

Remarriage

An Adventure in Patience and Love



Blending families requires twice as much patience. But it can also create twice as much love.

By Heidi Eljarbø Morrell Andersen

Divorce was never a part of my vocabulary until it actually happened to me. For a long time I felt the embarrassing downside of the word every time I was asked about my marital status. “I’m divorced.” It was as

if I could hardly say the words out loud—as if I were saying bad words.

Nevertheless, it was where I was in life, and I had a hard time fitting in. “You’ll find someone,” my friends would say. But I was not interested and had no desire to remarry. My four children kept me busy enough.

Until one day, without expectations or plans for the future, I met Arnfinn, and to my surprise we communicated so well that I enjoyed his company more and more. He was smart, good-looking, and playful. When he proposed,

I did not know what the future would hold, but I knew I wanted that future with him. We took our time to “iron out the wrinkles,” as Arnfinn called it, and were married in the Stockholm Sweden Temple in the fall of 1997.

Being newlyweds at almost 40 was not the same as the first time. Falling in love was the same wonderful thrill,



and the excitement of a new relationship was similar, but now we had two ex-spouses, a disobedient dog, a loud bird, and nine children, ages 3 to 17. Luckily, the newness of our romance was enough to get us through challenging days ahead.

The Key to Understanding

“It seems like we don’t always have the same opinions about things,” Arnfinn said one day. Forty years of habits and doing things your own way will do that. I was 19

the first time I married, and routines and traditions were formed along the way. Arnfinn and I found out that it was all right and even healthy to have more than one opinion. It did not necessarily mean that one was right and the other was wrong. Opinions are shaped by many things in life, and respect and listening became the key words to understanding the other person.

We also tried to come to an understanding of how to blend our lives together—where to live, how to deal with the family economy, and which holiday traditions to uphold. There were a few more wrinkles to iron out along the way, but looking back, some seem trivial today. Harmony and love at home were the targets we were aiming for.

Having another mother involved in our family was especially hard for me. Arnfinn’s ex-wife is a wonderful mother and concerned with her children’s welfare. Vacations and weekends were planned with her, and at times I felt I did not have a say in my own life.

But the transition was probably more of a challenge for Arnfinn, who moved into a home with four children, two of them in their teens—

children whose personalities were more boisterous than what he was used to and who had been brought up slightly different from what he would prefer.

Different Paths, Same Answers

Then one evening, so late that my thinker had stopped working for the day, Arnfinn challenged me to an IQ test. He sat down on one side of the dining room table and started making up equations and mathematical formulas in order to answer the questions. I was on the opposite side

of the table drawing pictures to solve the problems presented. We finished and compared our test answers, only to find that we had achieved the same answers. That's when I realized that the test was similar to our lives together.

Let me explain: He does things one way, and I do them another. But we have the same goal, even though the way there may vary. Reaching that goal is like the IQ test: while he makes equations and I draw pictures, we still get to the same answers.

I know I could never do his job as a lawyer, and I am pretty sure he would find my line of work as a writer and water-color artist difficult. The trick has been to find him cute when he does things differently from me instead of being annoyed. Difference can be an exciting learning experience if we let it. I told Arnfinn one day, "If you can teach me some things and maybe I can teach you some, we will turn out OK one day." We both have to be teachable, and it's an ongoing process. Admiration has become a key word.

If Mom and Dad are two diverse species, you can be sure that two sets of children will be poles apart as well. We rolled up our sleeves and faced the everyday problems

of varying eating habits, clothing styles, bedtime, and chores, to mention a few. For a long time the children were titled "mine" and "yours" and did not always think that being thrown together was all that wonderful.

The oldest one let me know that she would soon be out of the house anyway and that she wanted me to be happy; the next two girls did not even seem to like each other; and one of the boys gave up his bedroom every other weekend and slept on the couch whenever his step-brothers came. He has never complained about that, bless his heart.

Making Room for Those We Love

There's always room for those you love. We rearranged the parlor next to the living room as a parent refuge and had the children in the upstairs bedrooms. Two television sets and two bathrooms became a necessity instead of a luxury. A few days alone once a year for the newlywed parents was also an essential investment for our future as a family.

Weekends and other events were planned ahead; meals, games, and activities had to suit most of the children.

Arnfinn's five children lived with their mother on weekdays, and I wanted to respect her wishes as well as make sure the children enjoyed their visit with their dad. That meant I sometimes had to keep quiet about minor annoyances and instead focus on what was more important in order for them to have an enjoyable stay. I applied patience and love—then

Blowing bubbles with three of our grandchildren. Our children have grown up and moved out, but they know they are always welcome to visit.



One of our traditions is to attend the Stockholm Sweden Temple each summer with as many of our children as possible. Last year we drove 10 hours so that Arnfinn's 90-year-old mother could come with us and be sealed to her parents.

more patience, in addition to a bucket of humor.

Chaotic Sunday mornings were a major trial. We tried to set the atmosphere with beautiful classical music while guiding one child after another in and out of the two bathrooms before the cowbell rang for a scrumptious breakfast. Still, getting everyone out the door and into the minivan to get to church on time was a trial of keeping the spirit of the Sabbath every Sunday. By the time we came home and enjoyed a nice dinner, we had calmed down enough to enjoy playing games together.

There is much wisdom in the programs and lessons we are taught in church. Family prayer, family home evening, and discussing gospel principles are worth the time and effort. The gospel has brought us joy and helped us understand even more how important and valuable families are.

We have made many new traditions but also kept some from our previous lives. Every summer we bring as many children as possible to the Stockholm Sweden Temple. We stay at a campground south of the temple. It has become a tradition that we enjoy and one that even the kids who are married have adopted for their families.

When our children now come to ask for advice about dating and marriage, I tell them that it does not matter if one likes jogging and the other is partial to ballet. The most important thing is to have the same enthusiasm for serving our Savior and the determination to strive toward the goal to be an eternal family.

Twice the Patience, Twice the Blessings

When I meet couples who find each other for a second opportunity for marriage, I am delighted for them, glad that



they have a partner and best friend to spend time with. But I also remember that the first few years of putting together two families were not all bliss and glee. It comes at a cost, and some days we wonder why it needs to be so challenging.

Today, our daughters who did not really like each other as teenagers are both mothers and enjoy comparing notes at family dinners and even spending vacation time together at the family cabin. Encouraging letters have been mailed to the boys serving missions, and some of our children have visited each other as they have lived abroad. They always have fun getting together for large holiday dinners and rejoice when the arrival of a new niece or nephew is announced.

There's only Arnfinn and myself at the house now. We have a fun-loving dog and a new little bird. The kids have frequented their bedrooms in between studies and establishing new homes. They know they are always welcome and will be fed and loved when they come by.

Putting two families together requires twice as much love and twice the patience. There has been a lot of cooking and many loads of laundry to wash, but it's worth it. We love our large family. The blessings of having twice as many people to love are twice as great.

And our family is still growing. There's a new generation of beautiful babies, and they are all our grandchildren! ■

The author lives in Norway.