

# Children of a troubled marriage...

By Joanna Thurmann

Children suffer when marriage suffers. We may suspect that intuitively but we may not realize the full implications that a hurting relationship has on our children.

I received a poignant reminder of this when my 11-year-old son told me what he remembers as the worst part of our troubled marriage prior to my husband and I attending the Retrouvaille program for couples in crisis.

My son said "It was one of the times that you and dad argued so hard that he slammed the front door, got in the car and drove off. When I asked you when he is returning, you said 'I don't know. Maybe never. I guess he doesn't love you.'"

Ouch! I don't recall having said that. Then again, I don't recall many of the hurtful things I said in anger and hatred to either my husband or my children. As much as it hurts to acknowledge that it's possible, I have no defense.

Whether or not those were my precise words doesn't matter. What matters is that my children remember it so. They feared he would never return and each fight brought that reality closer.

I feel blessed and grateful that six years later, my two children are healed enough to be able to understand and vocalize the scars left behind by our near divorce. If we hadn't made it out of that storm, my children would have had little chance to heal.

They would have been dragged through custody battles and chauffeured between two households, and we would have infected them with our anger.

A troubled marriage scars children in many ways. Various studies point to lower academic achievement, increased risk for truancy, crime, substance abuse and teen pregnancy among children who grow up in troubled unstable homes.

According to the National Marriage Project (November 2004), people who grow up in a family broken by divorce are slightly less likely to marry and much more likely to divorce when they do.

The divorce risk nearly triples if one marries someone who also comes from a broken home. Parental divorce reduces the likelihood that children will graduate from college and achieve good jobs. Children who live with their own two married parents enjoy better physical health, on average, than those who do not.

Our children lived through our war, but they're incredibly strong precisely because the war ended and peace ensued. They witnessed our struggle to understand each other, to forgive and to become better spouses, parents and individuals.

I think they will not carry unrealistic expectations that marriage begins, continues and ends like a Hollywood romance. I also think they won't sit passively when challenges arise in their own relationships.

I trust they are learning the value of expressing their feelings, distinguishing them from judgments, and the willingness to change and accept others. I trust that now we are teaching our children crucial life and relationship skills and the Christian virtues of patience, temperance, forgiveness and compassion.

If you or someone you know is in a hurting marriage, consider marital counseling or attending the Retrouvaille program: [www.Retrouvaille.org](http://www.Retrouvaille.org). Healing your marriage is a gift to yourself, your spouse and your children.