fixed my marriage in the long run.”

—Jennifer Kalagi

“*The Surrendered Wife* answered all my questions I had about my marriage!!”

—Ilana Salzman

“When I found *The Surrendered Wife* twenty-five years ago, I was searching for a way to heal what felt broken in my relationship and had no idea what that path looked like—until that book handed me the blueprint that restored my connection, reshaped me as a woman, and changed the entire trajectory of my family’s future, for which I will forever be grateful to Laura Doyle.”

—Darlene A. Davis

“*The Surrendered Wife* has meant I have rediscovered my voice, passion, and pathway forward to hope, healing, and joy in all of my relationships through a consistent practice of Laura’s time-tested Intimacy Skills™.”

—Amanda Townsend

“More than any other book, *The Surrendered Wife* taught me how to live out Scripture in marriage.”

—Sonya Mounts

“This book made me question everything I grew up hearing, reading, and believing about relationships. It taught me how to have an amazing marriage by (not despite) honoring myself and the things important to me. No, the honeymoon phase does not have to end—ever—and if you want to have that kind of a marriage, forget everything you have been told about marriages and read this book.”

—Raseena Sherif

“Laura’s books gave me practical wisdom, but they also gave me hope. I have bought her books for every newlywed in my life—I call it the secret weapon for marriage.”

—Bernitha Rena

the
Surrendered
Wife

A Practical Guide to Finding Intimacy,
Passion, and Peace with a Man

LAURA DOYLE

SIMON ELEMENT

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Speaking of expert editors, I'm incredibly lucky that this book fell into the hands of Doris Cooper at Simon & Schuster, who was visionary enough to see its potential. She is wonderfully encouraging and motivating—and amazingly thorough.

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Most of all, I'm grateful to my beloved husband, John Doyle. He helped me to become my best self and made me laugh all along the way. I still say I'm a little luckier.

And also: To the courageous women who've picked up this book over twenty-five years, trusted these principles, and transformed their marriages—and to the coaches who've taken this mission around the world. Your courage and joy inspire me every day.

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Introduction

Why Would a Woman Surrender?

When I was newly married at twenty-two, I had no idea I would ever call myself a surrendered wife. At the time, the phrase would have repulsed me.

I knew that marriage was risky because I had watched my parents go through a brutal divorce. Still, I was hopeful that I could do better. I was amazed that my husband, John, could adore me as much as he did, and part of me believed we could make our marriage work because it was born of so much love.

At first, our marriage was blissful. John wrote songs about me (“Laura, Laura, I adore ya”) and sat on the same side of the restaurant booth as me. We walked the neighborhood holding hands, excitedly planning our future. We couldn’t pass each other during the day without kissing and enjoyed plenty of passion at night. My parents liked John so much my dad introduced us as “my son-in-law, John, and his wife, Laura.”

After a couple of years, I started to notice John’s imperfections, and I developed the habit of telling him how to change and what to do. Obviously, he should pay off the credit card bills every month instead of wasting money on interest. And he should do more research before buying a car so he wouldn’t get ripped off. And why was he putting plastic in the dishwasher or, worse, overloading

it? And couldn't he remember to wipe down the counters when he cleaned the kitchen? I gave him constructive feedback on his résumé to help him with his job search and told him to prepare more for his interviews. I advised him to eat more greens, and that he'd sleep better if he didn't have talk radio in his ears all night. And speaking of going to bed, he should also initiate intimacy more often, since the average couple was having sex nearly three times a week and we hadn't done it for two weeks, so we were below average.

All of this—and more—was my way of helping him improve. I thought: If John would just be more ambitious at work, more romantic at home, and clean up better, everything would be fine. I told him so.

John did not respond well, because what I was really trying to do was micromanage him. The harder I pushed, the more he resisted, and we both grew irritable and frustrated. In no time, I was exhausted from trying to run my life and his. While my intentions were good, I was becoming estranged from the man who had once made me so happy, and that was heartbreaking.

I couldn't understand why we fought all the time, or didn't talk for days, or why he was more interested in watching sports than he was in spending time with me or even making love to me.

I was lonely. I tried to tell John what I needed from him, but no matter how much we talked about it, nothing improved.

I'd read the most popular marriage books, but that wasn't helping. I knew we needed to go to marriage counseling because, well, everybody knows that's what you're supposed to do if you can't even have a conversation without having a fight. Finally, John agreed to go, and we went for over a year. But it didn't work for us.

In fact, I was on the marriage counselor's gray couch when I became hopeless about ever having a happy marriage. We were just too far apart, and he was never going to change.

I didn't see any choice but to end my painful marriage.

But . . . I was too embarrassed to get divorced.

The Return of the Man Who Wooed Me

So as a last-ditch effort, I asked women who had been married for at least fifteen years what their secret was. At first, I was convinced that my marriage couldn't be saved. I mean, the counselors even said that my husband was the problem and that I'd be better off without him. And even though I believed he *was* 99 percent of the problem, I had a dream of having a great marriage, so I kept talking to women who had happy marriages to see what I could learn. I desperately wanted what they had.

One woman told me she let her husband handle all the finances, and what a relief that was for her. Another explained that she tried never to criticize her husband, no matter how much he seemed to deserve it. Another said she had to "let Paul be Paul" by not telling him how to do things even if she thought she probably knew better.

And although I didn't believe the things they told me would work with my husband, or that I could even *do* them, I decided just to go all in on trying their ideas, which seemed counterintuitive to me. I experimented with their suggestions even though they were not like anything I'd heard in counseling or read in relationship books. With a lot of trial and error, I figured out what works.

And *that's* how I got my miracle.

I came home one day, and John's face lit up. He was happy to see me again! And that had been gone.

So I thought, Wow, this is working! I was shocked to find out that I had so much power to make him respond to me differently. It was exhilarating!

There was no single moment when the surrendered lightbulb went off. Instead, I changed little by little. At first, the things I learned from those happy wives didn't make sense to me. I thought refraining from commenting—even if my comments were critical—

would be dishonest and turn me into a doormat who never got my way.

But the opposite happened.

I felt more dignified and less frantic. I realized I wasn't dumbing myself down—I was simply extending the same kindness and politeness to my husband that I would offer a stranger. I felt calmer and more peaceful, which made it easier for him to hear me. It also enabled *me* to hear my own heart and notice when I was close to the limits of what my nervous system could handle. Instead of being preoccupied with what I thought John should be doing, I started to recognize how often *fear* was driving my impulse to control: I was afraid—afraid we'd be late, lose money, make a bad decision, or leave a bad impression.

And soon it became clear: indulging my impulse to control, acting on my fear instead of trusting John as competent, was at the root of our cold wars and big blowups.

We were enjoying each other again because I now knew to trust John instead of to micromanage him. But then, you know what happened? I reverted to my old habits, and we started to fight again. Why would I do that when I knew what *to* do? We were headed right back into the ditch if I couldn't figure out *how* to keep doing the things I'd learned. The new way wasn't so hard—it was just new!

One night we had a fight in the car, just like the bad old days, and I could hear myself saying things I knew I would regret. And John was yelling right back at me and we were both being mean and horrible. What made it even more awful was that I had been hopeful this wasn't going to happen again. And then it did.

I did not want to go back to living with tension instead of intimacy. How sad would it be to struggle and fight or even end my marriage now that I knew how to show up with John so that our relationship was passionate and playful? I was embarrassed that I

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was inconsistent and ashamed of the way I behaved during those fights.

Then I had an idea: I would start sharing with other women how I resisted micromanaging and that would help me hold myself accountable. And you know what? They did the same and it worked for them too! They reported miracles. I took inspiration from hearing the stories of how their marriages were getting better, and I felt a jolt of motivation to resist the urge to control and correct and criticize in my own relationship.

I adopted the word “surrender” as my mantra. I said it to myself when I could feel the fear rising like malware taking over my operating system. I said it when I needed to remind myself to be trusting and respectful instead of frantic and fearful. I thought of surrender as a word that described a beautiful spiritual state I aspired to, where I was relaxing on the river, enjoying the ride instead of trying to swim upstream.

I *finally* had what I’d always wanted, and it felt good to do the things that made my marriage peaceful and intimate again. Who would have thought that using the *actual* behaviors of women in happy, time-tested marriages would be what works?

The community of other women gave me the resolve and encouragement I needed, which made the changes stick. That gave me the marriage I dreamed of. I gained confidence that I could nurture peace and passion in my home while still getting what I wanted and needed more than ever. The other women also had incredible breakthroughs in their marriages. It was like an upward spiral.

I started a support group to keep myself on track, and I referred to us as Surrendered Wives. When someone asked me to write down what we were doing for her cousin who lived across the country, and that turned into the book you’re holding now, it only made sense to call it *The Surrendered Wife*, which felt like a comfortable old pair of jeans by that time.

Things kept getting better. When I stopped bossing John around, giving him advice, burying him in lists of chores, criticizing his ideas, and taking over every situation as if he couldn't handle it, something magical happened. The union I'd dreamed of appeared.

The man who wooed me was back.

We were intimate again. Instead of keeping a running list of complaints about how childish and irresponsible he was, I felt genuine gratitude and affection for John and all the ways he lightened my load—making my tea, putting gas in my car, listening to my problems and supporting me, moving furniture every time I wanted to rearrange. We were sharing our responsibilities without blame or resentment. Instead of bickering all the time, we were laughing together, holding hands, dancing in the kitchen, and enjoying an electrifying closeness that we hadn't had for years.

For our ninth wedding anniversary, I changed my last name to his. "Now that I know him a little better, I figure I'll give it a shot," I joked to my friends. What I really meant was that I wanted to be intimate with John in a way that I hadn't been before. I wanted to do something that symbolized my tremendous respect for him and to outwardly acknowledge an inward shift.

Surrendering changed *everything* in ways I never could have imagined.

The Surrendered Wife Then and Now

When I first published *The Surrendered Wife* twenty-five years ago, it was a *New York Times* bestseller. I was thrilled that it appeared in more than a dozen languages in twenty-seven countries. It sold hundreds of thousands of copies and started a movement.

But first there was an outcry.

Before the book caught on, the reaction was fierce. Critics assumed the title meant *subjugated* wife, and they responded with

contempt—who wouldn't recoil from subjugation? Naysayers sometimes portrayed the book as repressing women, setting them back to the 1950s. But over time, what stuck wasn't the criticism—it was that these techniques had worked to restore intimacy for generations of women. The practical advice in *The Surrendered Wife* works.

From Living Room to Worldwide Movement

Fortunately, some women insisted that I coach them in how to help others with surrendering. If they hadn't been so determined, I would have retreated into my own fear.

Amazing women emerged. They reached out from Australia and Mexico, the Netherlands and Hong Kong, the UK and all over the United States. They were committed to learning and practicing what I now refer to as the Six Intimacy Skills™, or the habits I adopted that brought emotional closeness, respect, and harmony to my marriage and swept out the tension and distance. Some women had been right at divorce's door—separated and seeing attorneys. Others had visited numerous marriage counselors with no improvement. Most women, while not on the brink of divorce, knew that the sizzle was gone and wanted it back, wanted to feel like a team again.

Each one used the skills to create a relationship that fulfilled her vision: connected and vibrant. And experiencing this breakthrough resulted in an irresistible tug on her heart to join the mission to keep marriages together—first by bringing peace to her own marriage, then by sharing her experience with other wives who wanted better connection.

Today there are hundreds of Laura Doyle Certified Relationship Coaches in twenty-one countries on five continents, and countless women using the phrases and actions in this book to restore their marriages and reconnect with themselves.

Each coach has changed her own romantic life too. She felt her marriage was dull or falling apart. Then she had a breakthrough. She learned how to use her influence and the gifts she'd reclaimed—magnetism, receptivity, and emotional brilliance—to help women transform their marriages. And her breakthrough is what makes her uniquely qualified to show another woman how to do the same thing. She's been down that difficult road already, and she knows what her clients need to do to get where they want to go.

Maybe you're just starting out and your marriage feels impossible right now. Maybe you just want to improve a few things. Maybe you're somewhere in the middle. Wherever you are, your experience matters. Not just to me, but to every woman reading this who thinks she might be the only one who has ever felt this way. She's not. And neither are you. I'd love to hear where you are in your story.

Why This Book Has Lasted

The community of like-minded women, especially the coaches, is indispensable for keeping my marriage shiny. I know this because for a time I drifted away from those conversations and my marriage suffered.

The skills are like a language that fades away if I'm not using them. I've been teaching and sharing about them because that's what helps me keep my marriage going strong. Talking to other women who are practicing the Surrendered Wife approach to an intimate marriage is a joyful experience that I never want to end. Now that we have a sturdy structure for it, and so many trained coaches, I don't see why it ever has to.

I think *The Surrendered Wife* has stood the test of time, too, because it's practical: specific about what to do and how to change the way you relate to and communicate with your husband. I

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wanted to be able to give myself a checkmark if I'd put a change into practice, which meant I needed to know that I'd carried it out, not just thought about it. So I include exact phrases to try and actions to take. And one thing I hear repeatedly from readers and clients is that they just never knew about the Intimacy Skills—no one ever taught them. So the book is rooted not just in insights but also in simple things you can *do* that will get you a different result.

For two and a half decades, I have received an avalanche of letters, emails, and DMs. Women felt—and still feel—that I was writing about them. Women have been recommending and passing worn copies of *The Surrendered Wife* to one another, sometimes secretly ever since. The title alone starts a conversation. They wanted to know where I'd hidden the recording device to capture their conversations and reprint them in the book. Most of all, they wanted me to help them with their struggling relationships. A global movement has sprung up—women practicing these skills, supporting one another, and finding hope where they'd felt frustration or despair.

If you read the original *Surrendered Wife*, you may be wondering what could possibly be new. The principles that create intimacy haven't changed—but I have. Twenty-five years and hundreds of thousands of readers later, I understand these principles in ways I couldn't have when I first wrote them. I've refined the language, replaced what was unintentionally off-putting with what actually lands, and added stories from real women facing modern marriage challenges. What I had then was conviction and optimism. What I have now is decades of proof.

Those principles in *The Surrendered Wife* fall into six broad categories called the Six Intimacy Skills. Rather than list them as bullet points, I've woven them throughout these pages in stories and examples, because that's how they come alive and make sense.

Twenty-Five Years Later

The principles in this book are an even bigger part of my life today than they were twenty-five years ago. I think about them and talk about them daily with the coaches, with the clients in our coaching programs, with the students who are studying to become Certified Relationship Coaches, and the guests on my podcast who come on to share stories of how they changed their marriages. Being part of a community of women who value the ideas in *The Surrendered Wife* and who prioritize having a fulfilling marriage makes my marriage feel like a soft place to land.

As a mere mortal woman, recently I was embarrassed to find myself trying to control whether John put a bookshelf in his office. But after all these years of practice, it wasn't long before I caught myself and changed course, which restored the levity of the moment—and our connection.

And it's working. Sometimes I'll be brushing crumbs off the counter and John says, "Don't move," and starts taking my picture like I'm a model he's been married to for thirty-six years. And he still sits on the same side of the booth with me at restaurants.

Now, I don't pretend to know what any woman "should" do. My role is simply to share what worked for me and countless other wives, and I invite you to experiment. You're the expert on your life.

I'm updating this book for a new generation because these principles are timeless—even in a world that has changed technologically, socially, and politically from when the book was first published. I remember how much I suffered before I knew this approach existed—the hopelessness, the exhaustion, the distance from the man I chose. I don't want any woman to suffer just because she doesn't know there's another way.

Why These Principles Are Still Relevant— and What’s Changed

For this update, I’ve added new stories and information to bridge what I knew then with what I know now. I’ve also woven in stories of women navigating modern challenges to illustrate what the Surrendered Wife principles look like in twenty-first-century situations. And I’ve shared how this movement has grown—and how you can join us if that speaks to you.

One big thing has changed—and that’s my understanding about who these principles are for.

I used to think that they wouldn’t work in certain instances—like when there was addiction, infidelity, or abuse, so I told women in these heartbreaking situations to leave their marriages. I’m in no position to make that decision for anybody. It was never my place to tell another woman whether to leave a painful or dangerous situation, and it’s not my place to tell her to stay in one either. That was never my call to make.

I’m sharing my experience, what worked for me, and what I’ve been privileged to see work for thousands of other women. Only you can decide if experimenting with these skills is right for your marriage.

What I can offer is only what I’ve seen with my own eyes.

Bree’s husband was an addict. Cindy discovered her husband was cheating with their bookkeeper. These women decided—on their own, for their own reasons—to apply the principles in this book. I was astonished.

So I’m not telling you to stay. I’m not telling you what to do at all. But I am telling you there is hope—because I’ve seen these principles work in situations I never imagined possible. I’ve stopped putting a lid on what’s possible for any marriage, and I’ll never go back to doing that again.

I've also discovered that women of many religious and cultural backgrounds find that *The Surrendered Wife* helps them understand how to apply what's written in their religious texts. They appreciate knowing not just *what* they should do—they already wanted to follow the wisdom of their religious teachings—but specifically *how* to do it.

Despite the amount of time that's passed since I first wrote this book, the changes in our culture, and the shift I noted above in my perspective about who these practices are for, my conviction in these ideas is stronger than ever. I still follow the same approaches. Practicing them all this time feels a little like having a black belt in relationships.

If you're new to surrendering, welcome. Get ready for an exhilarating ride! If you've been with me for twenty-five years or ten years or since last June, I'm grateful for your company on this adventure, and for how in walking this path with me, you've helped me keep my own marriage joyful.

It takes courage to start a whole new relationship dance. The world needs more women like you who are brave enough to make their marriage extraordinary.

1

Respect the Man You Married by Listening to Him

Respect a man, he will do the more.

—JAMES HOWELL

Respect is like oxygen to a man. The more he feels your respect, the more he can breathe, relax, and do for you. It's essential for bringing out his best.

Respecting the man you married doesn't mean you have to agree, but that you listen to him without criticizing him, insulting him, laughing at him, or making fun of him. It means that even if you disagree with him, you consider his ideas instead of dismissing them.

Apologizing when you've said or done something disrespectful is a powerful way to restore peace and intimacy.

In marriage, as in nature, water seeks its own level: We marry men who match us.

That means that respecting your husband is also a form of self-respect: It's a way of acknowledging that you made a wise and thoughtful choice to marry a man who deserves your love and respect. Respecting him is also a way of honoring your own judgment—of saying that you chose wisely, and that the man you married is worthy of the love you originally felt for him.

Disrespect will bring out his worst, and make it seem like you *did* make a poor choice, but until you experiment with respecting him you won't really know.

For years I secretly believed I had married below myself, but I was wrong. In reality, this delusion was a convenient way for me to blame John for everything that went badly. Perhaps you do the same thing. I've since learned I'm not alone in this—it's one of the most common ways we accidentally keep ourselves stuck.

Karen's husband ran a large corporation and was well paid for it. A few days before his birthday, he put a note on the counter with the one thing he most wanted his wife to give him: respect. The same request is made in a variety of forms in households the world over, because men desperately crave respect from their wives.

That request might take the form of distance, like late hours at work, or retreating to the gym. It could look like defensiveness, or resistance to your thinking.

Respect is one of the greatest gifts you can not only give your husband but also yourself. If you miss the man he used to be, don't put this book down without experimenting with this skill. It will breathe life into your marriage in a way nothing else can.

If you don't think your husband deserves your respect, ask yourself what it was you saw in him that made you marry him in the first place. At that time, you trusted and admired him. Chances are he's not all that different now than he was then and therefore is still worthy of your admiration.

Honor His Choice of Socks and Stocks

So what does it mean to respect your partner? It means that you accept his choices, big and small, even if you don't agree with them. You honor his choice of socks and stocks, food and friendships, art and attitudes. You listen to him and have regard for his ideas, suggestions, family, and work. That doesn't mean you have to agree with him or make the same choices—just that you accept his.

When you respect your husband, you treat him like an intelligent adult rather than an irresponsible child. You use a calm tone, not a frantic shriek.

Respecting your husband means that you don't tear him down. For example, telling him how to load the dishwasher is insulting. You might as well be saying, "You mean you can't even do something as easy as that?" Comments like that stifle intimacy.

If you resist the urge to give unsolicited advice, criticize, or control, he'll learn life lessons instead of wife lessons, and suddenly you can go through the ups and downs of life together without it costing the closeness in your marriage.

When you respect him, he'll see his capability to figure things out and do well reflected in your eyes.

That's the essence of a surrendered wife.

Respect Breeds Intimacy

So what does respect have to do with intimacy?

When your husband is secure in your opinion of him, he doesn't have to second-guess or steel himself because he's expecting you to pounce on him. When he knows you're on his side, he can relax and feel confident in himself.

Most importantly, when he knows you won't shoot an arrow in his Achilles' heel, he can let down his guard. Having that sense of safety will make it possible for him to share his innermost thoughts with you, and *that's* where you'll find intimacy. He may speak about the values he hopes to impart to the children, what he's imagining the two of you will do when you're old, or how he lost a dog he loved as a kid. He might talk about what he imagines it would be like to live on a ranch, go to the moon, or add on to the house. Intimacy is made up of lots of little tender conversations—sometimes silly, sometimes solemn—that he wouldn't have with anyone else in the world. The details of the conversation are less important than the fact that the conversation is happening and connecting you spiritually.

But how exactly do you find your way to those tender conversations if you haven't had them in a while? How do you find the oomph to become respectful when you're in the habit of nipping at him, or you just don't feel he deserves your respect?

By taking small steps until your habits have changed. You already have more clarity about what respect means to your man, which is a great start. Later in this chapter I'll describe disrespect so you can start to see it yourself. Just being able to identify disrespect helped me stay focused on the goal of respecting my husband, which went a long way toward helping me find the intimate relationship I always wanted.

Preserving Your Dignity

Disrespecting your husband's choices is like pricking him repeatedly with little pins. Imagine living with a porcupine. That's what it's like for him.

It's no fun to be the porcupine either. You find that your man doesn't want to get close to you because you're so prickly. Shedding those pricklers by treating your life partner with respect is a gift for him, but it also dramatically improves your self-respect because your husband will reach out to you, making you feel loved and wanted. Instead of having the unpleasant feeling of always repeating yourself or arguing, you hear yourself sounding more calm and dignified. You won't be haunted by the horror of wondering if you've become that overbearing teacher you had in grade school, or the micromanaging boss, or your mother on her worst day. Since you don't respect someone who's ordering everyone around, you don't respect yourself much when you hear it coming out of your own mouth either.

I remember how unattractive and remorseful I felt when I would boss John and complain. In the middle of my tirade, I thought I was saying what had to be said, but my self-respect deteriorated with each harsh word. No matter how justified I felt yelling or correcting, I inevitably beat myself up afterward, and that only made me feel worse.

Now, I treat my husband respectfully not only to cultivate closeness in our marriage, but also to preserve my dignity. I don't miss the hostility hangovers.

The “I Was Just Trying to Help” Syndrome

A lot of us have an unconscious refrain jingling in our heads that goes like this: “I know better than he does. I’ll help him do it right.” With this background music, we quickly develop an air of superiority. We feel qualified to instruct our husbands on how to vacuum the carpet, talk to the children, and negotiate with their colleagues. All the while, we tell ourselves that we’re just *helping*.

Unfortunately, “helping” in wife language translates into “criticizing” in husband language. All those comments about how everything should be done are daggers of disrespect. Our generous “help” goes completely unappreciated, which makes us resentful. Somehow, we get so used to correcting our husbands that we don’t even hear the harshness in our own comments or notice how much we sound like the boss rather than the affectionate wife we set out to be.

The Mother Complex

If you feel like the only adult in the family, think about this: Your husband manages to communicate, problem-solve, and produce in his job. Clearly he has the skills to do the same at home. So why doesn’t he? If you feel like you have an extra child instead of a husband, check to see if you’re treating your husband like a little boy instead of a capable man.

When I correct, criticize, or tell my husband what to do, I automatically become his mother in that moment, which means he doesn’t see me as his partner. There’s no greater turn-off for me than seeing him as a helpless little boy and there’s no bigger intimacy killer for him than feeling like he’s with his smother-mother. Your husband may not say so, but he likely feels the same way.

Your husband won’t tell you he feels emasculated when you