Divorce on the rocks

More couples try to save rather than end marriages

By Tricia Crane
Herald Examiner staff writer

Divorce lawyers are worried. More and more couples whose marriages are on the rocks are thinking twice and deciding not to throw in the towel. And it's not just fear of AIDS. Some disgruntled married couples dread the anomie of contemporary single life. Others who are going around for the second time hesitate because they realize they are up against the same issues they were in the first match.

The net result is that more people today recognize that divorce isn't an automatic out.

"We live in a world in which practically everyone has been exposed to divorce, either directly or indirectly," says psychotherapist Mel Krantzler. "And they know the pain it causes. That's why more people are willing now to try counseling."

Krantzler collaborated with famed divorce attorney Melvin Belli in writing the forthcoming book "Divorcing." He says its emphasis — trying to save the marriage before initiating a divorce — is very different from the approach he took in his 1973 book "Creative Divorce." It is also, he says, a reflection of a new approach to marriage and relationships.

Los Angeles couples therapist Jordan Paul also sees a new determination to make marriage work: "In the past people left relationships with a fine appreciation of the shortcomings of the other person and blissful ignorance of their own. Now more people recognize that unless we understand our part in it we will re-create the same problems in a new relationship."

Paul makes it clear, however, that in the decline of the divorce rate he does not see a return to the old style of matrimony.

"Toni Grant may be talking about that. What I see are people who don't want to go back to traditional marriages, to relationships that are based on dominance and submission. The people I see want to know how to have one's self and also be related."

Based on these goals, the therapy that is available for ailing marriages is changing — radically. Until recently your choices were limited to individual psychotherapy, which tended to support individual psychological growth, and marriage counseling, which asserted the primacy of the marriage commitment. Today a small but growing community of psychologists are better able to offer therapy that is supportive of both each individual *and* the relationship.

Moreover, many of the methods contemporary marital therapists use are beginning to be made available to the public. Celebrated family therapist Augustus Natier is writing a couple-oriented book called "The Fragile Bond." And others who have previously published only in professional journals are assembling helpful texts aimed at explaining how such issues as power and control and intimacy and autonomy affect patterns of partnership. But thus far no one has done more to this end than Maggie Scarf.

Scarf is a journalist whose

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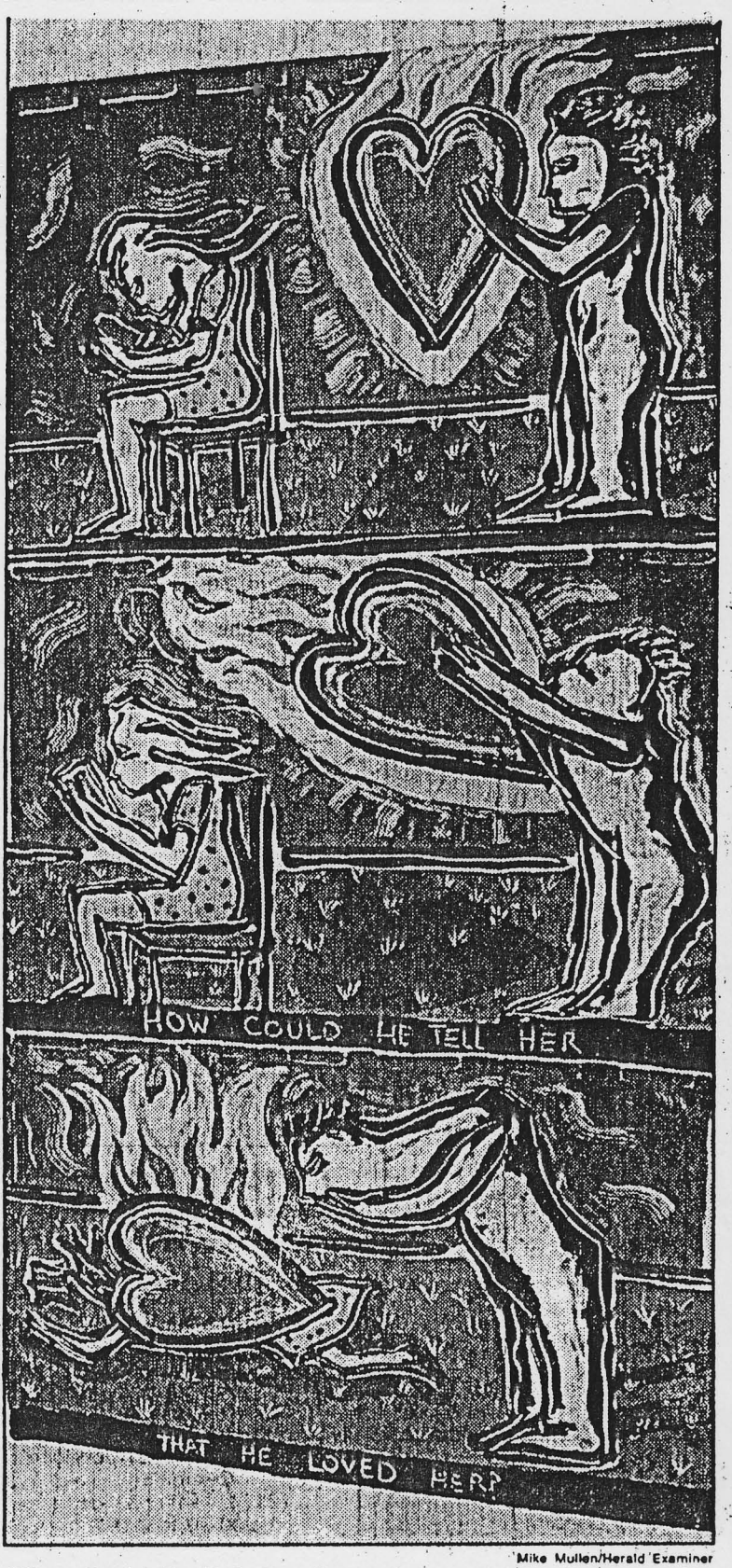

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"How Could He Tell Her That He Loved Her?" by Michele Roberts concerns troubles couples encounter in relationships.