

Letters

Marriage Contract

I have just read "The Radical Guide to Wedlock" by Norman Sheresky and Marya Mannes [SR, July 29] and agree wholeheartedly with the points relative to the idealism of marriage versus the reality of divorce. The problem does seem to stem from the fact that although people are entering into a contract, no more thought is involved other than the usual blood tests, license application, and questions about who will attend the wedding. In my particular case, I was married at the age of nineteen; at the age of twenty-five I found myself crushed with court battles, identity problems, and a son to support. If wishes were horses, beggars would ride, but I wish that I knew the reality of divorce before I entered into a seemingly happy marriage.

People just assume that marriage is forever and the possibility of its failure isn't even considered. This attitude must be changed before the entire marriage structure crumbles.

Sandra K. Greifzu
Havertown, Pa.

While parts of the Sheresky-Mannes premarital contract do make for equality of both partners in marriage, some parts do seem very oppressive for the female partner. Why should the woman agree that the place of residence shall be based on where "Donald" rather than "Ina" may be employed . . . regardless of whose earnings are greater? The right to be domiciled in an area of one's liking is just as precious to a woman as to a man. It does not seem that the woman should have to give up this right, as Article III (a) of your contract would have her do. Further, I fail to find any delineation of sharing of household duties and child-rearing, including payment for the woman's work done in the home, apart from her outside job.

The value of the wife's homemaking labors is not covered under Social Security; nor does she have the psychological satisfaction of having her homemaking services included in our Gross National Product. Unpaid labor makes for inequality. Since whoever does the homemaking labor contributes to the family income, I would suggest that this is a most important part of any premarital contract. Without this definition of the homemaking labors, your article is not truly contemporary.

Marjorie B. Plastina
Niantic, Conn.

From the vantage point of one barely out of adolescence and, as yet, untouched by marriage on the immediate, personal level, I find the Sheresky-Mannes article far from being radical, but more a last-ditch attempt to save marriage as a legal, and

thereby, socially acceptable institution. If anything, their proposal for a marriage contract does more to invalidate it than to sell it to an ever-growing number of skeptics who are wondering if it's worth it at all. What Mr. Sheresky and Ms. Mannes are talking about is a merger, not a marriage—and I consider the latter as being a far superior act. They completely ignore the concept of marriage as the bringing together of two halves into a whole, the spiritual reason for its existence. This concept needs no material, legal binding to keep it together, no physical contract to remind the participants of just what it is they're getting into. Marriage is spiritual (which is not by any means synonymous with religious); marriage is giving, not getting. And how I've managed to survive with an ideal like that, I'm not sure, although I have my upbringing to thank for having it at all. It is this ideal that just may result in my refusal of marriage as Sheresky and Mannes visualize it and as it is being sold to the public now—in a strictly legal wrapper. (Although one must not overlook the potential irony of a 'common-law' marriage.)

Debbie Groves
Newton, Kan.

I would like to point out one omission that in my opinion is almost as great an issue as sex and money in marriage—that is personal services, or, who does the grunt work? Husband, wife, both, or a hired helper?

In addition, I believe the marriage contract should be renewable every three years, regardless of "life" intentions or parties or the cumbersome process described in Article VI (f). People change (hopefully)! If people know their contracts are renewable, this may offer the time to get out grievances that can mount up, keep communications clear, and lessen the likelihood of divorce even more.

Barbara Tan
Edinboro, Pa.

Self-ignorance in a first marriage is a serious enough tragedy for the parties and the nation. When it is carried into multiplied marriages, further sets of damaged children and thus into future generations, the results are obviously disastrous: increased social ills from addiction through murder to lives of quiet desperation. The RGTW contract offers the challenge for change and growth with self-understanding.

I'm a Protestant worker with the national Judean Society, Catholic based, serving women in divorce distress. (This does not preclude realistic concern for male misery.) If apathetic citizens could, as I, see intimately the damages of self-ignorant divorce—from destroyed children

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to litigate suicide—there would be an immediate mass arising demanding legislation like the stated contract.

Gladys Yost
Littleton, Colo.

I was very much surprised that Norman Sheresky and Marya Mannes concentrated so completely upon just one of the dimensions in the marriage contract. There was no emphasis on the other two dimensions: the contract between the couple and the community; and the contract between the couple and the Greater Spirit of man, i.e., God.

Rev. Daniel F. Crowley
Lakewood, Ohio

Bravo! I'm sending a copy to my ex-husband, saving a copy for our teen-aged daughter— and keeping a copy for myself in case I'm lucky enough for a "second time around"!

Mary Wheatley
Huntington, N.Y.

I am disappointed that you should accompany the rather thoughtful article "A Radical Guide to Wedlock" with a set of cartoons which degrades the article and marriage itself. Is it not possible to sell a good magazine without reverting to sex in its basest form?

Lela R. Eby
Mill Valley, Calif.

Nixon Victory

Clark MacGregor's article "The Coming Nixon Victory" [SR, July 29] helped solidify my support for Senator McGovern with such reasoned, unbiased, and self-evident phrases as: "I predict that President Nixon will receive a higher percentage of the black vote than any Republican has in the last quarter of a century" and "... among the most vocal college students are those who engage in activities, often illegal, that place them in the news. . . ." Is he referring to those youthful delegates at Miami? I am a white, middle-income defense plant employee, husband, and father. MacGregor's phrases offend me. I am both tired and angered at being played-off against youth and blacks who, I hope, find such tactics and rhetoric even more offensive than do I.

Barry Hogue
Edwardsville, Ill.

Clark MacGregor cites statistic after statistic to document that George McGovern is a minority candidate, supported by a few radical idealogues who will be abandoned for Mr. Nixon by any thoughtful voter. Mr. MacGregor has not done his homework very carefully, for he has omitted several important figures: 20,000—The number of American soldiers who died in Vietnam since 1969; 800—The number of POWs in enemy camps; 400,000—The amount allegedly paid to the GOP by ITT as part of a settlement with the Justice Department; 85 billions, or more—our new Defense budget.

Numbers can indeed be dehumanizing, as this administration has so aptly shown us. As each new problem or catastrophe

befalls us, an impresario emerges to explain how the numbers really portend good, be it in reference to unemployment, inflation, or wage and price control. But the nation is dispirited: All the numbers in existence can't change that. Only a new President can.

Lowell E. Schnipper, M.D.
Rockville, Md.

Surely Mr. MacGregor's high campaign post would make one think that he had a certain amount of intelligence and sensitivity for the current political situation in this country. Yet, he is certainly the only man I have ever read who has portrayed Senator McGovern as a man lacking in candor. Senator McGovern is, after all, the candidate who has made public his finances and who has spelled out his programs. This candor has, all too frequently, given his opponents a basis from which to attack him without offering any alternative programs of their own.

But I find most disconcerting Mr. MacGregor's repeated identification of Senator McGovern as "irresponsible" and of his supporters as "radicals" and law-breakers only. Is everyone who does not support President Nixon a radical? Mr. MacGregor wonders how Senator McGovern gathered 46 per cent of the convention vote while winning only 23 per cent of the popular vote in the eleven primaries. Someone might explain to him that thirty-nine other states and three territories also cast votes at the convention and that, in the case of California, the highest vote-getter won 100 per cent of the delegates.

Linda Pohle
Denver, Colo.

West Point Resignation

Re: Lucian Truscott's "Major Bunting's Farewell Address" [SR, July 29]. Young Truscott speaks with all the wisdom and knowledge of youth not yet dry behind the ears. I wonder if the reading public realizes that this immature youngster is a 1969 graduate of West Point who resigned in 1970 as a second lieutenant.

As for Bunting, I think it probably wise he left also. Too bad a man of his ability—according to Truscott—couldn't work within the system to improve it if he felt things were in such bad shape. It's a funny thing that during my thirty-odd years of service as an enlisted man and officer—in a much more straight-laced Army than that in which Bunting or Truscott served—I always found my seniors very receptive to new ideas and constructive criticism! I feel both these ex-officers owed Uncle Sam more time and effort than they seemed willing to give.

Frankly, and in spite of Truscott's accolades, I don't really think Bunting will do much for education of high-ranking officers in the military service.

I must have been very lucky as a cadet and officer with more than nine years of duty at West Point, since I never ran into a "damned piss-poor" officer at any time.

Philip B. Toon
USMA, 1944
Cornwall, N.Y.

It seems to me that Lucian K. Truscott IV and Major Josiah Bunting III express some rather inconsistent and ill-thought-out views. They also seem to have a certain underlying naïveté.

Major Bunting says the Army should respond to responsible criticism. First, I'm sure the Army feels it already listens to and acts on responsible criticism, so this is not really the point that needs to be made. Second, who is to decide if the criticism is responsible? Major Bunting indicts the generals with failure to listen, but condemns their changing "search and destroy" to "reconnaissance," which was certainly in response to criticism. It would also appear that Major Bunting owes his new job to an admiral who *will* listen. Major Bunting seems naïve when he says he is amazed by the undemocratic Army. Many men are amazed at first by the *degree* of military discipline, but surely no one should be amazed that an army is by nature undemocratic. Major Bunting also points out the "eternal hassle about what should be taught" at West Point without seeming to realize that it has not been eternal and is now almost universal throughout education. Major Bunting laments the lack of "wonder" and "poetry" in the plebe's training with no indication that he knows he is touching on the basic question of what a soldier must be. How far can we safely ask a soldier to split his personality between the class in efficient killing and the class in "love and beauty"?

Beyond this, Major Bunting makes much of many military failures of honesty and integrity. But is not he himself a good example of such a failure? Certainly Major Bunting must feel that personal honor at the War College is not "what it starts out to be" at West Point. I fail to see how his actions can do anything but brand his words as hypocrisy.

Richard S. Blake
East Falmouth, Mass.

I object to Truscott's bad language where more acceptable words would convey the meaning adequately. We are passing through a strange part of the war cycle, and there is an observable tendency to employ needless obscenity to establish status.

It is true that we have had a double standard for vocabulary. I planned and supervised CWA and WPA projects during the depression; I "took" four years of ROTC (ending as Cadet Colonel) and worked with the old-line enlisted men who cared for our rifles, machine guns, and cavalry horses. All of these groups used profanity and obscenity as essential to status.

It is time to reverse the cycle. Many of the "popular" authors of the present will be forgotten when American literature texts are written in the year 2000.

William H. Taylor
Vicksburg, Mich.

Tennis for the People

Will you please tell Sophy Burnham that her article "Tennis: A Whole New Ball Game" [SR, July 29] reveals one of two things: (a) she is relatively young, or (b)

she does not have a particularly long memory.

She gives the impression that this is the first time in history "everybody" is playing tennis. Not so. I went to high school in New Jersey between 1928 and 1932, and it was anything but a "rich" school. In fact there weren't too many rich people around at that time. Yet everybody in high school throughout the area played tennis, and tennis was the basic sport at every little summer resort where ordinary people went.

Then along came golf, which had previously been a sport confined to those who could afford a country club. But the Depression forced many private clubs to turn public, and for the first time they became available to anybody with the green fee.

J. R. Mayer
Huntington, N.Y.

I try to play tennis, and I say "try" because I generally end up waiting in line and then leaving the public courts in Oakland, California. On these courts, at least, the white-suited bankers and junior executives have been replaced by young blacks, Chicanos, and freaks who are finding tennis is really a game of the people where, like the tennis book say, there is no advantage to strength, age, or social position. A typical doubles game on our courts, when you can get one, is between two levi-clad youths and two older executives in their "whites." This situation is the same on the new courts at the local junior college, the lighted courts built by the recreation department, and the old asphalt courts at the local high school.

Jim Mann
Oakland, Calif.

Breasted Roasted and Feted

Mary Breasted's two reports on *Ms.* "MS. Found in a Library" [SR, July 29] are permeated with the atmosphere of her own dashed expectations and cynicism. Now will she tell us readers what she *hoped* she would find?

Jeanne M. Pinneo
Palo Alto, Calif.

How refreshing it was to read Mary Breasted's account of the *Ms.* party, an event that sustains my faith in the persistence of Radical Chic. At last someone has pointed out the difference between trying to change the *status quo* and trying to get into the act. My own disillusionment jelled when I read, in the first issue of *Ms.*, a pithy article which discussed, among other things, the merits of separate bedrooms for husbands and wives. Not all working women can afford to be Greta Garbo.

E. S. Shapiro
New York, N.Y.

Ms. Breasted had much to offer regarding cloistered journalism. For us Bible Belt Okies, *Ms.* magazine is the only cohesive, relevant bit of writing available, and how and in what manner they manage to pull it off is of little importance.

Jan Semrod
Oklahoma City, Okla.



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Editorial

Gun Control: A Missed Target

To compromise is to settle for half a loaf—and then pretend that it will be every bit as nourishing as the whole thing would have been. One can also make a case that compromising may sometimes mean accepting a single slice of bread or even a few crumbs.

By that measure, the Senate's recent action on gun control can be excused as a compromise. What it really deserves to be called is a cave-in.

The Senate settled for some crumbs, all right, and for very little else. It voted, 68 to 25, to ban both the manufacture and the sale of snub-nosed handguns. These are the easily concealed, often inexpensive, short-barrel weapons cynically known as "Saturday-night specials" because 1) they are so easy to obtain and 2) they are so frequently used to settle, with utter finality, weekend bar brawls and domestic quarrels. It was, incidentally, a snub-nosed .22-caliber pistol that killed Robert Kennedy four years ago and a short-barreled .38-caliber pistol that three months ago left George Wallace incapacitated.

Perhaps the Senate deserves to congratulate itself for having gone as far as it did. After all, it did vote down an attempt by Nebraska Republican Roman Hruska to permit dealers to go on selling Saturday-night specials until existing stocks are gone and to deal indefinitely in the resale of second-hand models.

But the fact is that the Senate did not go very far at all. For one thing, no fewer than thirty million snub-nosed handguns remain in private hands—one for every other household in the United States. For another, crude but relatively effective short-barreled weapons are rather easy to produce for anyone with a basement shop and some skill with a lathe. Finally, the Senate repealed existing controls on the sale of .22-caliber rimfire ammunition, which can be used not only for rifles but also for Saturday-night specials. Under the 1968 Gun Control Act, which followed the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, a record had to be kept of every ammunition sale, specifying the buyer's name and address, among other things. It

took the gun lobby, led by the well-financed National Rifle Association, just a year to water down that measure by exempting ammunition for shotguns and most long rifles. The action exempting rimfire cartridges wipes out that section of the 1968 act.

What is perhaps most discouraging about the latest airing of the gun control issue is the ease with which every effort to enact meaningful measures was beaten down. Two proposals, in particular, deserve attention.

One was offered by Michigan Democrat Philip Hart. Maintaining that the United States "must dry up [its] vast reservoir of guns," Hart urged a total ban on the private possession of any handgun. He was decisively defeated, to put it mildly. The vote: 83 to 7.

Sen. Edward Kennedy submitted a more sweeping proposal calling for a system similar to the one now used for automobiles: licensing of all gun owners and registration of all guns. Kennedy noted that, in addition to the thirty million handguns that nestle in bureau drawers—or trouser pockets—around the United States, there are about 100 million shotguns and rifles in private hands in this country. Some experts reckon that the total number of pistols, revolvers, shotguns, and rifles owned by Americans is closer to 200 million, and that figure doesn't even take into account the occasional machine gun. In the twentieth century alone, this appalling arsenal has killed something like 800,000 Americans—considerably more than have perished in all our wars. "It makes no sense," Kennedy said, "for guns to remain as free-floating in our society as flashlights or ball-point ink pens."

The logic of that argument escaped seventy-eight senators. Only eleven voted for the Kennedy measure: Kennedy, Hart, fellow Democrats Clinton Anderson of New Mexico, Edmund Muskie of Maine, John Pastore of Rhode Island, Abraham Ribicoff of Connecticut, John Tunney of California, and Harrison Williams, Jr., of New Jersey, and Republicans Edward Brooke of Massachusetts, Clifford Case of New Jersey, and Hiram Fong of Hawaii. Included in that roster are a number of senators from states with strong hunting interests, such as Anderson, Muskie, and Tunney. Absent are a number of liberals—most notably, and regrettably, George McGovern of South Dakota.

The case against gun control rests largely on two supports, one constitutional, the other practical. Gun lobbyists regularly cite the Second Amendment in defense of their position. They do not point out, however, that the words "the right of the people to keep and bear Arms shall not be infringed" refer specifically to the need to keep up "a well-regulated Militia." The argument that registration and licensing amount to an unwonted abridgment of our liberties has a certain theoretical validity. So does the argument that traffic lights restrict our freedom. In other words, some rules are necessary in an organized society.

The practical case rests largely on the argument that registration and licensing would inconvenience law-abiding citizens without keeping guns out of the hands of criminals. There is no denying that strict controls would be a nuisance to the Montana rancher and the Michigan skeet shooter. But they would also make things more difficult for the hoodlum, who now merely goes out and buys a gun when he needs one. What about those who keep pistols or rifles around for protection in an age of steadily mounting crime rates? First of all, the odds are that the gun-toting householder is more apt to get shot than the intruder, who is likely to be more practiced at using a weapon. More importantly, a loaded gun is an accident waiting to happen—to a child who happens to discover it, to a newspaper boy mistaken for a burglar, to a husband or wife in the midst of a heated argument.

The point is that in our highly urbanized society stringent controls are not merely a good idea but an absolute necessity. Ours is the only advanced Western nation without such controls; much as we are enchanted with the myth of the frontier, we cannot afford to go on rejecting such controls for the sake of preserving that myth. The gun in America is no longer associated with the pioneer bent on taming a continent, but with the gangster and the political assassin.

It would be an awful bother, true, to have to worry about filling out yet more forms, probably in quadruplicate. But we take out licenses without undue complaint when we want to get married or own a pet. And dogs and marriages, in most cases, don't kill people.

Ronald P. Kriss