

# How far would you go to *SAVE YOUR MARRIAGE?*

*Charlie and Linda Bloom learnt that when the honeymoon ends, it doesn't have to be the end of the relationship*

**W**hen Charlie and I met through a mutual friend in our early 20s, I was clear from the beginning that I was very interested in getting to know him better. There was a strong chemistry between us, yet it quickly became obvious to us both that we were very different people. Charlie was a laid-back,

motorcycle-riding, guitar-playing hippy, whose relaxed attitude was very attractive to me. I was his polar opposite – driven, compulsive, goal-oriented and a meticulous planner who never left anything to chance.

Yet, for the first few years, we enjoyed a loving and exciting relationship. We got married in 1972 and spent a three-month honeymoon travelling in Europe.

In 1974, the first of our three children was born. The presence of a child, and then the addition of two other children in the few years that followed highlighted the differences between our personalities.

Charlie was much more laid back with the kids than I was. His attitude was less focused on discipline and order than mine, and that meant we were constantly in conflict.

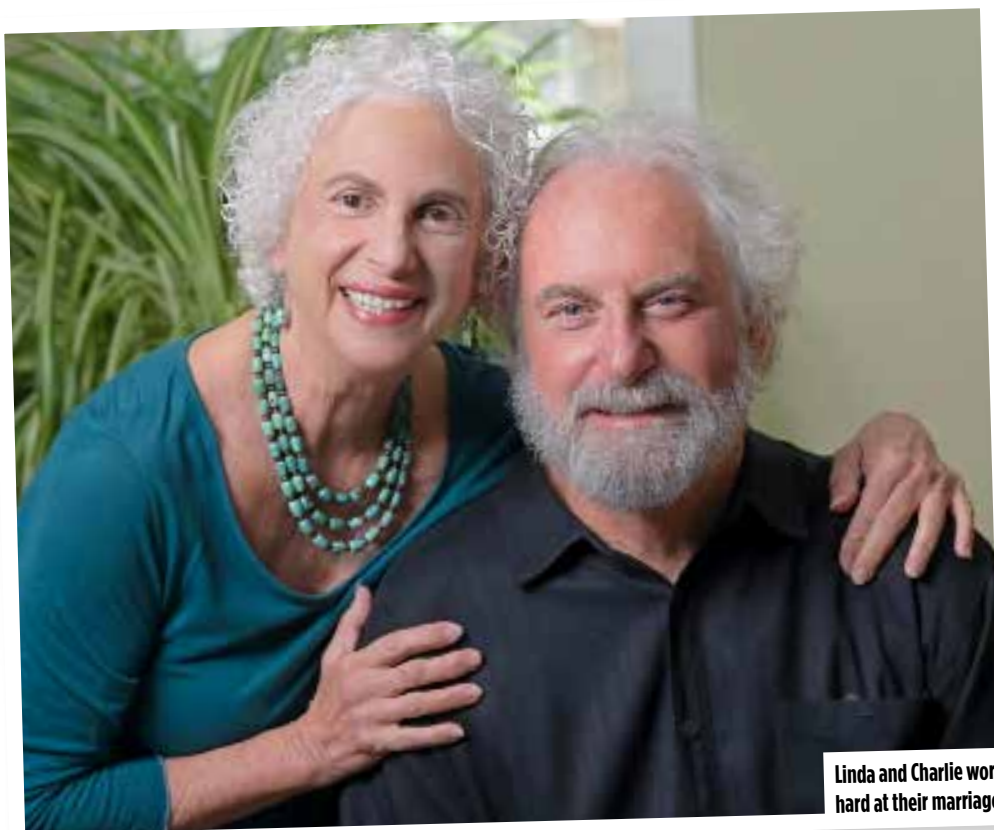
We both thought that our view was the correct one and we frequently called each other out for being wrong. We struggled to agree on how to care for the kids – from when they should do their homework, to what they were and weren't allowed to eat and do.

By now, we were both fully qualified, practicing therapists, but, despite our credentials, we found ourselves having the same types of relationship problems as our clients.

## Self-awareness

In 1984, Charlie agreed to attend a weekend couples' workshop with me. Together, we drove from our home in Sonoma, California, to Breitenbush, Oregon, for a four-day retreat that really opened our eyes to how each of us was contributing to the problems that we were experiencing and how it wasn't just the other person who was the problem.

We saw that nearly all of the other couples in attendance had the exact same problem that we did – believing that the other person was wrong and the guilty party, and that they were right and the innocent party. The



Linda and Charlie work hard at their marriage



facilitators helped us all to redirect the focus of our attention away from that and recognise our own faults.

We went home and practiced breaking the habit of blaming each other, but old habits do not break easily, and we did have our share of slips, falling back into blame and defensiveness. Eventually, though, we argued less and recovered from the ones we did have much, much more quickly.

Charlie recognised that I needed more structure and organisation, so he made the effort to think ahead more, making plans and adapting to my schedule.

Meanwhile, I learnt to let go a little bit, to enjoy the moment and stop stressing over the little things, like making sure the kids always did their homework and ate dinner at a certain time.

In 1982, Charlie took a corporate job

requiring him to do an enormous amount of travel. During his absence, I was essentially a single parent, running the household and raising the kids on my own. I began feeling resentful of Charlie's high-flying career and doubted myself, feeling like I'd lost my own identity.

Whenever Charlie was home, we'd have explosive rows, saying the most hurtful things we could think of. It was a dark time, and I realised, with a huge wave of sadness, I was losing respect for my husband.

'I fell in love with this laid-back hippy, but now, who is this man strutting around in a three-piece suit?' I told him. The truth was I still loved him, but I hated him, too.

We both began to recognise that sometimes a change in circumstance can require additional work in order to get back

on track. We'd let our issues fester for far too long and decided our only hope was to attend a couples' workshop again.

## Back on track

In the summer of 1986, we attended another weekend-long couples' retreat, which helped us to get back on track. We were reminded of some of the principles of effective conflict management that we had forgotten or neglected to practice.

After we came home, we instituted a tradition of having regularly scheduled weekly meetings. We each committed to holding them, the primary purpose being to make sure that we had a minimum of one time a week where we could share our deeper concerns, desires, needs, fears and longings without any fear of judgement.

These meetings have helped us increase our bond over the years.

Soon after, Charlie left his job and we started our own therapy business, where we

**'I doubted myself, like I'd lost my identity'**

could have more influence over our schedule. I'd get more help with the kids and the space to pursue my own career again and we'd have more time together to enjoy each other's company.

Since then, our relationship has grown stronger and, although I won't that say it's perfect, we've learnt how to use communication to help us through our issues.

I can honestly say that if we hadn't attended those relationship workshops, our marriage would definitely now be over. Last month, we celebrated our 49th anniversary, and not only do I still love Charlie, I'm more in love with him than ever before. And that's the truth!

## 'THEY'VE LEARNT TO APPRECIATE AND ACCEPT EACH OTHER'



**Psychotherapist Marcia Naomi Berger says:** 'The issue that was causing conflict between Linda and Charlie is not their

differences, but how each reacted to the other's style. By holding marriage meetings, Linda and Charlie have learnt to appreciate and accept each other, and to collaborate and communicate respectfully. They see the big picture – a relationship that mutually fulfils them both in all the important ways, emotionally and spiritually, as well as physically and materially. They now enjoy more romance, intimacy, and teamwork, and resolve issues much more smoothly.'

## 'Creating a great relationship does take time and effort'



**Charlie Bloom says:**

'From my own experience as a psychotherapist, I know how much work it takes to make a committed relationship last for the long term. The majority

of people do not have the skills and tools they need to communicate in a healthy way and some may not have had the best examples of relationships to draw on. But, when Linda and I started experiencing problems in our own marriage, despite knowing how beneficial outside help can be, I was reluctant to seek it.

'I was concerned that getting counselling or attending a couples' retreat would diminish the trust and confidence that my clients and colleagues would have of me, and that they would feel less confident in my professional expertise if they found out. But, with Linda's persuasion, I went along to couples' counselling and I was surprised by how much it changed the way I viewed things.

'Like so many people, I'd gone along believing that if only the other person would change their ways then things would be OK, reluctant to accept my share of the responsibility in our failing relationship.

'But with the help of the workshop's leaders, I quickly realised that I had a big part to play, too. Whenever Linda aired

her worries or resentments, instead of listening, I'd become defensive, even aggressive, and I'd interrupt her and shout over her. During the workshop, we both learnt how to communicate our feelings to each other without blame or judgement.

'It was hard at first, to keep my mouth shut and just listen to Linda while she spoke, but I knew that our relationship was on the line and that if I didn't learn the lessons that I was there to learn, our marriage would be over and our family would disintegrate. I did not want that to happen. It was hard for me to break lifelong habits that I had been practising and perfecting for years, decades even.

'I learnt that when you really want something, sometimes you've got to be willing to go out of your comfort zone in order to get it, and I really wanted to make my marriage work.

'Things like practising self-restraint, getting emotionally vulnerable, fessing up when I knew that I was wrong and apologising when I did or said something that I regretted has not been easy. I learnt a lot through the help that we received from some very gifted and committed teachers. Although Linda and I have had some hard lessons to learn and some hard work to do, I can honestly say that the end result for each of us has not only been worth the effort, but it has given us both riches greater than either of us had ever imagined. And it just keeps getting better!'

## OTHER OPTIONS

**Therapy isn't for everyone and can be pricey. Here are some alternatives which may still prove beneficial:**

- \* Consider low-cost counselling. There are some private practices and organisations that offer low-cost therapy. This may be a blanket fee for everyone, or they may offer concessions for those on benefits or low-income households. Never be afraid to ask about these when researching private therapists.
- \* Reach out to charities and organisations like Relate which may be able to provide free advice and support. See [relate.org.uk](http://relate.org.uk)
- \* Join support groups and forums. Talking to others who have experienced similar struggles can offer you advice and tools to try.