

# *Like Ships Passing in the Night*

## **When love ends ☹️ but the marriage doesn't**

BY GLENN CAMPBELL

Campbell's Law states that the nastiness of the divorce is proportional to the unreality of the initial delusion. If you fall madly in love, you are bound, in the end, to fall just as madly out of it.

We now concede, however, that this principle doesn't capture the whole picture of marital collapse. In Family Court, we are used to seeing marriages disintegrate violently, full of charges and countercharges that can only be resolved by a judge, but such cases are only the most visible. Most divorces, in fact, are settled without a trial, and many are resolved amicably, with no visible blood.

But even this doesn't tell the whole story. We are used to thinking of divorce as a failure, while the absence of divorce must mean the marriage is successful. Not so. We now see there is a vast body of marriages that have failed by any emotional measure but that continue on in name.

We call them "nominal marriages." We became aware of them when we ran into an old friend. She says her marriage has been loveless for five years, but she has no plans to file for divorce. Both parties recognize their affection is gone, but they continue to reside in the same house to care for their two children.

Like college roommates, their rela-

tionship is defined by clear boundaries. She has her part of the house; he has his. He has control of the kids in the evenings and on Saturdays; she has them in the afternoons and Sundays. When they pass, they are civil to each other, as roommates might be who have little in common, but they make no attempt to share their emotions.

None of this is in writing. It's just what's been worked out. Both parties regard divorce as too expensive, both to their finances and to their children. They lead separate lives in the same house, and the arrangement seems stable.

This seemingly bizarre relationship is probably more common than the rest of us suppose. The statistics for divorce are clear, since they are a matter of public record, but there is no way to quantify when love has died without divorce. Maybe this represents only a tiny fraction of marriages or maybe it's the dominant form.

Look at Bill and Hillary. Given Bill's philanderin' ways, how could any woman put up with him? A wife probably wouldn't but a business partner might. For political purposes, both of the Clintons say the right words and share the same legal residence, but when is the last time you saw any spontaneous affection between them?

Federal election law doesn't require the disclosure of sleeping arrangements.

This is their business, not ours, but once you become aware of the phenomenon, you begin to see it everywhere.

Our own governor, who filed for divorce last week, certainly presented the appearance of a loving marriage during the election campaign, but was it real? Political, social or religious expediency can be adequate motivation for maintaining a sham.

Other reasons can be purely practical. Many couples have built financial empires together, and dividing them up might seem too costly. Others might not be able to afford two homes. This is especially a concern in the current real estate environment, where the marital residence might not sell.

Of the long-term marriages you've seen at close range, how many do you regard as truly successful? If you choose to look, you usually see some serious dysfunction. Truly egalitarian marriages seem outnumbered by those where one partner devolves into a child-like state and the other becomes the parent. That's the danger of Communism. The protector may know that love has died but he/she maintains the status quo out of a misguided sense of duty, in memory of those ancient wedding vows.

Can a loveless marriage be healthy? Is it truly best for the children? That depends on the alternatives, if any. Life is full of imperfect solutions dictated by circumstance. Still, such an arrangement has to be confining to both parties. Clear boundaries can also be a prison, discouraging to personal growth.

To be truly single again, truly whole and responsible, both parties have to control their own finances and destiny. Even if living in peace with your erstwhile partner, you're a fly trapped in amber, a Sleeping Beauty, until the spell is somehow broken.