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## Charlene Costanzo

**The Twelve Gifts in Marriage**  
**ISBN13: 9780060742522**

**Q: There are a lot of marriage and relationship books on the market, how is yours different?**

A: This is a short book - 1000 words - in the form of a parable. I like to compare it with a fortune cookie in that it's easy to crack open, read in a few minutes, and feel an *ahha* of understanding. But it's deeper than that and offers more than a few minutes of fun. Like all parables, this story resonates with the reader's own wisdom. With each reading, through all the stages of marriage, it can reflect something powerful for the reader to consider in that moment.

**Q: How have the stages in your 35 years of marriage affected the writing of this book?**

A: All the stages and passages, ups and downs, hurts and healings that Frank and I have been through are embedded in this story. The book is also influenced by our involvement with the Marriage Encounter movement where we learned that every marriage experiences cycles of romance, disillusionment, and renewal and that "Love is a decision." Even though we all know that "happily ever after" exists only in fairy tales, I think most of us still expect it on some level. The truth is: marriage is not easy or happy all the time but through each cycle we can learn more about real love. This book is also based on my conviction that all relationships are enriched when we bring strength, courage, compassion, joy, beauty — all our innate gifts — into them.

**Q: Let's look at a few of the 12 wishes in your book. Some are easy in the honeymoon stage, but how do you "look for what is good in each other" after that stage is over and you begin to see things that annoy you?**

A: And, that's bound to happen. Disillusionment. Our spouse is not perfect. Nor are we. He leaves dirty socks on the floor. She doesn't close drawers. A lot of factors come into play here, including good communication skills to work out conflicts, but the main thing is to continue to hold the intention of seeing the good. What we seek we find. If we continue to look for what is good in one another we are going to see it. If we focus only on what drives us crazy, that is all we are going to see and that will be very damaging. Practicing the other wishes will also help.

**Q: "Make time each day for moments of play." HA: How do you make time for play when more and more couples are not even having dinner together most nights?**

A: True. And, it's getting harder and harder as we get busier and busier. But, we must find ways to routinely relax and laugh for our own well-being and the health of our marriages and our families. Personally, I think most of us could benefit tremendously by slowing down, perhaps cutting out some activities, but we can also bring fun into our routines and errands. One couple told me they are having fun with the wish "May you show that you care when you come and go." If either spouse feels their hello or good-bye was done in an unconscious way, the other says "Do over." They laugh and kiss again. That takes only a minute yet it can help a couple feel connected. Frank and I have just re-instituted having a date together each week. It can be as simple and affordable as a hike or a picnic.

**Q: How well do you and your husband practice these wishes?**

A: Sometimes we practice them very well. But, quite frankly, often we don't. One pitfall for us is that when things are going well, we tend to take our relationship for granted. We get caught up in the busyness of life and eventually our relationship suffers. Before we realize it we have drifted apart again and must re-connect. But that is why I was able to write this book and was motivated to do so. Not because our marriage is always easy or blissful.