

The glue of marriage that holds society together

By [Janice Shaw Crouse](#) - - *The Washington Times*, Wednesday, April 8, 2015

Our lovely, comfortable wooden rocking chair taught me a lesson years ago about the importance of the typically hidden things in life. The first warning sign of problems was when the spindles forming the back of the rocker began to pop out of the horizontal cross piece at the top. We aligned the spindles with the holes in the top rail to drive them back into place. That worked ... for a while. We continued to enjoy the rocker, but deterioration ultimately resulted in a total breakup of the chair.

Our limited efforts driving the spindles back in place did nothing to help the lower parts of the chair that were also drying out, just not quite so obviously. When rocking in the chair, we could feel the chair getting loose; that should have warned us that the integrity of the chair (which gave it its strength) had been compromised but we had no experience with the fundamental realities of wooden rocking chair construction. We did not know what should have been obvious until it was too late. Someone sat down in the chair too hard and it collapsed as the chair and its occupant crashed to the floor in a heap on broken wood and embarrassed guest.

I've thought of that broken rocking chair on several occasions when things fell apart from causes only the closely observant noticed.

My husband and I once served on the faculty of a college whose president was a gifted and beloved public speaker. The dean of the college, on the other hand, was a kindly, highly intelligent administrator who quietly worked behind the scenes. A third major player was a rather abrasive business manager who managed to alienate just about everyone except the president. After yet another negative interaction involving the business manager, the dean told the president that he was unwilling to serve any longer on a team with the verbally abusive business manager. He was firm in his position that the president had to choose between him and the business manager.

The president's choice of the business manager over the dean was a disaster. Much of the president's successful tenure in the office, it subsequently became obvious, was a consequence of the dean's quiet, skillful management of affairs and personnel while the president was absent on one of his many speaking and fund-raising trips. The dean's competence — invisible and unnoticed by most folks — had kept things on track and functioning smoothly. Within a year of the dean's replacement, the president himself had to resign because of problems caused by the difficult business manager. As is often the case, the dean's vital contribution became apparent only after he departed.

Having long been a student of the principles of leadership and avid collector of leadership books, I am intrigued by the characteristics that make a leader effective in specific and varied circumstances. Unlike many other leaders I've observed over the years, the academic dean at that institution was not a charismatic leader with flashy style. He just did his job, treated people well and he did it in a way that seemed so ordinary and good morale was taken for granted. His highly effective leadership was essentially invisible. The president was the out-front leader getting all the attention, but events proved that it was the dean's common sense and common touch that was the administration's glue.

Thinking back and analyzing the dean's low-key leadership style, one thing that stands out was that, despite the difference in our ages and positions, he never made campus personnel feel subordinate; we felt respected and our contributions valued. It was easy to feel comfortable around him. Though he was clearly in charge, he was not intimidating or arrogant. He was, however, tough as nails; he had been a machine gunner during World War II and offered no apologies for the fact that his job had been to kill Nazis. Being genuinely tough — the kind of person you'd want to have your back in a fight — he didn't feel a need push people around to prove anything. Also, he had married a strong woman and developed the necessary skills and understanding to get along with her.

I think there is much we can learn from that dean about marriage and what it takes to hold marriages together in difficult times.

Today, married couples comprise less than half (48 percent) of all households. This is down from 78 percent in 1955. Is this a problem? Not according to those whose aim is to create a society where every individual is free to pursue any and all lifestyles (other than a devout Christian one, of course) regardless of how aberrant and to pursue their whims and lusts regardless of the consequences to themselves or others. Even pedophilia is now just another lifestyle option. Intellectuals in the universities and the media have worked especially hard to tear down the boundaries on behavior posed by religion and traditional marriage.

Pseudo-sophistication typically blinds people to the fundamental realities of life to such a degree that they have no understanding of the factors that are the glue needed to keep society cohesive and functioning. The average person

has a better understanding of the dynamics of real life than the intellectuals who spin out a Utopian fantasy to suit their tastes and desires. Dealing with the grubby reality of everyday life makes it easier to see the simple answers to life's questions.

Why do we need marriage? Why do we need a critical mass of married-couples in our communities? First let me stipulate that marriage unites two flawed human beings which means that marriage in "actuality" is weaker than marriage as an "ideal." That said, marriage (despite its mixed track record) is the best arrangement we have to teach people – with all of their self-centeredness and weaknesses – how to treat one another decently.

Initially passion and sexual desire and/or a strong desire to have children tend to propel couples into a relationship; judging from what we see throughout all of nature, these urges apparently come courtesy of our DNA. In the past, religious teaching instructed couples that they should commit to each other in an exclusive relationship. In order to enjoy each other and live in harmony, the couple is then forced to learn consideration and how to respond to each other's needs unselfishly. Such consideration, in turn, schools them in the discipline of reining in their own needs, "loving one another as they love themselves."

Religious convictions can help reinforce this process, which is why the surveys show that married persons, particularly those who are religiously observant, tend to be happier and have more satisfactory sex lives. Happily married persons generally have learned the skills that facilitate being good neighbors and good citizens. Children growing up in stable homes – with parents who have married each other as an expression of a permanent commitment – tend to be more secure and, seeing caring and consideration modeled by their parents, they tend to treat other children likewise.

On the other hand, those children who have the misfortune of seeing one or the other of their parents abandon the family, who see their mother abused (and are themselves abused) by a succession of live-in boyfriends, have challenges in learning self-control and developing the capacity for sympathizing with the needs of other kids or for respecting rights of others. Fill the public schools with a sufficient number of such children who are bent on doing whatever they want whenever they feel the urge and no amount of educational expenditures can produce well-educated young citizens because no teacher in the world can be effective in such a situation.

Though secular intellectuals are sometimes blind to the value and contribution of married-couple families, anyone looking at what is happening in our schools and neighborhoods as their numbers shrink can see the dry rot and soaring crime rates that are taking over cities like Detroit, Cleveland, St. Louis, Chicago, Camden, Memphis and Oakland, among others. The virtues that are learned by working to develop a happy marriage constitute the drops of invisible glue which, when multiplied in sufficient numbers, produce a good, healthy, humane social environment. In today's post-Christian society, dominated as it is by a philosophy of radical individualism and ideology, it is hard to convince intellectual elites the simple but profound reality of marriage's pivotal and irreplaceable role in teaching behaviors that produce a cohesive social order.

When dysfunctional behavior and breakdowns in the fabric of society commonly occur because of a deficit of moral guidance, secularist thinkers cling to the false hope that they can fix the absence of personal responsibility and self-control through more and more government intervention and federal control.

This is hardly the land of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" that the Founders worked to create. Worse, we are fast approaching a situation where there won't be enough married couples left to counterbalance the growing mass of self-centered individuals. Then, the social order — bequeathed to us by our ancestors and left in our care — won't have enough glue to hold everything together and, inevitably, society will collapse around us.