

LOVE RIGHT NOW!
Published by Diane Anderson, MA
Registered Clinical Counsellor

LOVE RIGHT NOW! is an electronic newsletter with the purpose of helping people create love and happiness by transforming hurtful patterns of relationship!

Website:
<http://www.DianeAndersonCounselling.com>

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Feature Article:  
The Gift of Forgiveness!  
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1. Note from Diane:  
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Dear Readers,

Happy New Year! I hope you handled the stresses of the holiday season and created resolutions filled with self-care and compassion for yourself and others!

This month's newsletter looks at a very important component of any relationship---forgiveness!

You cannot be in a relationship and not have conflict! For those of you who say, "Oh, we never disagree," or "No, I never get mad at people," I say, "Who are you kidding?"

Conflict is a natural part of relationships. We need to know how to deal with conflict and the emotions that get stirred up because of it. Forgiveness is a conscious, intentional act toward resolving conflict.

Remember, IT IS NOT CONFLICT that is the problem! It's WHAT WE DO WITH OUR FEELINGS ABOUT CONFLICT that is the problem! Forgiveness is the process by which we address the feelings arising from conflict!

Having just come through the season where we wished for "Peace on Earth and good will toward others," I encourage you to put that intention into action this year. We all want (and need) peace...in our families, in our communities, in our nations, and around the world. Heal the hurts by seeking and granting forgiveness

This month's article, "The Act of Forgiveness" looks at "genuine forgiveness." Whether you have suffered from others' hurtful behaviours or you are the "wrong-doer," there will be helpful information on how to take action and repair the hurt in your life.

Until next time...happy loving!

Diane

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## 2. The Act of Forgiveness

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We have all been hurt, or have hurt others, in relationships. Whether intentional or purposeful, hurt happens.

Forgiveness occurs when we fully recognize and experience the emotions evoked by being hurt and are truly accountable to ourselves and others after conflict occurs.

Dr. Janis Abrahms Spring, psychologist and author, spoke in Vancouver in November 2006. Her latest book, *How Can I Forgive You?: The Courage to Forgive, the Freedom Not To*, reports that forgiveness comes in four forms. And she notes that not all forms of "forgiveness" are good for us!

She suggests a radical model of "genuine forgiveness" that asks as much from the offender as from the hurt party.

### FOUR APPROACHES TO FORGIVENESS:

Dr. Spring outlines four approaches to forgiveness: **CHEAP FORGIVENESS, REFUSING TO FORGIVE, ACCEPTANCE, AND GENUINE FORGIVENESS**. Both "cheap forgiveness" and "refusing to forgive" are, in her opinion, dysfunctional. Therefore, these approaches are viewed as less healthy and less healing for both the hurt party and the offender.

#### 1. CHEAP FORGIVENESS DEVALUES:

Cheap forgiveness is premature, superficial, and undeserved--"a quick and easy pardon."

Dr. Spring says that with cheap forgiveness, "forgiveness is offered before the hurt party fully processes the impact of the violation. [And] it asks nothing of the offender." Cheap

forgivers don't think through their actions or realize the consequences cheap forgiving has on the future of the relationship.

Cheap forgiveness creates "an illusion of closeness" in the relationship. Everyone is happy and on good terms, but nothing has been resolved.

More importantly, the hurt party doesn't fully acknowledge the extent to which they've been hurt nor come to terms with their injury. In fact, often the hurt party simply "let's their anger go" or buries their hurt too quickly and automatically in an attempt to obtain peace and preserve the relationship at any cost.

With cheap forgiveness, the offender has done nothing to earn forgiveness. In fact, sometimes the offender doesn't even know they have caused hurt because the hurt person never owns up to being hurt. The offender isn't (or can't be) accountable.

The hurt party minimizes the harm done to them, which Dr Spring notes can cause harm to one's physical health (e.g. recent studies link cheap forgiveness and unacknowledged emotional injury to cancer!)

#### CHEAP FORGIVERS TEND TO BE:

- CONFLICT AVOIDERS who fear retaliation or rejection by the offender, or who fear the intensity of their own anger and rage.
- PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE people who bury their true feelings and cover them up with a smile. They give the false impression that everything is okay in the relationship when they really feel anger and bitterness. They create physical or emotional distance from the offender without explanation and may display outright sarcasm and defiance.
- SELF-SACRIFICERS who believe putting others above themselves is a virtue. They devalue themselves! They treat themselves as second-class

citizens by doing things they would never do, nor expect, of others. They don't set healthy limits nor speak up for themselves.

**DISADVANTAGES OF CHEAP FORGIVENESS:**  
Keeping the peace may be an advantage in the short-term. But, cheap forgiveness keeps the two friends, coworkers, family members, and/or lovers at a distance from each other. A false intimacy is perpetuated and dominates the relationship. Neither person gets to grow and therefore the relationship is stymied.

At worst, cheap forgiveness may convey that you are agreeing with the offenders' mistreatment of you.

## 2. REFUSING TO FORGIVE: "YOU CAN'T HURT ME & GET AWAY WITH IT!"

On the opposite end of the spectrum are the Non-Forgivers. They maintain a grudge and never let the offender off the hook, even after sincere apologies are made. Non-forgivers may respond with distance, detachment, aggression, and, at worst, are filled with vengeance and retaliatory rage.

Like cheap forgiveness, non-forgiving may be an isolated event or a learned pattern of behaviour. If you have ever experienced "the silent treatment" then you have been at the receiving end of a non-forgiver's wrath.

Sometimes non-forgivers were raised in non-forgiving, merciless households where there was no tolerance for imperfection or mistakes. If there was chronic or severe abuse, then non-forgivers can feel empowered when they cut off contact with others or feel contempt or hate. If you were humiliated as a child, then you may become punishing, humiliating, and unforgiving in turn.

**NON-FORGIVERS TEND TO BE:**

- NARCISSISTIC: Narcissists are extremely self-involved, self-serving and self-centered. They have an exaggerated sense of entitlement and expect special favors and rights without recognizing others are entitled to the same. They frequently feel wounded and enraged when others don't do what they want as expect other people are here to serve and dote on them. Therefore, when people express individual opinions or needs contrary to the narcissist's, he or she blames the other person for the conflict.

If you apologize to a narcissist, your words are not accepted and have no impact. The narcissist, dependent on total admiration from others, cannot tolerate humility nor criticism. Nor can they accept their own part in the conflict.

Trying to make peace with someone who is forever unrepentant, unforgiving, and "always right" is futile. And crazy-making!

#### - TYPE "A" PERSONALITIES

These people are power-oriented, over-reactive, hostile, condescending, and defensive. They are impatient, self-centered, and demanding. They have difficulties in most relationships. Like Narcissists, they usually don't care about your feelings. They act arrogant and enjoy confrontations because they like the feeling of powerfulness that comes from annihilating others.

#### ADVANTAGES & DISADVANTAGES OF NOT FORGIVING:

Dr. Spring notes that not forgiving makes non-forgivers feel invulnerable. Humiliating others makes them feel powerful. Non-forgivers blame others for their own failures. And defeating their enemy in a forceful way can replace the emptiness and powerlessness (that truly haunts the non-forgiver) with the thrill of victory and a surge of adrenalin.

But not forgiving is an unproductive response to a violation. It prevents any positive resolution

to the conflict and cuts off any dialogue with the offender. It may restore "pride," but it prevents the non-forgiver from having any personal growth or understanding. True intimacy and closeness are never achieved and always longed for.

Refusing to forgive may bring temporary feelings of aliveness and ward off a recurrent sense of emptiness, but it poisons the non-forgiver physically and emotionally. (Again, studies show elevated blood pressure, higher risk of cancer and infectious disease in Type A personalities).

#### SO WHAT DOES GENUINE FORGIVENESS REQUIRE?:

Dr. Spring says that forgiveness requires the full experiencing of feelings by both the hurt party and the offender. It requires clear communication between BOTH parties to deepen understanding and to repair the disconnection that occurred. And it requires a commitment to quit the destructive behaviours.

But what if the offender refuses to acknowledge their own actions as hurtful? What if he or she refuses to acknowledge your feelings, or worse, dismisses and devalues you? What if the offender makes no commitment or effort to change their ways? If you don't want to give your forgiveness away cheaply and you don't want to become stuck in non-forgiveness, what can you do?

#### HEALTHIER ALTERNATIVES:

Dr. Spring offers two healthier forms of forgiveness: "Acceptance" and "Genuine Forgiveness."

#### ACCEPTANCE:

Sometimes we want to forgive, but maintaining contact with the offender is dangerous or self-destructive. Sometimes the offender will not acknowledge their role in hurting you or will not make the attempt to understand your pain.

Acceptance allows the hurt party to take control of their pain, make sense of their injury and create a relationship with the offender that makes sense and works for you.

While you may not be responsible for the harm that was done to you, you are responsible for your own recovery from that harm!

#### DR. SPRING'S TEN STEPS OF ACCEPTANCE FOR HURT PEOPLE:

##### 1. HONOR THE FULL RANGE OF YOUR EMOTIONS.

Anger, sadness, rage, grief, despair, whatever they are, identify them, experience them fully in your body, talk them out to someone. Do not let go of your grievance until you can fully honour the full extent of your feelings.

##### 2. GIVE UP YOUR NEED FOR REVENGE, BUT CONTINUE TO SEEK A JUST RESOLUTION!

Don't stay stuck in trying to make the other person "pay" for your hurt. Often that results in an escalation of hurts and an endless cycle of victim and perpetrator roles.

Real satisfaction comes from living a happy life. In other words, put your time and energy toward having your own hurt understood and validated rather than focusing on the offender. You will not undo your pain by "getting even" with or inflicting pain on the person who hurt you.

This doesn't mean that you shouldn't get the best resolution you can. If your wife cheats on you with your neighbour, look for the best legal resources you can find to get the best financial and child custody agreement you can.

Become your best self. Obey your own moral codes even if your offender didn't. Keep your own dignity and self-respect. Find a resolution that honours your own principles.

### 3. STOP OBSESSING ABOUT THE INJURY AND REENGAGE WITH LIFE

Obsessing only hurts you...replaying the injury over and over again hurts YOUR body, YOUR mind, YOUR heart. Your offender hurt you, but do not continue to hurt yourself by obsessing and re-exposing yourself to the suffering over and over and over again.

Know that obsession can be your body's reaction to a trauma. If you find you are having difficulty with obsessions, see a professional for help.

Letting go of obsessive thoughts is not the same as letting go of the injury. How you were hurt matters and you need to talk about that.

### 4. PROTECT YOURSELF FROM FURTHER ABUSE.

Accepting someone who is physically or emotionally abusive does not mean you have to continue to be abused. Acceptance means taking precautions to ensure your safety, setting limits, and sometimes saying, "You hurt me very much. I am angry and very hurt. I loved you deeply. Nonetheless, goodbye!"

Acceptance doesn't have to mean reconciliation. You can accept someone and still ban them from your life.

### 5. FRAME THE OFFENDER'S BEHAVIOURS IN TERMS OF HIS/HER OWN PERSONAL STRUGGLES

Don't let others determine how you feel about yourself. Remind yourself that while the person did something TO you, but that it wasn't necessarily ABOUT you.

Trying to see things from the offender's point of view, knowing about his or her personal history

may help you to dispel any mistaken assumptions that you caused or deserved your hurt.

## 6. LOOK HONESTLY AT YOUR OWN CONTRIBUTION TO THE INJURY

Own up to your own issues. Look honestly at yourself. do you REPEATEDLY find yourself in the role of victim? Are you FREQUENTLY told you are misperceiving things. Are you overly-sensitive across a range of your relationships?

What non-constructive ideas and expectations about your self, others, the world to you have that influence your response in relationships? Own up to your share of the problem.

## 7. CHALLENGE YOUR FALSE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED.

Identify the distortions in your thinking. Are you looking at things objectively? Do you have "black-or-white" thinking, i.e., you're perfect or horrible, right or wrong, good or bad?

Do you expect others to read your mind? Do you assume that you can know what the other person is thinking? do you get caught in over-generalizing..."He ALWAYS does this?"

Do you expect the worst? Do you jump to conclusions? Do you have "should" rules..."a woman who loves me should always hold me whenever I need her to."

Examine your assumptions and see if they really are helpful.

## 8. LOOK AT THE OFFENDER APART FROM THE OFFENSE; WEIGH THE GOOD WITH THE BAD

It's normal to have negative feelings about someone when they've hurt you. With acceptance,

you honour these feelings and also try to separate out the offender from the offense and view his behaviour in the context of your relationship.

Try to see the offender objectively. For example, your father may never have been able to give you affection. And you have every right to be hurt by that. Honor the feelings that go with that hurt. Also look at other ways that your father behaved. Did he demonstrate his support for you? Show pride in your accomplishments? Be there when you needed a hand?

See the person in a multi-dimensional light and don't fixate solely on their short-comings.

## 9. CAREFULLY DECIDE THE TYPE OF RELATIONSHIP YOU WANT WITH THE OFFENDER

If the offender is unwilling or unable to make amends, decide what kind of relationship you want to have with the offender. If you reconcile, can you remain authentic (be yourself, acknowledge your pain) in the relationship?

You can have acceptance without a reconciliation when the offender is absent: the offender has died and there can never be a reconciliation, but you can choose Acceptance. Imagine what you would say to the deceased or absent person if you could be totally honest with them. What did you never get to say to them? Imagine how they would respond to your statements.

You may not forgive the offender because s/he has not earned your forgiveness, but can you live with his or her shortcomings and make peace with yourself?

You can have acceptance without reconciliation when the offender won't apologize: the offender wants to maintain a relationship but refuses to earn forgiveness. You can accept the offender and still break off contact with him until he

makes amends.

You can accept and reconcile when the offender won't apologize: For example you may choose to get along with your boss to protect your job even though you may not respect him. Or remain civil to your ex-wife and her new partner for the sake of the children. Some relationships are more important to preserve than others. You have the ability to choose to accept the situation and your feelings about it.

#### 10. FORGIVE YOURSELF FOR YOUR OWN FEELINGS.

How have you ALLOWED the offender to hurt you? And therefore, how have you hurt yourself? Did you ignore your suspicions? Did you trust too easily? Did you minimize your suffering? Did you tolerate abusive behaviour?

These are all self-inflicted wounds. Will you forgive yourself?

#### WHAT IS GENUINE FORGIVENESS:

Dr. Spring proposes that a very precise, specific and interpersonal effort is required for genuine forgiveness to occur.

Genuine forgiveness is a "shared venture" where two people, bound together by an interpersonal violation, exchange their care, compassion, understanding, and empathy with each other.

Genuine forgiveness is conditional and must be earned. It comes with a price that the offender is willing to pay. In exchange, the hurt party must allow him or her to settle this debt. As the offender works to earn forgiveness, the hurt party works to let go of resentment and the need for punishment.

Dr. Spring proposes that in order for genuine forgiveness to be manifested, both parties address the question, "What am I willing to give in order to create a climate in which forgiveness

is possible?"

She states that genuine forgiveness requires a "TRANSFER OF VIGILANCE." That is that the responsibility for being aware of the hurt shifts from the hurt person to the offender.

When someone experiences a trauma, their brain becomes more sensitized to the hurtful event and its properties. For example, I hate snakes as a result of several terrifying experiences as a child. Unfortunately, throughout the years my brain has become hypersensitized to snakes. I now have a startle response when I stumble across a garden hose in the grass. In psychoneurology, this is called the "kindling effect."

After a hurt, the brain is like kindling wood--it only takes a small flame to ignite a big fire. Any sign of danger becomes the spark that lights up the brain by broadcasting "Danger! Danger! Danger!" Any event similar to the hurtful event triggers the alarm and the reactive behaviours!

With genuine forgiveness, the offender takes on the role of attending to the perceived or real danger. The offender becomes vigilant--on guard and protectively watching--to any way in which their hurt partner maybe reactive to any number of signals that remind them of the traumatic event.

For example, say you had an affair. Your partner discovered you and your lover went to Cuba together (rather than the business trip you said it was). You would imagine that any mention of Cuba (in a song, in a movie, on a billboard, etc.) would remind her of the affair.

Transfer of vigilance means rather than "hope she doesn't notice" or rather than denying or minimizing the event when she is upset, you take action. You inquire how she is feeling, apologize again for the hurt you caused, and ask her how you could make it better.

Rather than requiring her to be responsible for attending to her emotion (to not bother you with it, to calm down, to "get over it"), you would be the one to pay attention to her suffering and to hold yourself responsible for it. From there, healing will proceed much more quickly and there can be genuine repair to the hurt.

You might say, "Sweetheart, I notice you're quiet again and you seem sad/angry/hurt. I'm sorry that the movie we're watching is filmed in Cuba. That must hurt you all over again. I want you to know I am so very sorry for hurting you with the affair. It will never happen again. I want us to be together and to work this through. I want to earn your trust again and for your hurt to end. What can I do to make this better right now?"

#### EARNING FORGIVENESS:

Dr. Spring offers 6 critical tasks for earning forgiveness.

#### 1. LOOK AT ANY MISTAKEN ASSUMPTIONS YOU HAVE ABOUT FORGIVENESS AND SEE HOW THEY INTERFERE WITH YOUR EFFORTS TO EARN FORGIVENESS.

For example, do you think you simply "deserve" to be forgiven? If you admit you were wrong, will that mean you are weak and vulnerable? Do you think you are "not worthy" of being forgiven? Do you resort to helplessness saying, "Nothing I do will undo the wrong I've caused you?" Do you collapse into hopelessness, saying, "You'll never forgive me so why should I try?"

You must challenge these assumptions! Make the effort and take the risk to be forgiven.

#### 2. BEAR WITNESS TO THE PAIN YOU CAUSED.

Encourage the hurt person to open up to you. Don't wait for them to talk about it first. Inquire. Take responsibility. Don't make the hurt person put their emotions away because they

makes YOU feel uncomfortable.

Be courageous and daring by bearing your own anxiety about their hurt feelings.

### 3. APOLOGIZE GENUINELY, NON-DEFENSIVELY AND RESPONSIBLY.

"I'm sorry" is just not enough. You must take responsibility for your actions by naming them, by acknowledging the impact you made on the hurt person, by caring deeply about the pain you caused and by intending to never repeat the transgression again.

### 4. SEEK TO UNDERSTAND YOUR BEHAVIOUR AND REVEAL THE INGlorious TRUTH ABOUT YOURSELF TO THE PERSON YOU HARMED.

Your partner asks, "How could you do this? How could you hurt me?" and you respond, "I don't know."

If you can't explain your reasons for your actions, if you have no insight into your behaviours, then how can your partner ever trust s/he will be safe with you again?

You must be willing to be self-examining. You must be willing to face the truth about yourself--no matter how ugly.

You may not be able to undo the past, but you can seek to understand it. Again, if you have trouble understanding why you did what you did, then seek professional help in order to do so.

### 5. WORK TO EARN BACK TRUST.

You need to back up your words of remorse and regret with action!

What are your commitments to the hurt person?  
What gestures are you committed to following through on in order to restore the trust?

## 6. FORGIVE YOURSELF FOR INJURING THE OTHER PERSON

When you hurt someone, you debase yourself, according to Dr. Spring. When you work to restore that person's love, respect, and forgiveness, you not only honour the hurt person, but you honour yourself. When you confront and correct the damage you have caused you restore your sense of a dignified, noble self.

### WHAT THE HURT PERSON MUST DO TO GRANT FORGIVENESS

Dr. Spring suggests 3 critical tasks for granting forgiveness:

#### 1. LOOK AT YOUR MISTAKEN ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT FORGIVENESS AND SEE HOW THEY PREVENT YOU FROM GRANTING IT:

As with acceptance, ask yourself if these assumptions sabotage your willingness to forgive?

#### 2. COMPLETE ALL 10 STEPS OF ACCEPTANCE--WITH THE OFFENDER'S HELP!

For example, the offender helps you honor the full extent of your emotions. The offender helps you give up your need for revenge but not your need for a just resolution. The offender helps protect you from further abuse....

#### 3. CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE OFFENDER TO MAKE GOOD AND HELP YOU HEAL:

Open yourself up and share your pain to him/her. Tell him exactly what you need to help heal your pain. Allow her to make the repair. Let him know what he's doing right. Apologize for your contribution to the injury.

### CONCLUSION:

Forgiveness is possible but it requires insight,

emotional honesty and commitment...from both the hurt person and the offender.

Like bones, where we break, we become stronger...if the right interventions, corrections, and rehabilitation occurs. If you have hurt someone or been hurt, I encourage you to make the effort toward acceptance or genuine forgiveness. It works!

For more practical, comprehensive, step-by-step instructions on how to deal with forgiveness, please pick up a copy of Dr. Spring's book, How Can I Forgive You?: The Courage to Forgive, the Freedom Not To (published by Perennial Currents), ISBN-13: 978-0-06-000931-1.

Available at <http://www.janisabrahmsspring.com>

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3. Love Byte
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"Healing, like love, flourishes in the context of a caring relationship. I would go so far as to say that we can't love alone, and we can't forgive alone."

-Dr. Janis Abrahms Spring, from How Can I Forgive You.

Is there someone who you have hurt? Are you prepared to hold yourself responsible for their suffering? Are you ready to make a repair to the relationship?

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4. Relationship Action Step #2---How to Improve Your Relationships Now!
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Practice apologizing! Start small, if you'd

like...the person you cut off in traffic, the check-out clerk you were impatient with, the co-worker who's head you chewed off!

Then work your way up to the people who matter most or whom you've hurt deeply: your spouse, your children, your parents?

Acknowledge your role, your reactions, your responsibilities. What mistaken beliefs do you have about forgiveness that prevent you from seeking it? Look carefully for the hurt you caused in others (often it's first expressed with anger!). Empathize with their injury.

Ask for forgiveness. Earn trust back by following through with forgiving behaviours. Be consistent. Be reliable. Be vigilant.

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5. More Relationship Action Steps
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Want more tips on Relationships?

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21 WAYS TO WIN AT LOVE?

Or check out the Articles page on my website at:

<http://www.dianeandersoncounselling.com/articles.htm>

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6. Counselling & Consulting
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Are you struggling in your relationships?

Do you seem to have a pattern of being hurt or hurting others?

Do you want to take your relationship to the next level?

Whatever your relationship concerns and questions are, I can help.

Married, living together, dating or looking for that special someone, I will show you how to identify your relationship problems accurately, transform your frustrations into the moments that bring you closer together, and repair hurts that have occurred along the way.

I can also help you enhance and deepen an already solid and satisfying relationship by realizing your life-long desires and goals for loving.

Contact me for a free 10 minute phone consultation. Together we can explore how I might help you solve your relationship problems.

For general inquiries, you can email me and my Administrator will set up your free consultation, make an appointment or answer your questions at [info@DianeAndersonCounselling.com](mailto:info@DianeAndersonCounselling.com)

or visit my website:

<http://www.DianeAndersonCounselling.com>

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7. About Diane Anderson
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Diane Anderson, MA, is a Registered Clinical Counsellor who assists individual and couples in healing hurtful pattern of relationships and creating the happy, healthy loving relationships they long for.

Diane has been on all sides of relationships: married, divorced, and now happily remarried again. She knows what it takes to make or break a relationship as a couple, how awfully painful and costly it is to go through a separation and/or a divorce and how challenging it is to dive into the relationship swimming pool again!

She has also been a client of several relationship therapists, so she has a keen sense of what helps couples sort out their relationship troubles.

Diane says, "I am a happy, living example of how hurtful patterns of loving and relating can be changed!"

Diane lives and practices in beautiful White Rock, British Columbia, Canada with her husband, Tom who bakes bread every Sunday and wooed her with homemade tortillas and the best chicken and green chile sauce you've ever tasted!

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8. This Ezine
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Feedback:

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