



Married Boomers Face Their Own Perfect Storm

In the movie, *The Perfect Storm*, three weather systems collide to form a massive storm off the eastern seaboard. Boomers, the generation born from the postwar era to late 1950's, who are married, face their own perfect storm, the coming together of three major life challenges; menopause, launching your children and the empty nest; and caring for or losing aging parents. While any one event can precipitate a crisis of adjustment, the colliding of all three can throw even the best of marriages towards the brink. Marital bliss can take a hit in the wake of the perfect storm.

Menopause, often considered a women's issue, is also a relationship issue. As changes occur to the woman and she copes and adjusts, so too must the husband adjust. The wife may be coping with symptoms such as hot flashes, night sweats, heart palpitations, migraine headaches, breast swelling and tenderness, heavy menstrual periods, irregular or erratic periods, fibroids, change in libido, vaginal dryness and/or painful intercourse, urinary symptoms, skin problems, bone loss, insomnia and fuzzy thinking. The surfacing of any one or combination of these symptoms can intrude on the marital relationship. Depending on the understanding of the husband, any of these symptoms can cause a cascade of marital problems. The most obvious is a decrease in sexual libido or painful intercourse. Less obvious to most men are issues of fatigue, fuzzy thinking or even hot flashes. Menopause is an issue that men must come to understand and appreciate if they are to appropriately support their wife and the symptoms experienced.

At the same time of life, parents are seeing their children not only off to college, but off to the military, work or even marriage. Kids are leaving home in droves. Once a family life programmed by chauffeuring, soccer games, recitals and dealing with teenage dilemma's, family life has morphed into mom and dad alone to their own devices. There are existential adjustments as they redefine themselves, less as parents and more as couple. While many embrace this, others feel a sting from the loss of their role as parent and loss of their children's proximity. Some suffer in the adjustment of redefining roles and daily activities. Couples that have distanced from themselves during the childrearing years may have to cross a great

disconnect as they rekindle their relationship. Couples in this situation need time to reconnect and develop their mutual interests and activities as they come to rely on time in each other's company to pass the days, versus time taken to rear the kids.

Also occurring at this stage of life is the confrontation of one's own aging parent's and their mortality. With diseases like Parkinson and Alzheimer many boomers are thrust into caring for their parent's, parents who will only suffer a steady decline. This state of the human condition is fraught with despair and anxiety for many people whose parent's care falls solely to their hands. The challenge of caring for an aging parent can be enormous, physically, emotionally and financially. The challenge can be greater or lesser depending upon the quality of the relationship prior to having to care for one's parents. Caring for an aging parent can seriously tax the resources of the marriage. The couple must make serious accommodations and even when a parent is lost quickly and mercifully, there remains an adjustment to their loss. Psychologically, boomers are thus also faced with their own mortality.

Surviving the perfect storm takes perspective, maturity and mutual support. Boomers are well advised to learn about the issues involved so they can attribute their stressors appropriately to these events and not to any attitude or issue between themselves. If you are stuck in the perfect storm, riding it out remains key. In time most people adjust. Parents pass away. Biological changes occur. We take our place as matriarch and patriarch of our families and grandchildren bring new purpose and focus of attention. If the perfect storm has sent your marriage adrift, consider counseling to help with the adjustment. Odds are you have as many or near as many adult years ahead as you have behind. Time, understanding and counseling can be the way to smoother waters.

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