

Over time, passion dries up, life loses its shine and marriages simply 'flatline'. Fortunately, you can rekindle a relationship.

Does your marriage need a tune-up?

By GRACE CIROCCO

"For one human being to love another; that is perhaps the greatest work, the last and final work for which all other is but preparation". ~ R.M. Rilke

THE passion is gone – we are rarely intimate."

"He never has time for me".

"She treats me like a child."

"I'm just fed up."

These are just some of the comments I hear from couples who come to my Relationship Renewal Retreat held in beautiful Niagara-on-the-Lake, my hometown. Some come because they just need time away; while for others it's more serious.

"You're our last hope," one woman wrote in a recent email to me.

According to a recent study, more than one third of marriages in Canada will end in divorce before the 30th anniversary. Is it possible to have lasting love?

The path of love is glorious but it can also be treacherous. I have seen the faces of those who have been in relationship wars and it is painful to watch. When both egos are on the line, the chemistry can be poisonous and sometimes even dangerous.

But for many others, there is no war, just a quiet desperation, secret tears, and a painful longing to understand why they let it slip away. They yearn to be seen by their partner



– to have an authentic connection of the heart. They want passion and romance. Why do our best intentions for lasting love often end in misery?

I believe the lustre in relationships is lost when we lose the connection to ourselves. Many of us don't know who we are or what we want. We're overwhelmed with life's demands. Then we have children and we get caught up in the banalities of everyday life – those practical details of living. We don't make time to look our beloved in the eye and remind ourselves why we fell in love with him or her. Passion dries up. Life loses its shine and marriages "flatline".

The enemy for the 21st century marriage is "flatlining" – and why shouldn't it be? Most of us are on medication for some type of anxiety or depression disorder – why wouldn't this valley also affect our relationships?

Author Og Mandino wrote: "Most people die at 40 and then are buried at 80." In my line of work, I see many people who have given up on life or who are just *putting in time* until

retirement. How can our marriages and relationships be alive if our souls are not?

Here are some ideas for you:

1 Stand in the fire together.

When our love runs deep, life can get messy and unpredictable. We can touch the centre of our joy but also the core of our sorrow. Divorce or separation is sometimes necessary but many times it is an escape from feeling the valley of the heart. If you have the courage to stand in the fire together in truth and vulnerability, then I believe you can heal your past wounds and create harmonious unions. Call me a romantic or an optimist, but I've seen it and it is my greatest professional high.

2 Share your feelings.

This is so difficult for most couples. They think their problem is "communication" but the real problem is that they're communicating about the wrong things. If you want that emotional intimacy (necessary ingredient for physical intimacy), then you must peel back the layers of masks and unburden your heart. Most people find this terrifying because they fear their partner's reaction. This is something that I teach couples how to do without judgment or fear. If you want to get started in this department, practice talking about your feelings by keeping a journal and then reading your feelings to your partner. Make sure you "own" your feelings and don't blame them on your partner or anyone else. This will trigger the compassion button in your partner's heart. Feelings connect you to what's sacred within you and when you share them with your mate they build the bridge of true intimacy, and real love.

3 Find time to hug everyday.

Not touching in our culture has become a sick habit. We need touch to survive and in our gardens of love, a hug can be magical. In my workshops, I teach people how to hug heart to heart. I recommend you choose a

8 signs your marriage may need fixing



- You feel like you're drifting away
- You don't feel "seen", loved and appreciated by your partner
- You keep having the same arguments over and over
- There's little or no physical intimacy
- You're bitter and resentful about past hurts
- You no longer kiss good-bye or hello
- You crave "something more" in your relationship
- Your anger towards your partner is spilling into other areas of your life

favourite song, play it and then just hold each other in an embrace. The song has to be a special song for the two of you... maybe the song you first danced to. If you don't have a song, choose one you both like and make it your "hug song".

4 Commit outrageous acts

of love. All that we do, all that we strive for, and all that we want is to love and be loved. Don't blame your partner for the love you may lack. Instead whatever you want, give it away first. Give a kind word at the end of a busy day. Make a fuss over her, prepare him a special meal. Hug. Read poetry in bed. Leave a warm fuzzy in a lunchbox, or on voicemail, e-mail, or in their car. Listen. Pay attention to the little things. Plan something special just for the two of you. Write them a letter and list all the things you love and appreciate about them. Celebrate birthdays, anniversaries. Do something active together – bike, ski, exercise. Talk. Please talk. Love is the reason for the journey. Love heals the past, gives joy to the present, and sends hope to the future.

5 Find the right gardener.

Where did we get the idea that we're supposed to be experts on everything? If something is not working with our car, we take it to a mechanic. If our tooth hurts, we go to a dentist. Why then do we not seek help until oftentimes, it's too late?

Your relationship is like a garden. You must notice if the plants are wilting or fading. And then if you don't have time yourself or the expertise to diagnose why some parts of your garden are not picking up even after careful attention, then you need to find the right "gardener" who will help you. **W**

• Grace Cirocco is a best-selling author, a relationship "gardener" and the creator of the Relationship Renewal Retreat held in Niagara-on-the-Lake every few months. For more information visit www.RRRweekend.com, email grace@gracecirocco.com or call her office at 905-688-0868.