We Need Milk

In an age where people practically connect with their friends through modern technology and the social media, it is fun to read a play that uses post-it notes as the mode of communication. The play “Post-its (Notes on a Marriage),” by Dooley and Holzman gives insight into the life of a husband and wife through the unique perspective of Post-it notes written to each other throughout their relationship. The play is simple but insightful as the audience is granted open passage to the often personal doors that are so often closed in a marriage to the general public. Most couples only allow others to access the happy days of love and romance, but here the authors peel back the onion and reveal both function and dysfunction in a relationship. The audience is given an almost uncomfortable personal view into the couple’s marriage, through the transparency of their expressions through handwritten notes. From the opening lines, the authors point to the idea that relationships, especially marriages, are an investment that takes openness, nurturing, and commitment, as well as correctly placed priorities and open lines of communication.

In the opening scene, it is apparent that the couple is living together with minimal commitment by either party. In fact, the male character has obviously not bothered to inform his mother of his relationship with the female character, who is quick to point out this lack of openness and commitment; she dryly lets him know she’s not paying the laundry bill:

Actress: Shirts are in your closet. Your mother called. She seemed surprised to hear my
voice. You obviously never mentioned me. Your shirts came to $14.50. (Dooley and Holzma
203)

Openness from both sides determines the depth and trust in relationships. The couple is able to
resolve many of their differences and learn to communicate more effectively in order for their
relationship to deepen beyond a one night stand. In fact, they are only able to resolve their
relationship issues because they commit to work on improving and maintaining communication.

There is a constant theme throughout the play on the need for milk. The symbolism of milk is strongly conjured in the minds of people familiar with the many Biblical references to milk such as St. Peter’s admonition, “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation” (1 Peter 2.2). Milk is symbolic of an important part of nurturing both the young and the old. Just as throughout life milk is essential in building and strengthening the body, in the play the theme of milk is used to emphasize a craving. In marriage, there are many cravings that need to be nurtured. Nurturing involves more than sex and intimacy. Real nurturing promotes a sense of comfort, growth and security in the relationship. Milk strongly symbolizes this comfort and security. Every lactose-tolerant person in the audience identifies with the significance of milk on the grocery list. The mere presence of milk in the refrigerator brings a sense of comfort and preparedness, even if never fully consumed. As the notes are read and the couple transition into their latter years, the need for milk is humorously transformed to the need for milk of magnesia (1204).

No sooner does the audience gain a picture of the budding relationship of an unwed couple then the next challenge to the relationship is presented:

Actress: Shopping list: Pistachio ice cream. Sardines. Those tiny little cheeses

that come in the cute little net bag…they’re so adorable they make me cry.
Actress: We need Pampers. And baby wipes. And we need to get married. (Dooley and Holzman 1203-1204)

The need for marriage does not present itself in the play until the child arrives. Whether by tradition, social pressure, or personal conviction, the couple agrees to commit to be married. Although it is never stated, the play reveals the importance of marriage to the couple in raising a child and later in taking care of each other. Marriage for life is the ultimate commitment in a relationship. The couples goes through a time of separation, but are reunited. According to *Breaking Up Is Hard To Count*, their marriage commitment defied the odds and modern statistics that indicate that the divorce rate among married couples who cohabit before marriage is much higher than the divorce rate among the normal population (Sheela and Ruggles 5-7). Their marriage is one that requires a little help along the way. The seeking of counseling further demonstrates their commitment to the relationship.

Actor: At last---a breakthrough today with Dr. G. It all became crystal clear. My mother. My father. His mother. You. Your mother. I see our entire marriage in a new light! I must free myself from the past so we can truly have a future. This changes everything. (Dooley and Holzman 1205)

The characters increasingly demonstrate a real commitment to each other as they grow older. We see examples of this in the shopping list calling for “…Bengay, Dentucreme. Viagra” (Dooley and Holzman 1206) and in actor’s almost helpless note asking, “Where are you? Next time you go out, leave me a note!” (Dooley and Holzman 1206). They have obviously overcome great obstacles of acceptance of each other and committed themselves to make the marriage work.
This play also portrays the affects and importance of priorities in a relationship. Priorities are a placement of one’s values. We spend the most time with what value the most. The actor seems to place his priorities in his career, until he loses what he really cares about most.

Actor: Things to tell her. That I am sorry. That I miss her. That all I want—all I ever wanted—for her to be happy. (Dooley and Holzman 1204)

His priorities change, but so do those of the actress. Once forgiven and re-united, the wife develops a desire to find her fulfillment in a career of her own. It is almost as if she no longer trusted the marriage to fulfill her desires … she now needed something else to fill her longing.

Again, communication is the most important part of a marriage. For example, post-its was the one thing that made this marriage last. It did not matter how dysfunctional the marriage was, it was the constant form of communication that made it work. The writing of notes to each other allowed the couple to communicate thoughts with each other that were important and necessary. Even when the couple drifts apart, post-its were used to write down their thoughts to themselves. The closing lines of the play truly communicate these values when the husband discovers the stash of Post-it notes in his deceased wife’s belongings.

Actor: As I was looking through your things for that locket you said Eugenia should have. I could hardly believe what I found. You’d saved every Post-it I ever wrote you. I wish I’d saved yours. I could be reading them now. (Dooley and Holzman 1206)

Here we see so clearly how the thinking processes of men and women often different. Whether by instinct or learned by example, the differences are painfully obvious. To her, his notes represented the ideals she treasured in the relationship: security, openness, humor, commitment and nurturing. He, on the other hand, is found wishing that he had kept her notes to him and has
to rely on his memory to piece together the corresponding notes between them. All too late, the importance of the communications via Post-it Notes is fully realized.

The last scene of the play tenderly reveals the true treasure of a marriage that has grown through a mutual lifelong investment and commitment. To many, the concept of a lifelong marriage seems like make-believe or absurd; but, to most who have witnessed it, marriage is a noble goal. This play clearly demonstrates what openness, nurturing, and commitment, along with correctly placed priorities and an open line of communication will do in a marriage to help achieve the needs of each party. The final three statements of the play provide just the right touch of comic relief for an audience recovering from the realization that the wife has died, and we are, once again, grappling with the intimacy of his last Post-it Note to her, “We need milk” (Dooley and Holzman 1206). I think I’ll have a glass, myself.
Works Cited

