

Fighting Divorce in an Unusual Way in Bowie

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The latest statistics show that nearly one out of two marriages that take place today in the United States will end in divorce — and that two out of three second marriages will break and three out of four third marriages. It seems like we Americans not only have become pretty poor practitioners of marriage but that we don't even learn from experience!

And why is the divorce situation important in the U.S. today? Isn't a trip to Splitsville just another of life's choices, and then that's the end of it, and it's on to the next choice? Not really. Once a couple divorces, it unleashes a hail of dreadful darts onto the couple, their family, and society. It's kind of like when HIV infects a human cell. The virus multiplies in the cell, which then bursts, releasing a host of viruses that go on to sicken the body.



District Pastor Randy Francis introduces Edward Abendroth of Bowie and fiancée Aika Becker at the Greenbelt, MD press conference on March 16, 2012.

In the same way, divorce usually “sickens” the ex-spouses with emotional pain and misery, torpedoes their finances (especially women’s), shrivels children’s well-being and self-esteem (leading to a greater rate of juvenile delinquency and educational underperformance), and puts pressure on governments to raise taxes, because of things like child support enforcement, child abuse and neglect programs, and welfare benefits to mothers who are dependent due to divorce and court-system costs.



Jack LaValley of Irvington, N.Y., founder of True4ever, spoke on the benefits of a marriage process that built teamwork between fiances and their parents.

So, what could possibly help our sorry situation regarding conjugal longevity here in this country? Enter arranged marriage. “What?” you say. “Isn’t arranged marriage some sort of backward, foreign, sexist, patriarchal, tyrannical, controlling, loveless practice? How can it possibly help — let alone exist — here in America?”

Well, according to new research by Dr. Robert Epstein, a Harvard Ph.D. and former editor-in-chief of *Psychology Today*, “With mainstream Hollywood-inspired marriages failing so badly in the U.S., I think we need to take a close look at other, more successful models for marriage.”

Since 2003, Epstein has done research comparing the romantic-marriage model with arranged marriage, which is still the world’s dominant, marriage model, widespread in Asia, Africa, and South America. What he’s found is most surprising. “Love,” he says, “grew over time in these [arranged] marriages. All of this looks much better, qualitatively different, from what we see in typical, Western marriages. In typical Western marriages, the trajectory of [romantic] feelings is downward [over time]. In all of the individuals [in arranged marriages] we’ve studied in these two studies, the trajectory of feelings is upward.”



Rev. Randy Francis served as MC at the press event.

He says that people from arranged marriages start out with romantic feelings toward their partners at an average level of 5.3 on a scale of 1 to 10. Fourteen years later, when Epstein interviewed the subjects, their feelings of love toward their mates had improved to 9.3.

While this might seem all rather foreign to Bowie, Maryland, it just so happens that a young man who grew up in Bowie and still lives here got married on Friday, March 23, 2012 in an arranged marriage. He is 23-year-old Edward Abendroth, of Mabank Lane, a graduate in finance at the University of Maryland at College Park.



Ray Mas reminded the participants that Ed Abendroth and his high-achieving brothers came into the world only because their mom, Diane Abendroth, had survived an ill-fated faith-breaking attempt against her in 1978.

Following the tradition of the Unification Church, founded by Rev. Sun Myung Moon of Korea, Edward's parents, with Edward's go-ahead, scouted around for a suitable bride for their son (he's one of five brothers). They lighted upon 24-year-old Aika Becker, of Charles Town, West Virginia. She studied fine arts and exercise science at Brigham Young University, where she was a member of the champion, varsity volleyball team. (She's considering going into pro volleyball.) Edward's parents, Bob and Diane, talked earnestly with Aika's parents, and finally decided to introduce the two to each other. They both knew they had their parents' blessing on the union, felt good about each other, and decided to go forward and make a marriage of it.

Edward and Aika traveled to Seoul, Korea, to participate in the main Unification Church Marriage Blessing ceremony, which was linked by the internet to dozens of satellite marriage ceremonies around the world, including one in Washington, D.C., at the Washington Unification Church, on 16th Street and Columbia Road NW. At the main ceremony in Korea, fully 25,000 people were either marrying for the first time or rededicating their marriages, all with the conscious purpose of saying no to divorce and to other problems that threaten marriages, families, and children today.

Edward and Aika have known each other for only a few months, but say they're "very excited" about finally tying the knot. And already they feel their love has grown — and will continue to grow.

This only bodes well for Bowie and for U.S. society in general. As Epstein says, "Unification Church and other arranged marriages can begin to teach us about the possibility of creating marriages in which two committed people work together over time to create stronger bonds—to build a love that gets deeper over the years," and thus benefits society, through nurturing the next generation, in profound ways.

The writer is a Bowie resident.