

Story Corner

WEATHERING THE STORM

A young couple, Ben and Susie, came to see me because they were having problems with their marriage. They had known each other since they were teenagers and had gone out together for some years. Until their marriage eighteen months ago, everything had been good; they got on well and enjoyed each other's company. Since they married there had been fights and Ben was sometimes violent.

At first things seemed to improve, they seemed happier; then, at the next visit, everything was bad again. Their relationship ran hot and cold and, after a short honeymoon, so did my therapy.

Initially, my communication with them had been direct, so I decided to try something different. I compared their relationship with our Melbourne weather, unpredictable and always changing. You get ready for the beach on a lovely sunny day, by the time you get there, it is windy and cool. Sometimes there is continuous heat that goes on until you feel you will wilt away and then the rain comes and you feel refreshed and ready for action.

I told them that my wife and I argued a lot about the weather. I, having grown up in the Middle East, liked the predictable summer, knowing that, for six months, sandals and shorts were the order of the day; winter clothes and blankets were packed away. There would be my daily, even twice daily swim for the next half year. I loved it. My wife, however, claimed that Melbourne weather was the best; variety is the spice of life; after a few hot days there would be a cool change; suddenly, in the middle of winter, there

would be glorious sunny days; the spring and autumn were lovely and the seasons were obvious and each had its own charm.

I had been convinced that stable, predictable weather was far superior; but, as time went by, I began to think perhaps there was something good in the changing seasons and the variety that Melbourne weather offered.

Until the discussion about the weather, Susie had talked of Ben's violence with distress and tears, then gradually she began to compare herself with her brother and other friends; she thought she was lucky that she and Ben hadn't settled into a boring middle-class routine, that life still had sparkle and drama. Ben, who had felt and expressed a lot of guilt about his violent personality, started to sit erect in his chair, and appeared more comfortable.

As the sessions progressed, there was a change in the way he expressed himself; he began to talk about himself and their relationship in more positive terms.

The intensity of their fights diminished and the toxicity of their criticism lessened; in fact, at times, they appeared to value their disagreements and saw them as evidence of caring and involvement. After a while they entered calmer waters and had periods of smooth sailing. Their parting comment was, "We understand why you and your wife fight about the weather because you're both right."

MOSHE LANG

Williams Road Family Therapy Centre
Windsor, Vic.