

## FAMILY ARGUMENT TURNS INTO CELEBRATION

A little slice of life as only real life can provide.

A couple came to see me some time ago, poised on the brink of divorce. The wife, Janet, was beyond frustrated at her husband's unwillingness to be loving and kind to her when it was readily apparent that he was more than able since he was a devoted and loving father to their daughters. She said their family life was not "fun." I asked her what she meant by that but she wasn't sure; she just knew it was true.

The husband, Skip, was totally fed up with his wife's excesses. She spent too much money, talked like she was shot out of a cannon, and was generally too big emotionally.

I saw Janet and Skip together and Janet individually. At first, there was no movement. They would come for their appointment each week and engage around the issues but then they would ignore each other the rest of the week. Neither was willing to budge.

Over time and little by little, the pieces of their relationship came apart and we put them back together differently. They moved to a place inside where they were willing to forgive each other and let go of the many hurts that had accumulated over the years. Janet got smaller and calmer, and Skip became more receptive and available to her. The marriage became much sweeter and finally really good.

One night, I called my voice mail to retrieve my messages and there was one from Janet, who I had seen earlier that day. "I have a funny story to tell you," she said. "I'm upstairs with the phone in the bathroom, giggling my brains out. We just finished dinner. Nothing fancy, just some pizza. A little tiff broke out between Skip and Judy (daughter) over a piece of pizza and good manners. Skip tried to tell her about sharing. Judy said, 'Dad, the reason you're telling me about sharing is that you want the slice of pizza.' They started a little thing back and forth. It really never escalated very high but it was getting going. All of a sudden from the other side of the room, Carrie (daughter) calls out, 'Where's Maxine

when you need her? Get the miracle worker in her. I've never met the woman but we may be needing her.' Whereupon the whole family was on the floor laughing so hard. We just cracked up. I'm not out of your eyesight for five minutes and we're already talking about you."

How wonderful that this family is now so comfortable with each other that they can play with what used to be a cause for crisis between them.

Janet knows what she means by "fun" now. She means spontaneous and trusting. She means being able to be authentically yourself in the moment and not have to worry that you'll be criticized or found unacceptable.

I felt joyous for them, for the goodness they had created by their strong commitment to each other and their girls and by their willingness to tolerate the fear and pain of personal growth, ie self-reflection, self-knowledge, and taking ownership. My heart was full and it overflowed out my eyes.

P.S. It is with Janet's and Skip's permission that I share this with you.