

Partners

We sat one evening at the old kitchen table after our daughter's graduation and carefully looked at one another, each trying to judge whether the other was serious about the proposal. With our kids finishing college and now gone from the house, we had a little spare cash and could begin the home addition we'd always wanted. It certainly wasn't necessary at this point, more than enough living space surrounded us. Under the table, my foot felt the dog move, as if he sensed danger ahead. He may have worried that after ten years of his best efforts to raise a human family, this newfound world of peace was about to come to an end.

My wife blinked first, and I spoke, "Let's do it." I saw a twinkle in her eye that said, "We may be crazy, but I'm in if you are."

I'll spare you the painful details ... the new room grew larger even as we were drawing the plans, the idiots who worked on the structure (including yours truly) often had less enthusiasm than Egyptian slaves arriving at the pyramid each morning, the astounding costs continued to escalate before our eyes. But today we have a wonderful space that also doubles as an office for my wife's practice.

The two of us have accomplished many things in life we're proud of, both together and individually. But lately I've realized much of it wouldn't have happened without each other. I can feel sorry for those who never had a confederate with whom to wade into the deeper waters, or someone to prod them when sitting down appeared to be the safer option. It turns out life isn't about security. Smarter folks than I have said it's about challenge. And it's best done with a partner.

Looking back, I realize I knew nothing about how to find a partner, but when the first likely candidate came over the horizon, I didn't hesitate, I married her. Something told me there wouldn't be another. And I was right. Of the women I've known over the past half century, none would have been a better partner for me. Nor would any have put up with my quirks or temperament..

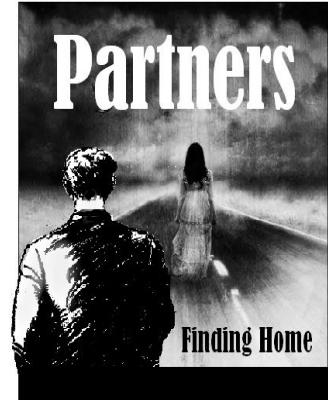
It took a special woman to pack up the house and to move everything we owned from city to city, while I carved out a career in different locations. It required an attitude of fairness to balance our tasks when later she pursued her own professional goals.

And after buying what the ad described as a "lovely old farmhouse," it took a mutual sense of humor to lighten the nights and weekends of sawing, nailing, painting and often cursing our way to the finish line. More than mutual goals, of course, our journey took courage, and a devotion to one another that enabled us to deal with the loss and heartache that a normal life brought to us, and to our children as well. An ideal partner is a loving anchor to the other, and an occasional inspiration, too.

Nothing better describes it than to say partners are partners. We scream and yell and curse and blame and stamp our feet ... me ... and cry and change our minds and change them again ... her ... and sometimes stagger on our way under the weight of misgivings and doubts. But without each other's encouragement, we'd never start the journey. Without each other's solace, we'd often be tempted to turn around and go home. But once you leave it, home no longer exists and you must go on to find a new one.

Stumbling around in the occasional darkness of life is best not done alone. My partner and I have weathered many stormy nights on the trail, but we arrived at places neither of us would have reached on our own.

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