

THE BLOG

How I Learned To Argue With My Spouse By Watching My Parents Never Argue

We forget that when we marry someone, we are not only marrying who they are today, but we are also marrying who they were as a child. The way in which your spouse argued with his parents is probably going to dictate how he will argue with you.

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When I looked for a spouse, I had certain things on my list that were non-negotiable. He must love me more than his car, must find my occasional neuroses charming and must really like my sisters. I got married very young. What I never considered was what it would be like to argue with my spouse. Would we argue in the same style, and how quickly would he give in and agree with everything I said? At least that is what I saw my father pretending to do with my mother for many years.

I, however, did not get a spouse like that. I got one who has strong opinions and stands up for what he believes in.

We forget that when we marry someone, we are not only marrying who they are today, but we are also marrying who they were as a child. The way in which your spouse argued with his parents is probably going to dictate how he will argue with you, (although hopefully without slamming doors and telling you that you are the meanest person he has ever met). My parents have now been married for 55 years and growing up, I rarely, if ever, saw them argue. That is not to say that they had a perfect marriage, but they were nice Jewish parents, the non-demonstrative variety. On those rare occasions when my parents would argue, they would snap at one another. It was quick and painless and over within seconds and then we all pretended it didn't happen. An average argument between my parents would go something like this: My mother: "Henry, please stop reading the newspaper, we need to leave in a minute." My father wouldn't say anything to this; he would just ignore her. My mother: "Henry, did you hear me, we need to leave in five minutes." My father, still not moving. All of these conversations would take place in the same tone as if you were asking to pass the salt. The only difference would be that the salt would blow my mother off until she got fed up and wished she married the pepper. My mother: "Okay, I'm leaving without you." My mother would then slowly pick up her purse and walk to the door. At this point, my father would finally put the paper down and the two would walk out as if nothing happened. On those rare occasions when my mother really lost it, it would be: "Henry, now."

My husband's arguing style is so far from my quiet parents', that I when we had our first fight, I started packing my bags. Well, in my head I did. I do not remember what the fight was over, but I remember he raised his voice and I was completely thrown off. To him, it was no big deal. To me, our marriage was over. My husband is from a big Italian family where

arguing is considered just an exchange of ideas. When I would go with my husband to visit my in-laws, you would often hear any number of generations yelling at each other, and a moment later hugging and laughing. A typical argument between his parents would be: Mother-in-law: "Richie, I need you to grab a box from upstairs!" Father-in-law: "I'm busy right now, I'll get it later!" Mother-in-law: "Screw it, I'll get it myself!" Father-in-law: "If you must have it now, I'll get it now!" All of this conversation would be at the same volume you would yell: "Run, the cops are here!" But by the time my father-in-law would get down the stairs, my mother-in-law would envelop him in a hug for being such a wonderful husband.

Arguing within a marriage is not fun, but over the 23 years that my husband and I have been married, I have learned that the volume of your voice has nothing to do with how angry you are. My father could growl very quietly and I knew he meant business.

I am proud to say that I have learned how to raise my voice with the best of them. And because my kids understand that, they will likely raise their voices with their spouses and create a whole new generation of people who yell and hug. I will tell my future daughter-in-law on her wedding day that someday when my son yells, don't pack your bags, it's my fault.