

WHAT IS REAL?

by Wendy Weeks Tobin

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of Jennifer Morrison and Darryn Bouknight

Two people capture the essence of Jen and Darryn's relationship. Both knew of and spoke of the depth that only a few relationships ever reach. Marjory Williams, author of the classic children's story, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, and Carl Rogers, psychologist and founder of the human-potential movement, referred to this depth as REALNESS.

Williams tells the story of the splendid, fat and buncy stuffed rabbit who one night in the nursery asks the Skin Horse, "What is REAL?" To which the Skin Horse replies, "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you then you become REAL. It doesn't happen all at once. You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept."

Being real to Rogers meant being genuine with yourself and others. Indeed, Rogers professed that this realness is the essential of all successful human relationships. Like Williams' characters in *The Velveteen Rabbit*, Rogers acknowledges that being real is risky and not without the potential for hurt. Being real is also not always pleasant...for sometimes one has to share a differing opinion or belief with his or her partner. It is also not for the shallow or superficial who do not have the courage to go to the depths or heights with another.

To be REAL or genuine, Rogers believed one must have deep respect for the person as a human being. Rogers called this respect "prizing" one another. Jen and Darryn "prize" one another as people. They have become companions and promote the growth, development, and maturity of the other. As the Skin Horse said, becoming real takes a long time. Jen and Darryn, in the years they have been together, have discovered that their relationship is never complete and finished as it is, but that it is a growth-filled one.

Jen's and Darryn's story is by no means unique – after all, many people fall in love and marry every day. Yet Jen and Darryn work every day on the process of being fully human – fully human as individuals and fully human as a couple. Theirs is a conscience relationship--one in which deep respect and unfailing honesty exist. These are two individuals who are truly REAL with others and especially with one another.

Like Williams and Rogers, Jen and Darryn have been an inspiration to me. Yes, there are others whose relationships have survived international travel, graduate school and long separations. But I have always looked at Jen and Darryn as two individuals who have the courage to be – not to use facades, not to pretend they are perfect, not to

profess that they know best ...but to stand beside one another with masks off threadbare and worn, prizing one another and prepared to make the universal institution of matrimony a growth-filled, richly rewarding journey.