



### **“BACK TOGETHER AFTER A BREAK UP”**

[“Despues del Quiebre La Reconciliacion”](#) by Pía Orellana G.

Courtesy of *Hacer Familia*

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*Rodrigo Prieto and Isabel Margarita Hurtado went through a fairly common scenario: ordinary problems and a lack of communication weakened their marriage until it broke. What’s distinct about this story is the way in which they restored it. Their story shows the importance of everyday details in married life. Taking care of them can save a marriage and overlooking them can do much harm.*

The theme of Rodrigo and Isabel’s twenty-five year marriage was economic instability. They married young after they had dated for more than five years and, as they say now, “with all the enthusiasm of being married for the rest of their lives.”

As Rodrigo recalls, “It was a bit like throwing ourselves into an adventure. I graduated from high school and decided to start working right away instead of going to college. Although I earned very little and Isabel was still a student, the only thing we wanted to do was to get married.”

They had the good fortune to live in a home in which they didn’t have to pay rent. They made little, but they spent little; they didn’t need more. After a year and a half, their first daughter was born. Two years later, the second. Then they had the third and the fourth in a span of eight years. All of this required adjustments, with the aggravating fact that Rodrigo’s jobs were short-lived and constantly changing. Rodrigo reflects, “We had times of plenty and times of scarcity. We extended and shortened our expenses, and I’d say that 80% of our problems grew out of this instability, from that feeling of instability.”

Meanwhile, the family atmosphere started to deteriorate. Isabel recognizes: “A woman can be super-advanced in the way she thinks, but she still has this cultural idea that leads her to ask: ‘Why am I supporting him? Why doesn’t he do something so that I don’t have to support him?’” Isabel felt great pressure not to say anything to Rodrigo

that could be construed as an accusation, but at the same time, she worked like crazy so the family could get by.

### **THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM: LACK OF COMMUNICATION**

Isabel grew more and more angry inside, especially after Rodrigo lost a job he had held for six years working in the music industry. The four children were already born by then, and Isabel says “we never talked about it and this was part of the problem. I never verbalized what I was feeling—a bit to keep the peace, a bit so that he wouldn’t feel bad—but I kept it all inside to such a degree that eventually I started blaming him for every little thing. I couldn’t stand him any longer. This latter stage lasted for about six months, and from my point of view, Rodrigo wasn’t doing anything to find a job.”

This time, the unemployment seemed different. Rodrigo had always looked for work, or in some way did something to make sure he had income. Previously he had gone to great lengths to find a job—once even going through towns selling sneakers door to door. But this time something had changed. “I think he was hit with a tremendous depression and we didn’t realize it,” Isabel relates.

All of this infuriated Isabel to such a degree that one day, she asked him out to lunch and when it was time to pay the bill, she said she could not stand him any longer and that he needed to leave. Rodrigo remembers, “The truth is that I didn’t see a problem. I knew that I was imperfect on the economic question. But it never occurred to me that this could be a problem that could end a marriage. For that reason, when Isabel told me to leave, it was a total surprise. I thought she was just trying to call attention to the need for us to sit down to talk. I thought that all of this would pass in a day or two...but no...it was too late.”

She explains: “We had never worked on our communication. We had basically grown up together as friends and felt like siblings so there were many assumed understandings between us. If you felt or thought something, you just assumed the other knew how you were feeling and that they understood.”

Rodrigo adds, “When everything is fine, you don’t see what’s wrong. But when things start to go wrong, and you start to see what exactly is wrong, you want to cover it up. And that’s what happened. We didn’t talk much, because talking meant facing our problems, and what a drag! Especially when you know that you are the problem and that you aren’t doing what you ought to be doing to fix it. And well, you try to limit the size of the problem because you don’t think it will go much further than that, but you don’t realize how far it is getting.”

### **THE CHILDREN’S PAIN**

That night, when they got home, they sat down with the four kids in the living room and

told them that they were going to separate and why. Rodrigo explains, “I will never ever forget --it’s the strongest pain I have ever had in all my life—seeing them cry in the way they cried. I wasn’t suffering only because I had to leave or because I had failed in my marriage, but because of what I was making the children go through. It’s a pain far stronger than anything I have felt—including the pain of the death of my own father, which is saying a lot. When I closed the door and saw the image of my four children crying, I told myself: ‘I have to gain them back.’ I grabbed my bag and went to the street to start the process of analyzing what had happened.”

For Isabel, the situation was totally different. “This may sound strange but I truly felt an immediate sense of relief. It was very saddening to see the children crying but the extent of my anger was such that it trumped any other feeling. I only asked him to provide for the education of the children, a somewhat feminist declaration, suggesting I could do everything else alone.”

It was a drastic separation. “I erased him from my life. I didn’t want to have anything to do with him. We adopted the classic system of one weekend on and off with the children, which meant the children left the apartment and he would drop them off at the door. I didn’t even take a peek at him.”

Shortly thereafter, Rodrigo started work again. He shares: “I had this realization that this is the way that I am and that this is the way I will always be. I’m not a lawyer with his practice; I’m not an architect with a studio. I’m not an engineer... I’m a chap who was educated during one of the worst points in Chile’s history, because I studied during the first Pinochet years, during a time when many people thought we could make it without going to college. Obviously, I was going to live with economic instability, because things have gone very well for me, but they also have gone very badly. That realization led me to see that they were going to have to accept me in this way, because that is who I am. Therefore I had to figure out how on earth Isabel could understand that I was this way, how to diffuse that anger she had towards me, and make myself visible to her again.”

But Isabel had no plans to get together again. “I had closed the chapter. I tried to be civil with him because he was the father of our children, but if I had not had them, most likely I would never have seen him again. The anger I felt had me so worked up that it superseded any other feeling of kindness that I could have had for him.”

## **THE RETURN**

After a “very disagreeable” first conversation, Isabel was able to unload her frustrations and get to the bottom of her anger. At the same time, Rodrigo started to feel more sure of himself. He saw that, once that barrier was overcome, getting together again was a possibility. For her birthday, he sent her flowers, which had an effect on Isabel. “They had a big impact on me. I called him and told him that the next time he had to pick up the children, he should come in.” They started to talk again, to laugh, and to enjoy time

together as a family. Conversations were not just about money or problems.

“I wanted to have a steady relationship with him without raising the children’s hopes in vain. After venting everything I was harboring, telling him every last thing I thought, I felt a change. When he sent me those tulips, my anger had already subsided and there was now space for flirtation, for talking more.”

Isabel continues, “He had also changed. The fact that he had found work also helped, because I no longer saw him as a couch potato watching TV.”

Eight months later, they decided to get back together again, with the conviction that marriage is forever. Fourteen years have passed since then, during which their economic instability has persisted, but which they now face differently: by communicating their feelings fully and early on. This year they celebrate thirty years since their wedding.

