

Introduction

“Be Honest with Yourself and Be Honest with Your Partner”

My father died a decade ago. Before receiving his diagnosis of pancreatic cancer, Dad had been a vibrantly healthy man. He took exceptional care of himself, and he took immense pride in his body. A weightlifter since adolescence, he continued pumping iron and riding his bike up to 100 miles almost every weekend at the age of sixty-nine. He was still running the business he started in his forties, designing and manufacturing diagnostic medical equipment. Dad was quite the well-rounded man: an athlete, an intellectual, highly educated, professionally successful, and—most important to him—a family man who cherished his wife and children. He would always greet me with a hug and a kiss, never concerned about putting on some macho façade because I am another man or because I happen to be gay. He embraced me, my life and my life partner. He was my support, my advisor and my confidante. He always seemed to have “the answer.” He loved life, and before he ever had a chance to retire, he was stricken with that most deadly and devastating cancer. He lived eight months of hell watching his well-cared-for physique and his vision of traveling the world with his wife of forty-eight years deteriorate before his eyes.

Not long after his death, my mother and I had the grim task of going through his belongings clearing the way for a life

without dad's physical presence. I took it upon myself to go through the more personal items in his nightstand and medicine cabinet. His electric razor, toothbrush, comb, cologne and deodorant all evoked memories of this man I loved dearly. Then there were the medications. Pain pills, vitamins, herbs, Viagra, more pain pills...Viagra? I looked at the label on the medicine bottle and, indeed, it was Viagra that had been prescribed by his oncologist! Dad was still having sex, or at least trying to, even after starting chemotherapy for cancer. (If you don't know, pancreatic cancer is a horrific disease because it is usually diagnosed in the late stages of its progression. Dad had thirteen "spots" on his liver at the time of diagnosis, meaning it had spread extensively. The treatment is extremely aggressive, despite its lack of long-term success, and patients often find themselves in tremendous pain, devastatingly weak, and filled with abdominal fluid.) Despite the pain, the weakness, and the despair, my father wanted to continue to make love to my mother.

My parents had always been a very physical and sensual couple. My father would often caress my mother's shoulders or waist, hold her hand or give her a kiss. When I was a child, I recall waking up at night and going down into our den to find my parents romantically dancing to soft music. I remember going into their bedroom on weekend mornings when my father and mother would stay in bed late. I asked my father what the blue package and balloon were on his nightstand. Dad said it was a special kind of bandage. And there was the time I went to the kitchen midday to get a snack to find my father sensuously reaching for my mom's behind.

I found myself struck by the fact that not only were my parents still having an active sex life into their late sixties after forty-eight years of marriage, but they were fooling around while my father was depressed, in pain, weak and dying of cancer. I loved the realization of my discovery, but I found myself feeling sad and filled with grief. To be sure, part of my personal pain was because of the loss of

my dad and all he meant to my mom and me. But, I also recognized how, at age forty-four, my own sex life with my partner of nineteen years had ended years before, and I had done virtually nothing to re-create physical intimacy in my relationship. I knew this wasn't about living up to some standard based on my parents' relationship, but I realized more than ever that I had been in a relationship that was sexually less than satisfactory for me. On the other hand, I loved my partner, and he was my best friend. The ambivalence I was feeling about my relationship came to a head with my father's untimely death. I found myself thinking "Okay, so I'm not going to live forever. How many more years do I want to go on without a sex life?" Clearly, it was time to end the silence around the issue of sex. I went into therapy with my partner.

After interviewing several psychotherapists, we agreed on someone we felt had a solid approach and would be even-handed. He was excellent with his base of knowledge and expertise, and my partner and I finally dialogued about the difficult issues we had avoided for years. After eleven grueling months of spilling our guts out to one another, we were no closer to having sex than we were when we began therapy. I felt that I had to make a decision about whether to continue to be in a relationship that was filled with love and trust, or leave because we were more like brothers than lovers. I felt I had nowhere to turn for an answer. I was wishing my father were around to give me advice.

It was a cold, gloomy, drizzly November day in Washington, DC. I decided to take the forty-five minute drive out to the suburban cemetery where we had buried my father fifteen months earlier. I sat on the damp ground at his grave and cried. I was in such turmoil and pain. I loved my partner. We essentially had grown up together. I couldn't imagine my life without him. But I did not want to continue to live without some sort of sexual connection, preferably sexual intimacy. I felt as though I was living with one foot out the door, and that didn't seem fair to me or my partner. I

couldn't bear the thought of hurting the man I loved, but wasn't I hurting him by staying with him while wanting to be somewhere else or with someone else? Our relationship had been monogamous, which essentially meant celibate. There was no one else in my life, but there was this nagging thought in my mind that there might be the potential for passionate sexual intimacy with someone else.

I closed my eyes, my face wet with tears and mist, and I asked my father what I should do. What came to me was his voice from beyond. The message rang true in my head and in my heart, and it was to be the basis of my life and my life's work. Dad answered, "*Be honest with yourself and be honest with your partner.*" My heavy heart sobbed uncontrollably as I knew this was "the answer." I also knew this was much easier said than done. But, it is the message I pass on to you as you go through this book. Finding the honest answer inside your heart is often tougher than sharing it with your partner. However, *both* pieces are necessary for intimacy.

Sex is an important part of most men's lives. Sex can also be terribly confusing and evoke conflicting emotions. You probably picked up this book because some aspect of sexual intimacy in your life is in need of fulfillment or creative enhancement. Or perhaps you want to be sure future relationships will work to create loving intimacy and be sexually fulfilling and sustainable. This book cannot substitute for good work with a qualified sexologist or psychotherapist. My professional work since the visit to my father's grave site has been in the area of intimacy and sexology with gay men. The book you are about to read, based upon years of clinical and personal experience, is arranged in a deliberate order. The step-by-step format for the reader is the same journey I take couples on in private therapy when they are experiencing concerns with sex and intimacy. I encourage you not to jump forward in the book but, rather, to read it in sequence because the unfolding is a process that builds upon itself.

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There is no work more vital for a loving relationship than honest dialogue. As per my dad's advice, start by having an honest dialogue with yourself, and then engage your partner. This book will explain why you have the challenges you face, how to talk about them with your partner, how to create deepening levels of intimacy, how to re-engage your sexual connection, how to create a relationship contract around your sexual interests and desires, and how to create space should your relationship require a time-out. Nothing successful happens in relationships without good, solid, authentic communication.

The purpose of this book is to take you (and your partner) on a journey to experience love, intimacy and peace of mind. *Intimacy is a deep, loving connectedness that results from an opening of heart and soul.* This opening allows both partners to experience themselves and each other at their innermost cores in their most vulnerable places. *Everyone has a fear of intimacy*—true intimacy, that is. True intimacy requires looking deep into ourselves. And what could be more frightening than looking deep into ourselves? Only sharing our most vulnerable, fragile places with the ones we love.

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Intimacy requires complete honesty and transparency with yourself and with your partner. When there is true intimacy, there is no defensiveness, there is no judgment, there is no secrecy, there is no hiding, and there is no ego needing to be strong or autonomous. However, intimacy is not dependency. Intimacy is about accommodating and surrendering to another—not to placate or control, but to enhance your own experience in the relationship. *Intimacy is about coming to know yourself in a way that is only possible in the deepest connection with another, resulting in growth for both partners and for the relationship itself.*

Creative intimacy, the focus of this book, is the mutual opening of heart and soul—by design—to discover deeper levels of loving

connectedness. Creative intimacy involves continuous self-discovery and self-acceptance, as well as sharing that deeper understanding and inspiration with our partner. *Creative intimacy requires honest disclosure and dialogue through innovative communication and physical exploration. While sex and intimacy are not identical, sensuality and sexuality both provide openings to our deepest, most vulnerable core selves.* Creative intimacy includes new solutions to dissolve barriers to both physical and emotional intimacy. Creative intimacy necessitates paradigm shifts for inventive re-contracting of a relationship on an ongoing basis. *Creative intimacy means maintaining a sense of authentic wholeness, while going deeper into vulnerable places with your partner.*

Creative intimacy is ultimately the exploration and the expression of your emotional needs and sexual desires in the context of your current authentic experience and feelings. This is achieved, first and foremost, through honest introspection, and then through open dialogue with your partner.

You may find some of your experiences are validated by the perspective I put forward. You may also find yourself seriously challenged and even angry or defensive reading some of the material in these pages. If (or when) some aspect of the book creates tension, anxiety or defensiveness in you, I ask you to consider the closely held belief(s) you may be hanging on to that could be limiting your vision or your potential. Sit for a while with the concept that is producing discomfort rather than dismissing it outright. Please note: I do not claim to have all the answers regarding gay sex and intimacy, but I do have an opinion and a perspective based upon my personal and professional experience. You do not have to agree, accept or buy into my approach or point of view. As Winston Churchill said, "People just disagree." Take from these pages what works for you and leave the rest behind. My intention is to stimulate your thinking, challenge your beliefs, and *give you permission to change your thinking and beliefs* within the context of

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the unique and respected perspective you bring to the material presented. I encourage you to make choices and changes based upon what feels right and works for you and your partner.

This book is written as a guide for:

1. Couples who are dissatisfied with the sexual connection they share
2. Couples who love each other but have lost passion or sexual desire for one another
3. Couples who have difficulty communicating effectively
4. Couples who are in conflict or near a crisis point
5. Couples who wish to explore new ways to create intimacy and connect physically with each other
6. Couples who wish to create an exclusive or open sexual relationship contract
7. Coupled men who are confused or ambivalent about staying in their relationships
8. Singles who want to improve their chances for creative intimacy and sustainable sexual passion in new love relationships
9. Singles who need some guidance for determining when a match is worth pursuing
10. Singles who wish to sidestep some of the pitfalls that create intimacy problems in long-term relationships
11. Professionals who work with gay men on sexual intimacy issues

You (and your partner) will want to commit to spending time, energy and effort working with the questions and exercises contained in this book. Don't rush your

exploration. When I take couples in therapy through this work, it can take six weeks to six months—or longer. Allow the process to unfold at a slow but steady pace. Don't let the time commitment discourage you. *If you don't do it, tomorrow will be the same as today.*

Bring to this journey an open mind, an open heart and a willingness to expand your consciousness about the meaning and experience of intimacy. The result will be the creation of a deeper and more satisfying intimate connection with your partner.

(The descriptive definition of intimacy on page xv was quoted, compiled and adapted from *Intimacy: Trusting Oneself and the Other* by Osho and *The Art of Intimacy* by Thomas Patrick Malone.)

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