

There were so many ways in which my husband and I failed to communicate what we really wanted to say or really meant. My husband was my best friend. We talked about a lot of things and had good communication with each other I thought. Yes, we had our disagreements occasionally over how to raise the children or what to do with the dog, but over the years we had drifted into a comfortable communication mode and often had a good laugh together. But so much was not being said. So much of our communication was only superficial. Our real feelings were lying unexpressed and hidden from each other. Sadly it wasn't until the last days of our twenty nine years of marriage that I finally realized that we had never really communicated about our deeply buried needs **to feel okay**. Much misunderstanding and heartbreak was created as a result as the following account will testify.

MISSED COMMUNICATION

We had been married for over twenty years, when one day my husband burst out vehemently and said

“I hate mashed potatoes! “

“But you've never told me before! I've been serving them to you for twenty years!” was my startled reply.

Thus began yet another “ah hah”

I grew up in a comfortable large home surrounded by a treed garden in one of the finer districts in the city. There was a living room, dining room, sun room and den besides the kitchen on the main floor. Four bedrooms, a sleeping porch and bathroom were upstairs. I grew up accustomed to having space around me. My mother, being proud, kept up the outer appearance that everything was okay after my father and her divorced when I was twelve. We continued to live in our home, but to make ends meet we ate a Spartan diet of canned Spam, salt cod, fried kidney, omelet or other simple fare. We never ate out. Even before my father left, we seldom dined at a restaurant. In rare dining out occurrences they were held to celebrate some special occasion. I grew up thinking that **“I am okay if I live in comfortable spacious surroundings”**.

My husband, however, grew up in an older part of town in the basement suite of an old six-plex with a gravel patch for a yard. When his family became too crowded, they moved several of the boy's bedrooms into the other part of the basement. Access to these additional rooms was by way of a rough hole broken through the concrete fire wall between two basement suites. In order to get into the other side one walked up a wooden style of several steps, and ducked through the rough opening. While their housing was not ideal, they were comfortable enough, and they ate well. My future mother in law would cook great meals with roasts of beef or turkey, with mashed potatoes, gravy, salads, and pie or a sweet for dessert. My husband grew up thinking **“I am okay if I can eat well.”**

In 1978 after all but our youngest son had moved away, I agreed when my husband wanted to move from our comfortable large two storey home to a new penthouse apartment being built that overlooked the city centre and mountains. It was relatively spacious, approximately 1876 square feet in size with two bedrooms, and two bathrooms. In addition to the large living-dining room and kitchen, there was a family room with fireplace, a bar area, and an office as well as a wonderfully large thirty feet by sixty foot roof top deck space. The view of the Calgary city centre, river and mountains was superb.

I went to work, putting all of my real estate income into the apartment customizing and building it to suit me and my own special designs. After all, I expected to live there the rest of my life since my husband was a professional with a city practice. Fitting out the apartment with a custom designed kitchen and a lot of custom woodwork became my special project. I was single-minded about what I wanted to create. When and if my husband would object to some of my plans I overrode his attempts at input and continued with my own plans to create my space, my “**I’m okay**” haven. I had stained glass windows made; extra sound insulation applied; and added a lot of additional wiring including lighted oak valances. A six foot square Jacuzzi tub was installed in one bathroom, separated from the master bathroom by a stained glass window that let light into the shower on the other side. A bidet and two shower heads were installed. I designed all of the oak cupboards for the kitchen and bathrooms with rollouts and special height shelves and higher counters to suit my height. I had a Jennaire barbecue installed and hidden behind matching oak panels was an ice and water refrigerator. French glass doors slid into wall pockets separating kitchen from the adjoining oak trimmed mirrored foyer. Planters with built in lighting lined the walls. The mirrored walls of the living room brought in views of the downtown buildings and mountains behind them. Another paneled wall in the living room opened at a touch to reveal storage shelves and drawers and behind it in the adjoining office were also built-in bookcases. Between the living and family rooms I had built in a bar with a sink and a bar fridge. Glass shelves set into the adjacent picture window frames displayed my paperweight collection. I selected brown mountain stone for the fireplace, cream sheer drapes to cover the windows, and leather chairs for the kitchen. I was creating my “**I’m okay**” space around me.

During this time of construction, and after we moved into the beautifully finished penthouse, my husband would take me out to restaurants a number of times each week for breakfast, lunch or dinner. Since my husband had never told me anything about his business finances and had rebuffed my attempts over the years to find out how our finances were, I had made an **assumption** that we must be doing really well financially, and continued to spend all of my earnings, a considerable sum, on outfitting the apartment. After all, I thought, one does not go out to dinner so often unless they have lots of extra money.

It was not until I could reflect upon it later, after we had had to sell the apartment in a hurry to solve my husband’s financial problems that I realized how poorly we had communicated with each other. During the time of his failing business ventures, while I

was building my dream space, we were going out to eat so often because that was my husband's way of making himself feel **"I'm okay"** when in reality his business was in trouble and he was secretly upset about it. He was attempting to feel good about himself in the same way that I had been by attempting to create my **"I'm okay"** space around me. The result was a totally missed communication that caused us both great sadness and loss. Perhaps we could have saved our marriage had we been able to really communicate openly with each other, allowing ourselves access to each others true feelings, and by letting ourselves be open and vulnerable to each other.

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