



Writings of W. Burney Overton

As I See It to Be

After The Divorce

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This one
is somewhat different from others I have written
in that
instead of expressing my point of view
on the subject,
I am expressing observations and impressions
gathered from fairly frequent contact
with persons in their upheaval
after the divorce.

At first
I had in mind to write in terms of both male and female.
I believe that the situation
is basically the same for both.
The same thoughts, feelings, fears, searchings,
and whatever else is involved in the adjustments
after the divorce.

I have decided
not to try to do that
but rather to write in terms of what I understand to be
the female point of view and experience.
By and large, men do not let their turmoil be known
as readily as do women.
They are the losers.
All that feeling
all that uncertainty
all that struggle to adjust
is covered,
and comes out in oblique ways
often to the detriment of the person
and the confusion of those around him.

I believe it would be so much better
if men too could be more open,
more expressive of their feelings,
more aware of all that is going on with them.

So this time
I am not trying to express my own beliefs and ideas
but what I have gathered to be the case
for many women
after the divorce.

As it turns out,
it is mostly in the form of unanswered questions,
uncertainties, insecurities.
I don't know that I have any answers.

After the divorce –
RELIEF – and then, DISMAY.
“After all these years together,
for good or ill,
can it be over so quickly?
My life situation totally changed
abruptly and with finality,
and almost no one seems to notice
or to care one way or the other.”

Then with the relief and the dismay
comes the flood of other feelings
and all the questions – the questions
for which there seems to be no answer.
Relief – turmoil – sense of failure –
anger – fear – feelings of guilt –
and loneliness – terrible, gnawing loneliness –
and questions and more questions
with so few answers.

The need for companionship is very great.
Even if family is accepting and loving
Even if the children are responsive and supportive,
there is no ONE to whom to belong
with whom to share
to hold and to be held.
Not just lonely, but alone.

Though there are many more divorces now,
it is still a couples' world.
Society is build around the understanding
that people come in couples.
Where in society
is the place for a single person,
especially one who is single because of divorce?

The need for companionship is very great,
for a sharing relationship,
for closeness and intimacy,
for caring for and being cared for,
for being priority for somebody,

and having somebody who is priority
to feel needed and wanted,
to have someone with whom to sleep –
not just the sexual part –
to have someone to share the bed,
to touch,
to hold,
to feel his warmth,
to be touched and held,
to get the messages of belonging and specialness.

How are all these needs to be met
after the divorce?

It almost seems as if the only answer is
to find a man as soon as possible
and so to be back in a relationship
intended to meet them.

But that means to give up
the new found freedom –
to move right back into a situation
that may be much like the one that has ended.

What about single life?
Maybe it should be tried for a while
before establishing another permanent relationship.
Maybe enough of the needs can be met
in partial or incomplete relationships
while the new freedom is being explored.
Maybe. How is one to know?

And besides,
there is that sense of failure
about the relationship that has ended.
Did I really do the right thing?
Did I try everything I should have tried to make it work?
Should I have hung on a little longer?
With a little more time, would he have changed
as I wanted and needed for him to change?

Divorce means that I have failed
in the most important relationship of life.
How can I even think about trying it again?
I am afraid to try it again.

Now I'm not sure about my own identity.

Who am I, really?
How am I seen by others – and especially by men?
Am I attractive – desirable – pretty – beautiful –
to the men that I meet –
even those with whom I am in just casual contact?
Do they see me as someone with whom they
would like to be friends, or whom to care?
Can I draw persons to me – men especially –
and make them care about me?
Am I – will I be – accepted and valued?

After the divorce, it seems to be the process
to discount self –
to insist – almost fiercely – that there is self-worth –
to wonder and worry about the reactions of others –
both male and female.
How will wives see me? How will they react?
Do I dare be friends with their husbands?

There aren't any guidelines.
It is a new road being traveled.
There is hardly any way to know what to expect.

And with it all,
there is that anxiety about self
that pushes to go out and find out how people react –
to look for signs and signals
that affirm and confirm.

The feelings become very intense –
almost consuming.
I must find out. I must know.
So, after the divorce, I am very vulnerable –
or, at least I feel that way.

There is – or may be –
enough hunger for attention – companionship – closeness –
to feel cared about and to be included –
that even the most casual interest
gets interpreted as a move toward a more
intimate and sharing relationship.

Thoughts and feelings about the person
can become almost obsessive.
Every word – and contact – and gesture
exaggerated to mean what I need it to mean

after the divorce.

Then that raises questions about which are “passing contacts”
and which are really sincere interest
and affirmation and caring.

No matter how unsatisfactory or unpleasant
the marriage was –
nor how glad to be free of it –
the desire to move toward another marriage
in the hope that it will be all that the other was not
continues to be evident.

At the same time
there are feelings against ever risking another marriage –
feelings of caution and guardedness.
Maybe the thing to do is
either to try for multiple relationships
and to avoid entanglements in one –
or to be in only a few relationships
while testing to see just what the potential may really be.

This time, I want to be sure.
I don't want another failure.
So caution – and tentativeness – and no commitment
become the guidelines.

If there is to be much contact with men
the dating scene must be faced.
It has been a long time.
Will I know how to act?
How do I meet suitable men anyway?
How do I know that they are for real
and not just trying to exploit me?

Men seem to think that a woman who has been married,
or who has been sexually awakened,
is so in need of sexual attention
that she will fall into his arms
and into bed with him
as soon as he makes himself available
and lets her know that he is willing to serve her in this way.

But, if there are to be involvements with men,
The dating scene must be faced.
And that raises questions about life style.
What is an appropriate single life style?

Do I play around – not serious lest I scare him away?
Do I have sex with him
as my part of the expenses of the date we have?
Do I accept his sexual advances,
And so, for a brief time,
have the warmth and closeness in bed that I need and want?
What about my sexual needs and desires, anyway?
Do I not have a right to have them met?
Do I have to be celibate just because I am not married?
Do I have to wait until “Mr. Right” comes along?

How does one behave in the dating scene?
What about the conflicts I feel
between my needs and desires on the one hand
and what I believe on the other?

Why worry about these questions?
No one has expressed any interest in dating me –
at least very few and they infrequently –
and some of them just aren’t who I want.
It has been a long time since the divorce
and I appear to be no closer to dating relationships
than I was right after the divorce.

My self-image suffers, and I feel angry about it all.
Sometimes I even begin to entertain
thoughts of going back to my former husband.
Maybe it wasn’t so bad after all.
Maybe it could work another time through.

And then there is the matter of the children.
They need me
and there is no one with whom to share the responsibility
of raising them – of meeting their needs.
I get angry about this too.
He wasn’t much of a father when we were married –
or maybe – whatever else is said about him,
he was always a good father to the children.

Now that we are divorced,
I have the care of the children.
Mostly, it works out okay
except that they have to have baby-sitters
so I can work
so we can have enough to live on.
And then they are always there to be taken care of

and no one to look after them
when I want and need to be doing something away from them.

I love them.
I love them very much
and sometimes I feel so burdened by the responsibility
and so fearful of the task of parenting all alone.

Then, of course,
there is the business of the care of the house
and property, and car.
Whether or not I have the ability and the interest
To do these things,
they have to be done
and there is no one to share the load.
This stirs anger, too.
It feels as if it isn't fair.
He is free from all these responsibilities
And I have them all without any help.

I have to deal with the reactions of my friends and family, too.
They are loving.
They are well meaning.
They are concerned for my well-being.
And they advise me –
They ask innumerable questions –
they want to know how I am getting along
and want to tell me what to do and not to do.
They warn me. They suggest to me.
They get upset when I do not act on their suggestions.
I feel as if I can't live my own life.
I don't want to hurt them.
Sometimes I just want to be loved and left alone.
I don't know how to tell them so they will understand
and not be hurt or feel rejected.
They really do love me.

The biggest question of all is
Are there no answers to all my questions?
Do I just have to stumble through this painful
adjustment time
not knowing when I am making mistakes and
when I am not?
Is there no help for a person
after the divorce?

Recently I heard a sermon on
the pressures and stresses of life
and how to be relieved of them.
After having discussed the pressures and stresses at some length,
the preacher suggested four things to relieve them.
I have forgotten what they were.
They were palliatives that suggested
such things as – be brave – be patient – trust in the Lord –
but nothing very concrete.

Are there answers to the questions that arise
after the divorce?

Well, yes and no.
Some of them – many of them –
go with the process of readjustment and eventually
find their own answer.
Some of them are answered
when the decisions are made about life relationships –
another marriage or not – career – single life – or what –
and one gets on with the process of living.

Some are answered –
especially those having to do with self-image
and with being in relationships –
when one reasserts one's own self-worth
and re-evaluates the competencies and abilities
to meet the challenges of life – single or married.

When I am faced with similar questions,
whatever the situation out of which they arise,
I do a good deal of introspection.
I look to myself to see what is really going on with me.
Whether I like how it looks or not,
I own it – and my feelings –
and re-affirm my knowledge and my belief
that I am valuable and worthwhile
by the Grace of God.
And then I get on with working out
what kinds of adjustments I want to make.

If I am fortunate enough to have a loving
and understanding friend – male or female –
who will listen with patience
and not try to offer solutions
or find answers,

I will make use of that friend.
Tell – or write –
And let the deep struggles and doubts and fears be known.
Let them surface and be outside.
In the clear light of day
they are much more manageable,
and often what to do – how to decide –
becomes evident.

If I am not so fortunate,
much can still be accomplished
by doing a lot of writing,
thereby externalizing and identifying
what is going on
and giving the answers a chance to become apparent.

So I talk to trusted friends.
Write down what is deep inside.
Know that the feelings and the questions
go with having been divorced.

It is, in many ways,
a new life.
Turmoil – and doubt – and fear – and anger – and feelings of guilt –
and loneliness –
all go with it for a while.

And then the resources of life that I already have
begin to assert themselves.

After the divorce
life goes on
and I rise to the occasion
and find the way.

The greatest resource I have
is my knowledge of the Love of God
my faith that I am loved unconditionally –
divorced or not.

So, gradually,
the confusion clears.
I find my way.
I pick up the threads of my life
and renew my knowledge of the values of my life.
I am not so afraid.

I have let the feelings of guilt go.
I have found ways to cope with the loneliness
that suit me and meet my needs.
I no longer need to feel angry.

The time
after the divorce
is a transition time
stormy and confused
and the wilderness journey comes to an end.

I can count on it.