

Harville Live

I read *Getting the Love You Want* by Harville Hendrix. I found it difficult to read – too repetitious and not very well written for my taste. Many people must have loved it, because the Crest Theatre was nearly full, the audience eagerly awaiting the author's appearance.

In person, I found Harville to be witty, entertaining, and easy to understand. He was able to capture typical dialogue (he played both parts) used by couples when they become testy and quarrelsome with one another. The words rang true, and non-issues were appropriately escalated into full charges and countercharges. It was bittersweet humor because it was typical of the experiences most of us have had. I could hear the sighs of recognition from different members of the audience as he carried on his mock dialogues, and when he finished there was applause, but it sounded to me more like an applause of relief. His dialogue corresponded so closely with our collective experiences that it was almost too painful to hear it enacted out loud and in public.

Harville's thesis is quite simple. Each of us has been wounded in childhood by our parents or caregivers. For example, we feel we were abandoned or smothered. We were affirmed or we were put down. And so on. Nature's way is to compel us to be attracted to, and fall in love with, others who exhibit the most negative characteristics of our parents. This enables us to carry on our unfinished business of trying to grow up and become whole with another person who resembles our parents. It also enables us to carry on the quest of seeking from our partner what we have failed to receive from our parents. It is another chance to redeem ourselves. This, then, is the work of a marriage: to understand, accept, and overcome our negative feelings about these parental characteristics now being manifested by our chosen partner. And it is the process itself – understanding, accepting, and reconciling these negative differences – that provides the basis for love. Sounds like pretty gruesome work, with not much hope of success, but there were more than 150 couples present who had paid good money to listen to Harville, apparently hoping to make it work for them.

The highlight of his presentation was working with a volunteer couple from the audience to demonstrate his technique of listening to and communicating

with your partner in order to work at the process of understanding, empathy, and reconciliation. All of us in the audience painfully identified with the young couple on stage as they tried to talk with each other about what they heard from each other, their feelings, and their empathy. As they made a sincere and honest effort to communicate in public their feelings, and reformatted what each was saying to the other, they took on the role of actors, worthy of applause for their moving performance.

And applaud we did.