

Blanfords' Book Describes the Journey of Marriage

According to Linda Blanford, everyone has a story to tell. Thanks to a suggestion from a television producer, Linda and her husband, Buddy, turned theirs into a book titled "Over the Hills and Through the Valleys: Best Friends in Marriage."

Linda's introduction to the book paints a picture of how it all began.

In 1960, I sat on the floor of our three-room house in Waterloo, Iowa, typing with two fingers on a borrowed Smith Corona typewriter. I was seventeen, a ninth-grade dropout married one year, and I wanted to write a book about marriage. I loved my nineteen-year-old husband more than I had ever loved anyone or anything. I felt fully understood by him. Buddy was my best friend. That was all we needed, wasn't it, to make our marriage last?

Last year, after forty-one years of marriage, my desire to write about marriage returned. As a college graduation gift to me, Buddy had taken me to New York City. While in New York, we visited the set of the "Good Morning America" show. As we watched the show, a staff member asked if any of us had anything interesting going on in our lives. He was a thin, dark-haired young man with a pleasant face. One couple shouted that they were newlyweds.

Buddy spoke up and announced that we would be celebrating forty-one years of marriage the following week. The young man's smiling face turned suddenly serious after Buddy's announcement of our forthcoming anniversary. Wide eyed, he walked right toward us until he was no more than a foot away. As if he didn't want anyone to hear, he whispered, "What's

your secret?" His solemn sincerity was disarming in such an upbeat and enthusiastic atmosphere as the production set. He told us that he had been divorced and that his present marriage would be his "last shot at it."

A chance meeting with the television producer is where the story begins.

Linda and Buddy quickly told the young man some of the reasons why their marriage had survived and flourished during the ups and downs encountered by most couples. "You guys should write a book," the producer said. Then, he invited Linda and Buddy to share their story on the program.

Within minutes the cameras were turned to Buddy and me as we were introduced on the air. Nervousness turned to confidence somehow as we shared our marriage tips for a few minutes on live television.

Most of the time, it's the book and then the movie. In this case, it was the movie (or television show) and then the book. Linda said the idea of writing a book had always been on the back burner of her mind and the television producer's suggestion prompted her to turn up the heat.

"Over the Hills and Through the Valleys: Best Friends in Marriage" recounts how Linda and Buddy became much more than husband and wife. The book also details the Blanfords' rags-to-riches-to-rags-to-riches story.

After the Blanfords were married, Buddy began working in the home-construction industry near Waterloo, Iowa. John Deere had a tractor plant in Waterloo. The tractor plant employed a lot of people and those people were well paid. Those well-paid John Deere employees didn't mind spending money on new homes.

About 15 years later, the couple opened a real estate company that later expanded into residential home building. That venture turned the Blanfords into millionaires. Life in Waterloo was good and there was no reason to think that it would change.



But life did change and it happened quickly one weekend when John Deere closed its tractor plant and terminated 9,000 employees. Many of those people had bought Blanford homes on contract. Without the jobs at John Deere, they were no longer able to make the payments.

“Eventually, we got all 35 houses back,” Linda said. “We resold the houses to get clear of the debt.”

But in the depressed economy, the Blandfords were forced to take pennies on the dollar. And the revenue was not nearly enough to cover the \$60,000 quarterly interest payment on the subdivision property.

“We didn’t believe that we would go broke, and our friends didn’t believe that we would go broke,” Linda said. “But we did.”

Linda and Buddy have faced many challenges, a great deal of success, numerous setbacks and plenty of comebacks. Through it all – the hills and the valleys – their marriage grew stronger and their book tells why.

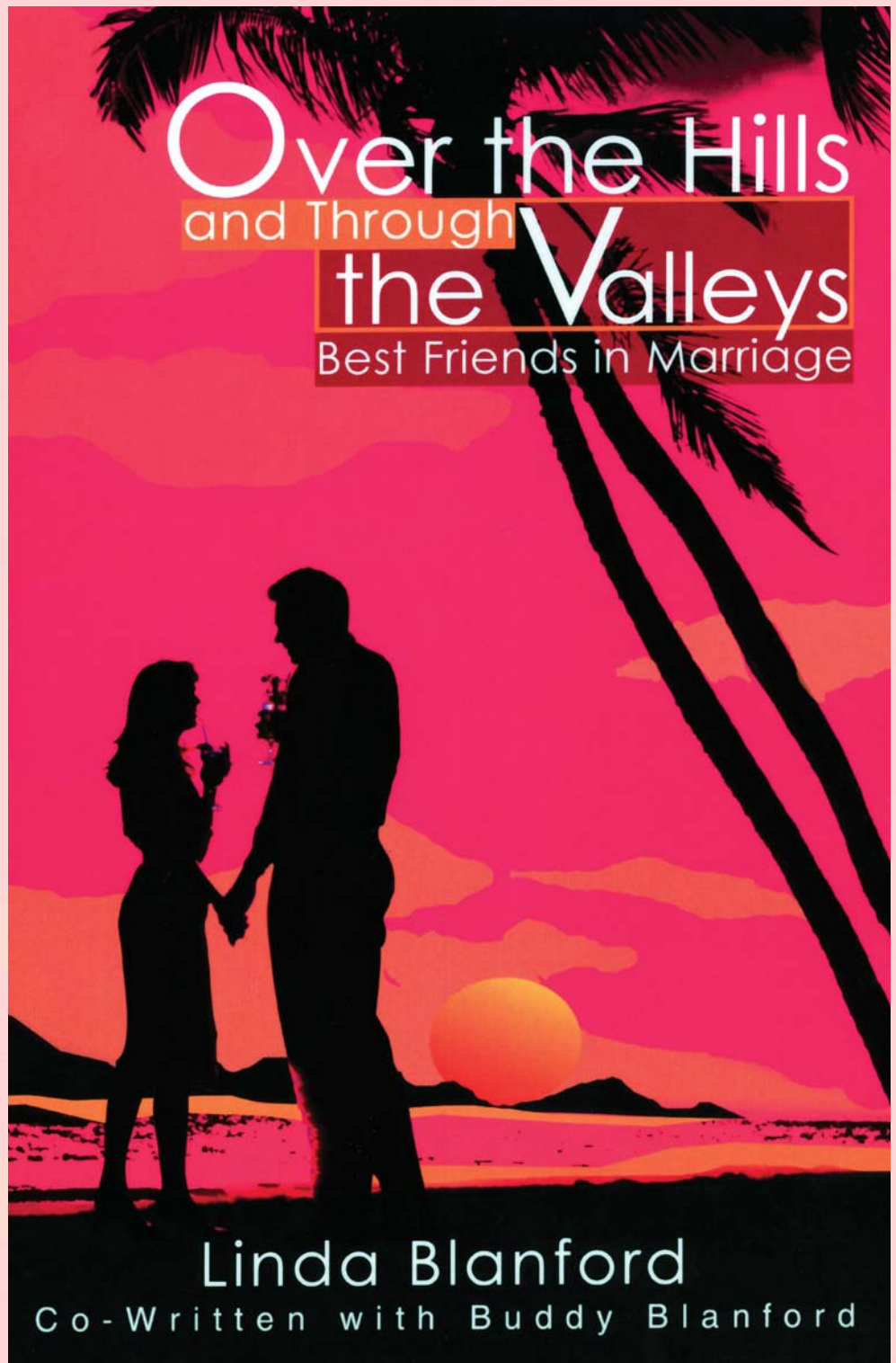
One of Linda’s personal challenges was earning a college degree. That’s where the University of Wisconsin-Parkside enters the picture. Remember that Linda had dropped out of school when she was in the ninth grade. More than 40 years later, in May 2000, she walked across the stage in the DeSimone Gymnasium to receive her bachelor of arts degree with an English major and professional writing concentration from UW-Parkside.

Surprisingly, English was not her initial goal when she began her college journey some eight years earlier.

“When I enrolled in 1992, I took the lowest remedial math they had,” Linda said. “I was building up my basic math skills. After I got through elementary algebra, my confidence was starting to build.”

Linda wanted a degree in the sciences because she felt it was the most challenging academic area. Early on, she received above-average grades, and credits much of her success to help from the Tutoring Center.

Eventually, she was accepted into the nursing program. “But when I was in the clinical part of the (nursing) program, I realized I didn’t want to be a nurse,” Linda said.



So she changed her major to English with a writing concentration. Linda said writing had always been easy for her, which was one of the reasons she didn’t pursue it originally – she wanted more of a challenge.

With encouragement from various UW-Parkside professors in both science and English, Linda accomplished her goal of earning a college degree. With a simple question from a television producer she complet-

ed the book that she had started on a borrowed typewriter in a three-room house.

Everyone does have a story to tell, and the amazing story of Linda and Buddy Blanford, “Over the Hills and Through the Valleys: Best Friends in Marriage,” can now be found at Amazon.com, the Barnes & Noble website, and at various bookstores in Kenosha and Racine.