

Giving Love A New Coat of Paint

By Leon Scott Baxter

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Last week my friend, Alex, who's been married a little over two years, approached me apprehensively. He said, "You've been married fourteen years."

This is true. So, I nodded.

"Well, uh..." he hesitated.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Well, I'm afraid it's gone."

"What's gone?"

"The pizzazz, the excitement, the bang. It's gone from my marriage. I still love Angela with all my heart, but the intensity... it's fizzled. Is our marriage doomed?"

The short answer: no.

The long-winded answer: three years ago I bought a new car. It was my baby, my pride and joy. I hand-washed it every weekend. I'd park in the farthest parking spot and trek a quarter mile by foot to Ralph's for a gallon of milk just to be sure there were no other cars around that might ding my baby. And, if I did find a ding or a scratch I'd have to schedule an emergency visit to my therapist just to deal with the imperfection.

Fast forward to the present. I'm lucky if my car gets a hose down every couple of months. I moved it out of the garage so I could have a home office and a gym. Now, I'll wait ten, twelve minutes to get a parking spot as close to the store as possible, even if it means squeezing in between a couple of beat up trucks. And, I've stopped counting dings and scratches now that they're hidden under a layer of dust.

I don't love my car any less, but the honeymoon stage is definitely over. I'm no longer excited by the newness of it. I've grown into a new relationship with my four-wheeled friend, a relationship of comfort and stability. A relationship of reliability and stability.

Love is a lot like this. There's an early stage of excitement and passion based on the newness of the relationship. This is when we write love letters, pick flowers, call just to say, "I love you," and have passionate evenings until the wee hours of the morning.

But, like the relationship with my car, love changes over time. When the flames of passion dwindle to the embers of comfort, we often think our relationship is doomed. On the contrary, love is not doomed, it's merely changed. As time moves on, love evolves.

The next stage of our relationship often loses the bang that Alex spoke of, but is loaded with comfort and long-term happiness, exactly what we strive for in love, but often forget when the bang is gone.

So, must Alex, and the rest of us, give up the bang for commitment and stability? In a perfect world, we could have both. Unfortunately, the world isn't perfect, right? The world is not perfect, but in love it can get pretty darn close.

Back to my car. Say I get it a new paint job. I rebuild the engine. I add a new stereo, speakers, interior, and get it detailed. I'm back to excitement, but I haven't lost the stability that time gave me.

The same can be had in a long-term, loving relationship. It's called romance. Just like the detailing and painting, romance takes effort and time, but it's effort and time well spent.

You'll find yourself holding hands more often, scheduling dates together again, leaving surprises for each other, and installing a chandelier in the bedroom.

Alex, like most of us in a long-term relationship, needs to embrace what love has become, but also do what it takes to keep it fresh, lively and passionate. Relationships are not doomed to monotony, a cursory "luv ya" as you head out the door to work, and a quickie every Thursday night.

Bringing romance back to relationships is my goal and the goal of this column. I'll be writing about love, relationships and romance, as well as answering your questions on the same subjects.

So, send your questions in and look for my replies in the coming weeks.

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