

marriage SOS

She's lonely,

"Why can't he just appreciate me?"

"I feel like nothing more than a housekeeper, and I can't even do that right," confides Karen Schuman who has been married to Kevin for 23 years. "I convince myself, *If I make the perfect dinner, I'll prove my worth and finally get some praise from Kevin.* Instead I hear, 'Too much salt' or 'Not enough oregano.' It's gotten to where I won't make a move without my spouse's okey-dokey. I'm so afraid of being criticized.

"We used to view each other as equals. He was the logical one and I was the creative one with an art career. But along the way I started feeling worthless. I'd miss art classes because my workaholic husband wouldn't get home in time to watch the kids, or I'd skip an exhibition because he wasn't free to help me get my paintings to the venue. I finally gave up being an artist.

"Don't get me wrong: I love being a stay-at-home mother, but it's lonely. I'm like a single parent. Kevin insists he's working so hard for me, but if that's the case, why do I feel so bad? I've never wanted a big house. All I want is a husband who appreciates me.

"Instead, I have someone who locks himself in his home office and only emerges when he wants romance. *Um, are you serious? You haven't talked to me all night!* I get more attention from the strangers I meet at retreats than from my spouse. But he begrudges my new friends, too. So I'm alone. I can't believe God would put me here to live this joyless existence."

Karen Schuman, 50,
Riverwoods, IL

What the counselor

"These partners couldn't truly love each other because they were too busy judging themselves," contends relationship expert Allan Hardman, author of *The Everything Toltec Wisdom Book* (Adams Media, 2007), who counseled the couple. "They hadn't learned that self-acceptance is the key to shared love.

"Kevin's tendency to judge his wife stemmed from a fear that, despite his professional success, he was failing her. He was surprised to learn this thinking was distorted, and that working harder to provide material things for her (things she didn't actually desire) was actually creating distance in the marriage.

"For Karen, what she perceived as criticisms from Kevin aggravated a wound from childhood, when her father had told her she was worthless. That 'less than' message made her feel powerless. And while she blamed Kevin for ending her art career, the real culprit was the inner judge that told her she'd never be a good enough painter.

"I reminded this couple that they couldn't be responsible for each other's emotions because everyone perceives the world differently. What they could do was share more of their personal

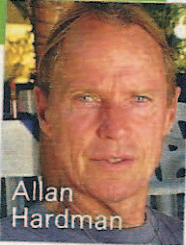
Update: How they're

"The other day I bought Karen tropical flowers: bird-of-paradise and lilies," says Kevin, who just celebrated his silver anniversary with Karen. "They weren't to apologize or to get her in the mood. That's the difference—we're good to each other now just because." Karen adds, "We were at a party and a lady said, 'You two look so happy. When you talk, you really look into each other's eyes.' It's true. Our marriage is like heaven on Earth."

he's defensive

had to say

universe by revealing their perceptions. Kevin could say, 'I feel jealous when you talk to your new friends because...' And Karen could say, 'I feel sad when you don't compliment my dinner because...' It takes practice. From age two we're trained to shut out our feelings: *Stop crying. Don't use that tone.* Kevin and Karen were afraid to reveal this vulnerability, when in truth, it would draw them closer.

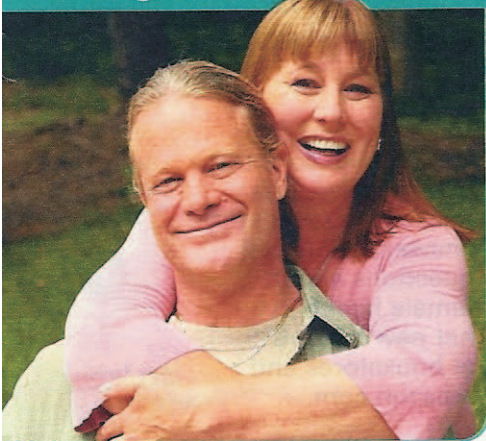


Allan Hardman

"Karen also needed to believe she had internal value so she could stop placing her self-worth on external things like recipes. She put a card in her makeup case that read, 'You are a unique expression of divinity.' After reading it daily, she started to believe it—and gained the confidence to run an art gallery.

"To continue the healing, I gave Karen and Kevin a challenge: If you catch yourself judging your partner, stop and think where the feeling is coming from within your memory. By ensuring old distortions didn't rule their lives, they learned they could love without fear. When they had a partner who loved to love, peace and happiness came easily." 🌱

doing now



"Can't she see all that I do for her?"

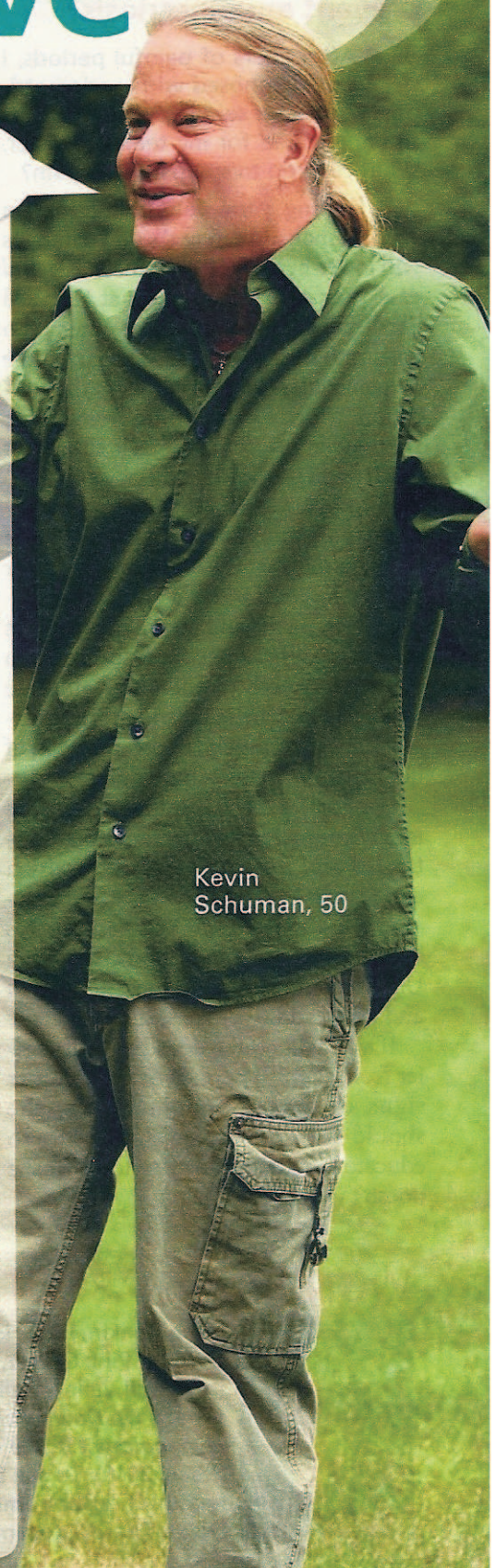
"I was raised with the old 'do better' philosophy, so I'm always offering suggestions in a good-natured way around the house," responds Kevin. "I might think, *If I like this pasta sauce with extra spice, the whole family might like it that way, too.* But my wife ignores my ideas. I worry, *Oh God, she doesn't even care what I have to say.* It's like I'm invisible to her.

"Day after day I think, *If I just work harder, then Karen will be happier and less moody.* It's my duty, after all, to take care of her. But she just complains about my schedule. Doesn't she hear how selfish that sounds? Thanks to my strong work ethic, she has a comfortable life. She doesn't even have to work. Honestly, I don't know what she does all day. When I'm racing to get out the door, I never see her cleaning. She's just sitting around drinking coffee. Must be nice.

"And hell yes, I'm jealous when she makes new friends. I feel like, *I've built a business and done everything for you. How could you have a social life going on that I'm not part of? Are you tired of me?* When I do try to connect, she shuts me down. Or worse, she goes through the motions of sex like she's performing some duty. But I know her mind is off somewhere else—baking apple pies for all I know.

"The other night my wife had the nerve to tell me she's never felt unconditional love in her whole life. That ripped my heart out. I mumbled, 'How can you say that? Everything I do is for you!'

"Is there any way for us to turn things around?"



Kevin Schuman, 50