

Wedding, Chris Lay and Elizabeth Andrews, June 19, 1999
Speech by Frank Andrews

Chris and Elizabeth asked me to share, today, some thoughts on love and marriage. Lots of things have been called “love” in this world — but to me, loving is an experience — a positive, affirming experience — loving is the experience of a heartfelt “yes.”

I want to distinguish two ways we can find ourselves loving — different ways that often get blurred in this culture and the blurring creates a lot of suffering. These ways are loving as a reaction to something especially wonderful, and loving as a deliberate choice.

With the first, reactive loving, “love” is a description of our emotion of the moment — we are mightily pleased. Something especially wonderful is in our life and we have almost no choice about how we react. We are going along, minding our own business, and something or someone reaches out and grabs us. The setting sun paints the sky with glory, the cat climbs purring onto our lap, an incredible human being looks at us, grins, and pierces our very soul. So we react — “Yes.” It’s not like we choose to love this — we can’t help but love it. Reactive loving is wonderful when it happens, and it has been celebrated in countless songs and stories.

Unfortunately, reactive love is so wonderful it can hook us into thinking it’s the only kind of love there is. “This is love, this is what it takes to love. In order to love, I have to get you to please me so mightily that you just overwhelm me. Only in the presence of the most desirable, the most beautiful, the most pleasing, can I experience loving.” This is a myth of our culture, a myth so often celebrated in weddings, in a spirit of dizzying youth, young love, and good feelings.

If the wondrous excitement of being mutually overwhelmed were only sustainable, we wouldn’t need weddings. We wouldn’t need to gather together this community of family and friends to solemnize and celebrate and vow to support Chris and Elizabeth in sustaining their love throughout their lives. We could all just get drunk and Chris and Elizabeth would stay together forever in rapturous mutual entrancement.

Maybe gods and goddesses can stay together forever in reactive love, but we are human beings and we marry human beings. Elizabeth and Chris are definitely human. And if we’re going to sustain deep love with a human being over a whole lifetime, we have to rely on more than just a hope that our spouse and life’s circumstances will please us.

Thankfully, there’s more to loving than reactive love. Love doesn’t have to be a description of how pleased we are at the moment. Love is also a choice we can make at any moment — a choice to appreciate — to appreciate this person, this child, this sunset, this birdsong. Love is a stand we take toward the world and our life — a commitment we live from that we will respond to this, right now, with the most heartfelt “yes” we possibly can. I invite every one of us here to use this wedding ceremony to affirm that we will approach each other and the world, determined to love.

Like all of life, marriage is both blessing and challenge — the challenge to turn the raw material of my particular human life into loving, caring, serving. Inevitably, some of the events in life are easy to love, if we're open to them, and some are more challenging.

Human life is so incredibly varied, so incredibly human! In just these two weeks of June, we've been reminded over and over of the landmark events of life: Chazz and Erin had a baby boy, as triumphant a home birth as I've ever heard of, and Stu and Audrey held a funeral for their son, Will, only five years after losing their other child, Len. Psyche graduated from UCSC and plans to live to 93, thereby defying those who told her she would never live to commencement. Elizabeth and Chris are here getting married. Ron's father lies gravely ill in Los Angeles. I went last week for a routine medical procedure and found I needed cardiac bypass surgery. Virginia is wondering how much longer she can continue to live by herself in the house Roy and she built before World War II. Elizabeth and Chris are thinking of moving out of our house and going off to Indiana. We never seem to know what we're going to have for supper tonight, and even if we did, someone has to do the dishes before we can eat it. And the baby bushtits in the nest outside our living room window have fledged and gone away.

Married or not, this is the raw material of life, whether we are married or not married — births and deaths, comings and goings, pain and joy. And the challenge is always the same — how to wake up and make a “yes” out of life. It's so easy to sleep through it. To sit opposite this spouse or child at dinner every night for fifty years or twenty years and never see them, never listen to them, never wonder at how something this magnificent could be present in our life.

Love is not just a description of our momentary emotional state that depends on how the other pleases us. Love is a stand we take toward life and the world — that we will love this, precisely this -- that we are extraordinarily grateful for this. Elizabeth, Chris, I invite you to use this wedding ceremony to affirm before all of us that you will approach each other, determined to love each other, to appreciate each other and be grateful for them, to make living with each other into a “yes” of satisfaction and gratitude at every turn.

Whatever situation or predicament you find yourselves in at the moment — changing the diapers, cooking dinner and trying to smile while totally exhausted, driving a kid to soccer practice and hoping the line at the grocery store is short — “I'm here to love you, not to blame you for whatever we must cope with.”

“And you can count on me to support you in loving — me, the world, yourself, your own passions and skills, so that when we are finished on this planet, each of us will know we have loved, cared, and served, that we have truly lived as we were meant to live. And that we were blessed to have the other in our life as a goad, a coach, and sometimes as a pain in the ass.”

Of course, in order to create a long-term relationship filled with “yes,” you have to be able to say “no” when it's necessary. If you can't say “no,” you can't really say “yes.” In order to be safe, you have to know that your boundaries will be respected. And in order for you to know that the other is safe, you have to know that she will establish her boundaries, communicate her wishes, and compromise and cooperate as appropriate.

Elizabeth and Chris, you can count on your relationship with each other to offer lifetime challenge and opportunity to exercise the commitment to love, to appreciate, to delight, to engage, to care, to turn this life with each other, over and over again, into the experience of gratitude -- a heartfelt "yes!" It takes more than the other to accomplish that — it takes a community. We are here to tell you that you can count on us to support you in doing just that.

And — after all this theorizing — there's still this miracle of love — of seeing and hearing and touching this incredible being — a miracle that Psyche (Eagleshadow) caught so well in her poem:

Kiita Massen Chant:

To a Lover:

I can sense soft flute music
When I hear your voice in the wind
 It speaks to my spirit.

I have a sense of night on your skin
Which embraces me
When you do.

I sense Moonlight in your eyes
A brilliance that lights my way
 From here to the stars.

When I sense the bite of the cold
I'm protected from the chill
When you smile.

Love,
Frank, Frankie, Dad