

MARRIED WITH KIDS

My belated prenup awakening

Lauren Kramer

“Please. Just sign it. Do it for me.” It was days before my big Jewish wedding, and I was seated in a lawyer’s office with my fiancé, a stack of pre-nuptial documents laid out in front of me. It wasn’t my idea to have a pre-nuptial agreement, and at 24, it seemed the wrong way to start a life together.

“Why do I need to do this?” I asked indignantly, as the lawyer rolled his eyes. “It doesn’t feel right.”

I’d been warmly welcomed into my fiancé’s family, my in-laws telling anyone who’d listen that they were gaining a daughter, not losing a son. So it felt deeply distrustful to be signing papers that said, effectively, “What’s mine is mine, what’s yours is yours.” I believed true love meant sharing everything

– heart, soul, cash and accessories. I wasn’t ready to sign.

To be fair, I wasn’t bringing much to the marriage besides love, commitment and a two-year-old Honda Civic. My fiancé, too, came with little more than a comforter, some ragged sheets and towels, and an impulse-purchase tea set. But the prenup had everything to do with family money, and this “old money” was paying for the lawyer’s fees and a portion of the wedding in a few days’ time.

My new family was insistent that I sign. Two previous daughter-in-laws had warmed those same leather-backed lawyer’s chairs and signed similar documents before they were officially welcomed into the family. It would have created a stink if I’d refused, and my fiancé knew he’d suffer the backlash.

“You know I love you and want us to build a life together,” he implored. “This isn’t about that. It’s about my parents trying to protect their life’s work and my inheritance. This is their

just-in-case-the-marriage-doesn’t-work policy.”

Why would they think I’d try to take their money? Why did we have to start our marriage with an insurance policy in case it didn’t work? To me, the prenup signalled a lack of faith. It felt like starting on the wrong foot.

But I yielded to the pressure, grumpily signing and trying hard to silence my ambivalence and focus on wedding excitement instead. I never received a copy of those papers, and I haven’t seen or thought much of them in the 20 years since.

In that time, I’ve transitioned from idealistic, self-centred young woman to mother. As I watch my own kids grow up, the idea of a prenuptial agreement for my future daughter- and son-in-laws is starting to make perfect sense.

Of course, I hope I’ll love my kids’ choices of partners and welcome them into the family. They’ll be guests at my Shabbat table. I’ll be babysitting often and hosting sleepovers for my grandkids so their parents can enjoy a night

alone. But before that, there will be a hint of caution to my warm welcome, and you’ll find it in the prenup my husband and I insist our kids’ future spouses sign.

See, we’ve worked hard in the 20 years we’ve been together, and I want my kids to benefit from the fruits of our labour first and foremost. If their marriages are successful, their future spouses will enjoy those benefits, too. But if not, we need an insurance policy for the “what-if” doubts.

And there’s good reason for doubt, given that 40 per cent of Canadian marriages end prior to their 30th anniversaries. What if a vengeful ex-spouse tries to take everything from one of my kids? We hope to bring faith, encouragement and idealism to our children’s future marriages, but we need a safety net just in case things go wrong.

If I could sit in that lawyer’s office with my 24-year-old self, I’d try to explain it to her, too. “It’s not about love,” I’d say. “It’s about a parent protecting their kid in case the love goes bad.” ■

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Mazel tov Alvin Abram on your 80th birthday. Wishing you the inspiration to keep on writing. Love Marilyn, your children and grandchildren.



A hearty mazel tov to Maurice (Moe) & Karen Stekel on your 50th wedding anniversary. With all of our love from your whole family.



Happy 50th anniversary on June 30 to Hannah & Issie Silberman from your loving son Leonard. Mazel tov to 50 more years!

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