

## COMMENTARY

## The Big D

rogerWILLIAMS  
williams@florida-weekly.com



I thought about divorce last week, while getting some perspective on things — more than 40,000-feet worth of perspective.

I had just learned by cell-phone that two family members intend to divorce. Meanwhile, I'd spent several recent days talking about the Big D with a close friend, a man at once brilliant, brave and broken-hearted.

My eastbound jet arced out of Colorado more than 7 miles above the patchwork squares and circles of the western prairie, where the deep autumn lay drenched in afternoon sun. Green splashes of winter wheat punctuated the otherwise austere palette of browns lying far below me like misplaced algae blooms, planted to sprout before the Great Plains turn white and silent with winter. Come April, the tiny stalks will remain fresh from their dormancy under snow, and by deep summer, the wheat will stand in a chest-high golden splendor.

To me that's the landscape of divorce, done right: a seed planted in the face of winter's difficult and frozen season, followed by future bounty.

But it's sure no picnic.

"I pretended I wanted to die," David Pulizzi wrote me, while sitting on my front porch. "What I really wanted, though, was to live again. Happily, peacefully. But I

couldn't figure out how. On every front, I felt like a loser in the eyes of everyone I knew. In my own eyes, I was an utter, ceaseless disappointment. With this dismal disposition, I took off at 5 in the afternoon, drove all night and much of the next day — 1,200 miles — until I reached the place where I hoped, dimly, to begin again."

Looking at all that from above, it's hard not to conclude that divorce may be the single greatest cultural gift that Americans have ever offered the world. We've long since missed out on the chance to rank at the top of the list of noble nations who quickly halt the buying and selling of human beings; the British, for example, made that form of slavery illegal early in the 19th century, long before we did and without a bloody Civil War to get it done. But when it comes to busting another kind of slavery, the kind that requires two human beings who do not love each other to carry on as if they do — personally, economically, socially, legally or any other way — we have achieved unparalleled progress for a Western society.

In the West, after all, divorce has long been anathema — an ugly thing, an assumed tragedy, a sign of failure, weakness or lack of virtue, punishable by all kinds of social and economic sanctions, or worse.

All of which is nonsense. Divorce does not challenge marriage (an institution I support wholeheartedly), at least not substantive marriage; instead, divorce is a remedy for slavery. And slavery is immoral, a toxic snakebite on the soul.

I think it's fair to claim that Americans have invented meaningful divorce, and consecrated it, just as we invented

and consecrated the automobile. First we designed it, and then we mass-produced it, making it both affordable and accessible to those other than just the very rich. And we continue to take advantage of it.

Additionally, every single divorce is a dying echo of courage and hope, which should always be celebrated. Love is risky, as everyone knows, and that's because sometimes it turns out to be a chimera — a shape-shifting fantasy that can burn those who gamble on its merits. But the courage and hope that bet on love in the first place, by putting down the marriage chip rather than just hopping into bed and cohabiting, remain real and glorious, win or lose the pot.

It's true that a lot of pots have been lost lately, but at least they haven't become cultural prison cells.

In the United States, about 43 percent of first marriages will not reach the 15-year mark, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. In 2005, about 1 in every 125 Americans experienced divorce directly.

In Florida alone, more than 80,000 divorces take place each year. And in Lee County — where my jet was bound Sunday — the 2000 Census reported almost 42,000 people divorced and another 6,200 separated, in a population of 369,000 residents who are 15 years old, or older.

Below my plane, the Arkansas River spilled from the alpine slopes of the Rocky Mountains to split the Royal Gorge in a torrent, before striking out across the stark plains of eastern Colorado. That river threads most of southern Kansas, pushes through northeastern Oklahoma, and finally traverses Arkansas, breaking free of the Ozark mountains to meander across the long, cotton-pickin' flatlands to the east (I watched this happen from the jet) finally reaching the mighty Mississippi River.

Every inch is a landscape of divorce,

both metaphorically and geographically, which is true of the entire nation, from Washington to Florida and from California to Maine.

That's a good thing, but good things are not always easy things. As a society, we've consecrated divorce, but we've done the consecrating mostly in pain, guilt and sorrow — mostly in suffering, in other words. And there's no need for that.

Children, in particular, are said to suffer in the face of their parents' divorces. But I question any assumptions about what such suffering means, or how it manifests itself, among children of parents who love them unequivocally.

In my experience of this matter, which is both broad and personal, if parents love their children unequivocally, they will never speak ill of each other in front of them, no matter what they think. They won't even imply criticism in tone, which can take some real self-control.

Instead, they'll actively speak well of each other — but not in servitude to a chimera, to a dysfunctional marriage.

For such parents, there is no real divorce. There is only shared parenting, by parents who no longer sleep in the same bed.

When divorce is the right thing to do (not a licentious surrender, but a refusal to accept slavery), and when it's the first planting of a new seed at the edge of winter, like the wheat, then it should be celebrated.

"I've learned that I'm neither doomed nor damned," wrote my friend, Pulizzi. "And so go I will, taking with me every precious gift....I'll think about how I might turn those gifts into a life. And in so doing, how I might someday return those gifts in spades to everyone who has ever been crazy and twisted enough to love my sorry, blessed ass." ■

 **Edison**  
NATIONAL BANK

 **Bank Of The  
Islands**

**"We don't  
discard tradition.  
We reinvent it."**

— *Robbie Roepstorff, President*  
(pictured with Dave DuVall, Chairman,  
left and Geoff Roepstorff, CEO, right)

Like Thomas Edison, we believe there is always a better way. We take the foundations of good banking — personalized services, meaningful relationships, and a smile with each handshake — and we build upon them to create innovative banking solutions for modern users. That's reinventing tradition.

Free checking, online banking and bill pay, and an expanded ATM network, are just a few examples of our convenient and innovative services. Call today to learn about these free services and experience the benefits of joining Edison National Bank and Bank of the Islands. We make banking about you.



 An Equal Housing Lender • Member FDIC

13000 S. Cleveland Ave.  
Fort Myers, FL 33907  
239.466.1800

2105 First St.  
Fort Myers, FL 33901  
239.334.4668

1699 Periwinkle Way  
Sanibel Island, FL 33957  
239.472.7211