What Is Happily

Marrying Prince Charming is only the beginning.

Ask Judith Wallerstein, author of *The Good Marriage*, whether any couple lives happily ever after, and she'll tell you that you can still have a twinkle in your eye when you look at your spouse, despite the wear and tear that living brings to your relationship. She'll also tell you that some women still see their men as their "knights in shining armor," despite the difficult times their marriages have weathered.

"You need fairy tales," says Wallerstein, who conducted the first study ever on what makes a marriage happy. "Without that element that a man is worth loving, you won't have a

Ever After?

BY MARCELA KOGAN

marriage. Prince Charming is worth marrying.

"One woman in the study said that her husband was a noble man," Wallerstein relates. "That's beautiful. In some ways he is a prince; in a mundane world he is a good man. Another man told me, 'my wife is a wonderful mother, a compassionate woman, much more generous than I am.'"

When Wallerstein talks about the 50 couples she interviewed for her study—all of whom defined themselves as being "happily married"—her voice is dreamy, full of hope and promise for an institution that cynics loudly say no longer works. But Wallerstein says that cynics are wrong. She thinks good marriages are possible if people make the relationship a priority and develop the skills to more effectively interact with each other. You *can* live happily ever after if you work hard at keeping the marriage alive, learn to deal with conflict and adjust to living with the other person.

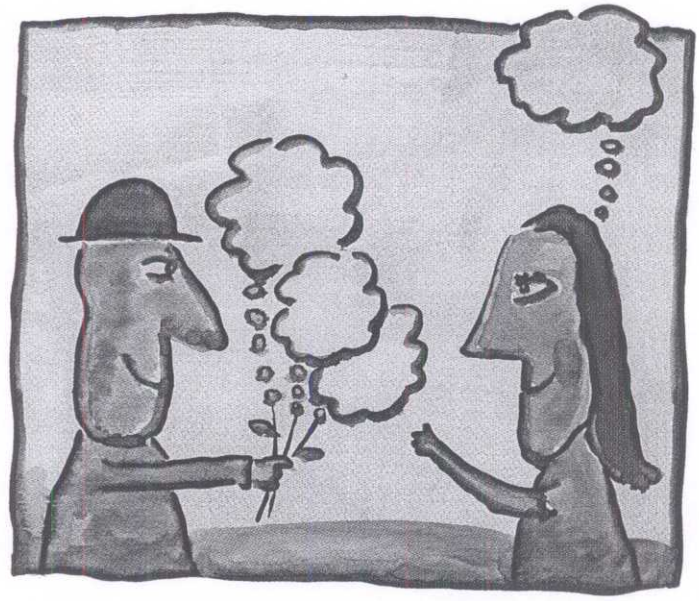
Wallerstein isn't the only one breathing new hope into the state of marriage.

Jewish social service agencies and other organizations across the country are offering courses to help newly married, engaged and other couples develop skills that will make their marriages last. In Los Angeles, Baltimore, Philadelphia and other cities, thousands of Jewish couples are exploring why they got married, how they can deal with their anger and ways to negotiate compromises.

"We are all concerned about marriages that don't make it," says Rhoda Posner, LCSWC, coordinator of Project Chuppah, a project sponsored by the Jewish Family Services in Baltimore. "This is a prevention and early intervention program. We want to decrease the incidence of domestic violence and make more happy marriages."

The sessions, which began in January, are open to newly married and engaged couples and are lead by a rabbi and a marriage counselor. They are designed to help couples get their marriages off on a sound footing.

"People are caught between two things," says Posner, "cynics that say marriages will never work and the fairy-tale notion that we'll live happily ever after [without having to work at it]. Then when normal everyday problems hit," she adds, "they feel betrayed and abandoned and society gives them permission to bail out because divorce is not stigmatized.... We want to give couples two things: an opportunity to talk about issues they may not have addressed and tools to resolve problems when they come up."



"You need fairy tales. Without that element that a man is worth loving, you won't have a happy marriage. Prince Charming is worth marrying."

—Judith Wallerstein
Author of *The Good Marriage*

Lisa Eidman, a 37-year-old finance manager from Moorpark, Calif., wanted to make sure that when she married the second time around, it was going to be for good. So she and her fiancé signed up for Making Marriage Work, a program offered at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles. "I wanted to do whatever I could to think about the things we needed to think about ahead of time so that we could lay the groundwork for a good marriage," she said.

Going through the course reassured her that, this time, she'd made the right decision. "In my first marriage," she says, "I thought that because I picked out someone who was Jewish, everything would be okay. I was naive and neglected to consider other im-

NINE WAYS to make MARRIAGE WORK

In *The Good Marriage*, Judith Wallerstein spells out nine elements that form the basis of a good, lasting relationship:

- **Partners must separate emotionally from their childhood family and redefine that relationship.**
- **The couple must create intimacy, while each person also retains autonomy.**
- **The partners must take on the role of parents, while still protecting the marriage's intimacy.**
- **The couple must confront the crises of life and stay close no matter how difficult.**
- **Each person must feel safe expressing anger, conflict and differences of opinion.**
- **The couple must create a rich sexual relationship and maintain it despite hectic lifestyles.**
- **Partners must use humor to keep things in perspective, and have fun.**
- **Each person must comfort, support and encourage the other.**
- **Each partner must sustain early romantic images of falling in love with the other.**

portant values. This time, I considered all things, his family background, morality, education. My feelings about love are not tarnished. I still think about living happily ever after. But the difference is in the way that I made my choice."

Plenty has been written about why marriages fail.

But little research has been done on what makes marriages work. Wallerstein, who holds a Ph.D. in psychology, had been studying the impact of divorce on children for 25 years when she began looking for studies on the subject of happy marriages. The shelves were crammed with publications about failing marriages, but virtually nothing was written on what makes marriages work. "Why is so little written about happy anything?" she asks.

"Tolstoy once said that...that which is not working is much more exciting," she says. "But the fact is that it's hard to get information from people about their marriage....Of all human relationships, marriage is the most complex, the one you can tell the least about from the outside. It draws on the strength of childhood, adolescence and adulthood....You have dinner with the same couple every week for years and know about their marriage only what they want to disclose."

People, she says, are always surprised when a couple divorces and one partner says, "He looked good to the rest of the world, but that son of a gun, let me tell you what he is *really* like."

To study what makes marriages work, she interviewed 50 couples from the San Francisco Bay area who defined their marriages as "happy." Some talked about their passionate feelings for each other and many said they experienced that love more strongly after being with the person for years. Others said they felt safe with their partners and trusted them. All of them felt that their marriage was their most important relationship, and that their children were among their greatest achievements.

The couples, says Wallerstein, also placed a high value on their partner's moral qualities—a finding that she says was unexpected, but that nonetheless explains why many divorced people say they've lost respect for their former partner.

"Part of building a good marriage is cre-

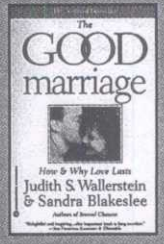
ating a fit," she says. "To do that, you have to know each other well. All people in a good marriage know each other's history.

"You also have to recognize," Wallerstein adds, "that everything is open to change, that nothing is rigid. He will change, having children will change, the job will change. She is not going to look at 40 the way she did when she was 21. You also have to create at the core a sense of togetherness, a sense that the marriage is bigger than you and me....that a marriage is worth fighting for."

The couples she interviewed fought for their marriages even though most of them grew up in homes with parents who didn't have good relationships. Only 5 out of the 100 people she interviewed grew up in what they felt to be happy homes. The rest saw fighting, boredom, infidelity and in some cases abuse and abandonment. "This was a major finding," she says. "The women, especially, wanted different marriages; they wanted more opportunities than their mothers had; they wanted something else in their marriages."

What kind of MARRIAGE do you have?

Judith Wallerstein, author of *The Good Marriage* (Warner Books), identifies four types of marriages. Couples often have different types of marriages depending on what point they are in their lives.



Romantic—emotionally absorbing for the couple, but can leave the children on the sidelines.

Rescue—less intense, and allows people who've gone through early traumas to have a better relationship than they've previously encountered.

Companionate—the norm for two-career couples; each person has freedom to pursue individual interests. Because of that, some couples may grow apart.

Traditional—women run the home and keep the family on an even keel, while husband handles breadwinning responsibilities, but partners can find they've grown in different directions.

Judith Wallerstein is considered one of the world's foremost experts on divorce and its impact on children. This work prompted her to think deeply about marriage—and what makes it last. She is the founder and former executive director of the Center for Family in Transition and is a senior lecturer at the School of Social Welfare at the University of California at Berkeley. She and her husband have been married for nearly 50 years.