



Writings of W. Burney Overton

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I am in love.

Because I'm in love, I hear bells and whistles. My heart and mind are singing. I have all these wonderful undefineable feelings. My life is full of promise as it has never been before.

The girl of my dreams has come into my life. When I am with her, my problems seem to disappear. All's well with my world. It is mine to conquer, and I can do it.

How can I possibly describe the feeling? I'm in love. We're in love. Our destinies are joined. I'm absolutely sure of it. Nothing is more important than that we be together forever, I tell myself. We cannot – we must not – deny the expression and fulfillment of our love. Nothing must be allowed to stand in the way.

I didn't know it was going to happen. I didn't plan for it to happen. But it did and I knew. In a breathtaking, mind-boggling moment, I knew.

I'm in love. I'M IN LOVE.

When we are together, everything is so “right” between us. We never run out of things about which to talk. We enjoy everything we do. We have so much in common. Nothing is hidden between us. Even when we get crossed up, we work it out. We are meant for each other. I'm sure of it. Surely everyone will understand that we must join our lives in marriage – a union made in heaven where every day will be a day of love and romance. Even if they don't, we really don't have any other choice. That's how it seems to us.

Everything in our experience supports the rightness of our being in love and of our getting married. Story, and movie, and television paint the picture clearly. Two people, meant for each other, but not knowing it yet. Things happen. They resist. They fend off. They deny. And then the moment of discovery comes. They look at each other. They kiss. They embrace. And their passion cannot be denied. They are in love, and all things else in life take second place. And, of course, the obvious message is that their life together will be characterized by continued passion, much joy and satisfaction, and no problems to be solved – the fulfillment of all their dreams. Therefore they must join their lives, no matter the cost of doing so.

The reason people marry is because they are in love. We know that, so, with appropriate fanfare, we are married, and our idyllic, romantic life as husband and wife begins.

But it doesn't stay idyllic and romantic. Somehow it isn't quite like we thought it would be. Soon, much to our surprise, we begin to encounter rough spots.

Even though we try hard, the bells and whistles gradually become silent. The singing stops. The wonderful undefinable feelings fade away. Things aren't so right

between us. We don't talk much anymore. When we do, we seem to get crossed up with each other and to argue, instead of working the issue through. Then we turn away from each other in anger. The glow is gone. The romance isn't there. Instead of really listening to each other and taking each other into account, we tend to feel neglected, ignored, and not understood. At least I do.

Instead of trying to please or understand each other, we criticize each other for not doing so. We don't laugh much anymore. We seldom touch or embrace. Our sexual encounters are less frequent and lacking in passion and in the spontaneous expressions of the love we once felt.

I was so much in love. There was such promise. The future looked so bright. And now, so much of the time, we are miserable, and sad, and fighting with each other. Or we just ignore each other. I don't even feel in love any more.

What has happened to us? What has happened to me? Where has the romance gone? Why isn't our marriage working out as we thought it would?

What has happened?

Believe it or not, what has happened is almost inevitable when "in love" is the reason for getting married. Being in love is a very special experience. It just doesn't provide what is needed to enable a marriage to work out in satisfactory and fulfilling ways.

When the glow is gone, some couples, consciously or unconsciously, start looking for someone else with whom to be "in love", and soon decide to end their marriage and go their separate ways.

When the glow is gone, other couples endure a miserable existence, unwilling, for whatever reasons, either to go their separate ways, or to do the hard and satisfying work of figuring out how to have a fulfilling and satisfying life together.

When the glow is gone, yet other couples confront the realities of what is going on and figure out what to do to have a fulfilling life together with love both a basis and an outcome. They find ways to experience "in love" anew. They make romance a part of their experience. They work out what it means to be happily and satisfactorily married to each other. The outcome is that they find they have a deep and abiding love for each other, and a marriage that works.

But I don't have to wait until I'm married to explore the potentials for satisfaction in a marriage.

It's true, of course, that "in love" people encounter difficulties before they marry. They have stormy times, and face uncertainties about whether they will actually – or should actually – be married to each other. However, in the end, in the stories as they are

told, love is not denied. It conquers all, and, finally, the two are together in marriage. And, of course, they live happily ever after. End of story.

But it doesn't work out quite like this in real life. Being "in love" can't set the reality aside.

In real life, marriage tends to be mundane and ordinary and routine and every day with a fair share of crisis and trauma – in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, as long as we both live. Or as long as we stay in the marriage.

There are bills to pay, responsibilities to meet, difficult times to endure, disappointments and frustrations to which to adjust. Most of the time, marriage isn't very glamorous. And, unless we deliberately see to it and build it in, there is very little romance.

But mundane and ordinary and routine and everyday doesn't have to be bleak and unfulfilling. Love doesn't have to be absent. Marriage can be the most loving, romantic, joyous, fulfilling, satisfying experience of our life, even in the midst of difficulties, hardships, and frustrations. And it can be sustained at that level.

Let's put "in love" in perspective and see it as a time to really find out if we are suited to be married to each other. Then let's touch some of the factors that enable marriage to be what it can be.

Being in love is wonderful. It just isn't a very good reason to marry, although it may be a necessary and important prelude to deciding to be married. The experience of sharing with (getting to know) each other is exciting. If we are willing to be realistic about it, the "in love" time gives us a chance to discover things about ourselves and each other that tell us whether or not a lifetime together is feasible for us. If we are in touch with the realities, we will make no quick decisions about being married. We will use our "in love" time to experience and explore and find out if, in fact, we have enough in common to sustain a happy marriage. Being in love won't tell us, but it can provide the setting in which we can find out.

To really find out, all sorts of things need to be taken into account.

To any relationship, especially to marriage, I bring myself. I am the product of my environment and my family. Early on, I developed values, goals, ways of functioning, role concepts, and attitudes. I decided some things about who I am and how my world is supposed to function. I put together ways of compensating, adjusting, protecting myself, using my power, and of keeping my world as I see it intact. The outcome is that I have a strong sense of my own identity, whether it be positive or negative. In a manner of speaking, everything is in place for me. As long as I believe it is in place, I feel secure.

And it is very important to me to feel secure.

Moreover, I tend to assume that how I see my world is how it is, and that, if you see it correctly, you see it the same way I do. If you don't, obviously, I tell myself, you are wrong.

There are many other factors to consider. I need to ask myself some very important questions and really work out the answers.

How well do I know myself? And you?

Given my growing up experiences, how do I feel about and react to men?
Women?

Do I tend to be:

dominate or submissive?

introvert or extrovert?

a loner, or very much involved with people?

What is my view of marriage? What do I really expect of myself, my spouse, and us? What do I believe our roles are?

How do I go about trying to get what I want?

How do I react when I don't get what I want? Am I stoic, philosophical, resigned, angry, pouting, indifferent? How do I react?

How do I use my power?

How do I manage money, and what do I expect of you in this regard?

Where do I want and/or expect to live? In what kind of house?

What is the measure of success for me – and for you?

What about children? Do I – you – want children? If so, how many and when and under what circumstances?

What really are my – and your – expectations in a marriage?

Believe it or not, this is not an exhaustive list of appropriate questions for me – and us – to rise as we consider whether or not we really want to be married to each other. The more I search for and identify answers, the more questions there are to be answered. Every one of them bears upon our relationship with each other and the future of our life together.

As I think about it, I can summarize the questions.

How do I see my world?

How do I see me in my world, and how do I function in it?

How do I see you in my world, and how do I see you functioning in it?

Do I see myself – us – as willing and able to be about the business of seeking answers to these, and so many other similar questions?

In all this, what is satisfactory to me, and what is not? What modifications am I willing to make to enable us to share a truly loving and satisfying life together? It is important for each of us, and both of us, to consider all these factors, and to do so together as well as separately.

If we choose to do it together, there is a process we can follow, with mutually agreed upon boundaries.

Let us be clear about our purpose. It is to really disclose ourselves to each other so that we both own what we know of ourselves and get to know each other more completely.

We agree to share our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, needs, expectations, etc., as much as we know them. We do this as information – information that is important for each of us to have – and without demanding anything of the other. We agree that we are disclosing ourselves in this way, seeking to understand each other more than reaching agreement.

In this context, it is neither necessary nor desirable to be defensive, nor to try to determine who is right or wrong. We end up with accurate information on which to base our decisions about being married in the first place, and about staying married.

As I think about all this, I realize that to do it involves commitment, determination, and a lot of hard work. It certainly means to move beyond "in love" as the reason for deciding to be married.

But, I tell myself, I don't want to lose all that goes with being "in love." Then I realize that I don't have to.

Falling in love brings us together and gives us the opportunity to start the process of building an in-depth, caring relationship. It puts me in a position to really consider what I want in marriage and in life. Having considered, I – we – have a basis for deciding about being married that offers some real possibilities for happiness and satisfaction in the marriage.

I must continue to remind myself that I bring my whole self to this marriage or this proposed marriage – good, bad, and indifferent. I hold in my hands – we each hold in our hands – the key to whether or not this marriage is and will be marked by their kind

of self-awareness and commitment that enables a deep and abiding and satisfying love for each other – the feeling of being in love – and the romance that can be.

Even though I believe being in love is not a good reason for deciding to be married, I believe being in love is wonderful and I don't want it ever to stop happening – not that there is much likelihood that it will.

In the midst of being in love, I want to do all the things that let me – you – learn if our being married to each other is feasible.

In the midst of being married, I want to do all the things that enable our marriage to be truly satisfying and fulfilling.

Love and romance are possible, feasible, and desirable in a marriage. What is indicated for it to be reality is for me – us – to do the hard and satisfying work that enables a fulfilling and satisfying life together marked by our love for each other and the romance we bring to our marriage?