



**STAY**  
*happily married*  
**.com**

## Amish Marriage Survival Tips

*This is Episode number 80 of Stay Happily Married, "Amish Marriage Survival Tips."*

*Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.*

*Today's episode of Stay Happily Married is brought to you by the Rosen Law Firm. For more information, visit us at [Rosen.com](http://Rosen.com).*

---

Lee Rosen: I'm Lee Rosen. I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. I have on the telephone with me Suzanne Woods Fisher. Suzanne is the award-winning author of some Christian books -- fiction books and non-fiction books. She's married. She's got children. And she raises puppies for Guide Dogs for the Blind, which I think is really neat.

She's joining us today to talk about her latest book, *Amish Peace: Simple Wisdom for a Complicated World*. Thanks for joining us, Suzanne.

Ms. Woods Fisher: Thanks for having me, Lee.

Lee Rosen: Well, I'm really excited about this. I have since my childhood really been fascinated by the Amish. I grew up in a family that traveled a lot in a motor home. My parents bought a big Winnebago and we traveled up and down the East Coast and several times we visited Pennsylvania and the Amish country there. And they're just, I think, really interesting and sort of mysterious. You see them but you see them from a distance. And for me, anyway, I never really knew a lot about them.

What is it that got you going with this? What motivated you to write the book?

Ms. Woods Fisher: Well, you described it so well right there, where they're interesting and they're a little mysterious. And I think during the Nickel Mine

shooting back in October '06 the Amish suddenly came to the limelight of America. The spotlight was shining on them and we had a glimpse into their inner life and just looking at how they resolved conflict and crisis. In fact, today's *Wall Street Journal* front page story about -- "Amish Romances are Hot," it's called. Isn't that interesting?

Lee Rosen: Yeah.

Ms. Woods Fisher: *Wall Street Journal*.

Lee Rosen: It's an ironic headline.

Ms. Woods Fisher: Yes. And *Amish Peace* is a deeper look at their life. It's more than getting distracted by the buggies and the beards but it's really trying to explore what's important to them and what makes them tick. Why are they the kind of people they are? And how have they been able to hold onto their way of life for 300-400 years now?

Lee Rosen: Well, how did you even discover them? Were you like me, driving through in a Winnebago?

Ms. Woods Fisher: Actually, I have a family connection to the Anabaptist tradition, which is the roots of the Amish and the Mennonites and really all the plain people -- to use that term -- the people who dress plain and live simple lives and you can often recognize them with bonnets and beards -- the horseshoe beards.

And my grandfather was an Old Order German Baptist brethren, which is also called the Dunkards. And they're Anabaptist; they're the same tradition from church history. And he was born into a family of 13 children. He ended up leaving the colony but amicably; it wasn't a shunning or an excommunication at all. Yet he began his career as a teacher of a one-room schoolhouse and he ended his career many years later as one of the first publishers for *Christianity Today* magazine.

But I've been surrounded by plain people with my mother's family all my life. So I've had an understanding and an interest in who they are the way they are and I'm comfortable with many of the choices they make. The Dunkards are not quite as strict as the Amish, where they use electricity, but they share many of the same beliefs. Simple living and a life really dedicated to God. So that's where my interest came from.

Lee Rosen: Right. Right. Let me ask you, if someone sits down and reads this book, what is it that they can really expect to find in it? Fill me in.

Ms. Woods Fisher: Well, *Amish Peace* is non-fiction, so it's all true stories and examples of the Amish life -- of Old Order Amish. There's many, many different kinds of even the Amish, but Old Order is really the most conservative. And we're looking at just -- from dramatic stories to every day stories of how they've just made choices and lived their life.

The book is also tailored so that there's, what we call in the magazine industry, takeaway value. I have trivia but I also have reflection questions. And that's where you can really incorporate some of the Amish principles into your life without necessarily going Amish.

Lee Rosen: Right. Which might feel a little extreme for some people. Although, I have to tell you, I had a case I was involved in where a woman visited the Amish country and came home and changed her religion. And I don't know -- the husband wouldn't go along and the next thing you know, I was involved in helping the husband. But boy, I guess sometimes -- it's hard to imagine people really making that kind of a shift, but I guess it happens. Some people just love it -- or fall in love with it -- and the next thing you know, they're making a change.

Ms. Woods Fisher: But converts are very rare.

Lee Rosen: I would think. Yeah.

Ms. Woods Fisher: You really have to -- she probably really had an extreme way of life or way of thinking about things because it -- generally the church is not growing from the outside in; it's growing from the inside out.

Lee Rosen: Inside out. Well, let me ask you -- and you mentioned electricity. If I want my marriage to work and we want to follow some of the ideas of the Amish, am I going to have to give up electricity in order to save my marriage?

Ms. Woods Fisher: Oh, that and grow a beard. Absolutely. A horseshoe beard. No moustache.

Lee Rosen: Okay. But seriously, what is different about the Amish approach to marriage? Why is it different than the typical American approach?

Ms. Woods Fisher: I think that is such a great question and that's really the heart of our interview today, because the thing about an Amish marriage is these marriage vows are taken extremely seriously. The vows are seen as a lifetime commitment, a bond that only God can bind, and

there is no provision for divorce. They essentially have a zero divorce rate.

Now, with that said, they're not perfect people and they will be the first to tell you that. *Amish Peace* is a book that's looking at the best of their culture. And I do want to make clear I'm not an expert on the Amish but I'm an observer of the Amish. So I think there's some suggestions and ideas that they have that we can bring into our life that could actually really benefit the modern American marriage.

Lee Rosen: Like, what comes to mind?

Ms. Woods Fisher: Well, actually, one thing -- just to prove this point of the fact that they have healthy marriages -- is that there is statistics showing that they are one of the strongest and most stable family systems in America. Researchers have found that major depression occurs in only about one-fifth to one-tenth as often in the Amish as the rest of the U.S. population. So they do have something here, something we can benefit from in studying.

One of the key points about it is I think reconciliation is a -- just a key part of solving marital problems in their perspective. And when you think about Amish -- I mean, when you even think of Nickel Mines, forgiveness and reconciliation is just part of the bedrock of their worldview, their life outlook.

Lee Rosen: Right. Yeah. We watched -- actually, in our firm we watched a documentary that covered a lot of that whole incident. And it was a documentary called, I think, *Forgiveness*, and it was really very interesting. And you get a real sense of -- that is not -- the forgiveness thing is just not the standard operating procedure in a lot of America. You see so much anger and upset. So you think that's a big part of why the marriages work?

Ms. Woods Fisher: I do. I think that that is the goal. That is always the goal is towards a healthy, stable marriage and not looking at divorce as an option, which really that's a different thing from even when I was growing up in the '60s and the '70s where divorce was very rare. And now it's really rare to have a long-term marriage.

Lee Rosen: But do the Amish have the same problems and just deal with them differently, or do they not have the problems that the average couple in America has?

Ms. Woods Fisher: I think that's another excellent, excellent question. And I've been thinking about that because the truth is I don't think they have the same problems. They have problems but they don't have the same

problems. And I kind of broke it down into three areas that differentiate the Amish from your modern American families. By the way, the Amish refer to us, the non-Amish, as English. That's just their standard word is we are English to them.

So when you think about an Amish marriage, first of all a couple is going into their marriage with a lack of media exposure. That is really quite profound. They do not have these preconceived ideas of what romance is like, what aging looks like -- I mean, the way we look at it from television and movies. They don't have sort of ridiculous ideas of what a marriage should look like. I mean, their examples are their community. It's not Hollywood. I mean, I think that probably seems simple and yet I think that is profound.

The second thing that I think is very different about the Amish in their families is that the accumulation of wealth is not their goal. They really value family and time together more than wealth or status. And that goes a lot with their sense of humility. They do not have -- they just de-emphasize pride. That's why their clothing is simple. It's why their homes are very simple. It's why they have buggies and not Lexuses. I mean, they really fight that human nature of pridefulness. So there's really nothing more vital to an Amish way of life than family and community. That's fairly different from most families that are working so hard to accumulate a bigger house, a better house; or even for the right reasons: braces for their children, camps, colleges.

And the third thing I feel that really differentiates an Amish marriage is that they are surrounded by good, strong role models. There's so many healthy examples in a tight community and that's something I think we can all find. I have one girlfriend who was raised by a single mom. Her dad had multiple divorces. She went into a marriage knowing she had no good examples in front of her. So that was one thing she sought out early in her marriage was finding people whose marriages she admired. And she said she just watched them and listened and looked and observed. But that's an example of where you can really take that concept into your own life. You don't have to go Amish for that.

Lee Rosen:

Right. Right. Yeah. And those folks don't even know they're looking for role models; they're just there. The Amish, everywhere you look you're seeing somebody whose marriage is working because they're all working. Very interesting.

So I guess -- I mean, some of the things that plague marriages among the English, like affairs, do you have that going on at all in the Amish? I assume not?

Ms. Woods Fisher: You know, I'm sure there's the underbelly. I'm sure there's some problems such as an affair or other issues that -- but there's such a cultural push against it. A man would lose so much if he were to even pursue an outside affair. There's just a lot of pressure to preserve that marriage.

Lee Rosen: Right. So you talk about these distinctions between the Amish and the rest of us, at least in this country. I sort of buy your position that you can take some of those and apply them to your life, like that whole role models are really easy. But even the media thing -- the influence of the media -- just being cognizant of how that's impacting your marriage I can see making -- it's one of those things you may be able to take away from the book and apply to your own life. Interesting stuff.

Let me ask you this. Can you give us examples of how the Amish would resolve an issue that we have every day? Could you give us an example/story where the Amish approach to dealing with life's issues is applied?

Ms. Woods Fisher: There's a story in *Amish Peach* called "Family First." And it's a story about a couple named Sarah and Abel Lehman. And Abel has an entrepreneurial streak and he is just a creative -- I mean, remember, these are German people. They are intelligent, they are highly resourceful and they have all kind of small businesses cropping up.

And one thing he figured out how to do was to have a little -- they bought a booth at Central Market in Lancaster -- that's kind of a large farmer's market or a daily market. And they sold salads -- freshly made salads -- because he observed how people were coming to his salad booth and seeing how fresh their salads were. So he started to expand and he started to add more and more products to his line and it was very, very successful.

But they have six children and they valued dad being at home and more and more Abel was gone, not just a day or two a week but three or four days a week and long, long, long hours. And Sarah would keep the kids awake late at night so they could see their dad before they went to bed but it was just getting harder and harder.

And again, parenting is a career to the Amish. They truly just -- both husband and wife are fully vested in raising their children well.

And Sarah put her foot down. She finally told Abel enough was enough. This is no way to raise a family with dad gone all the time.

So Abel actually sold the booth and they ended up creating a commercial kitchen right on their property so they were able to then just have things sold but not have Abel leave the farm.

But it was interesting to me to see an Amish woman there putting her foot down. Family came first, above the financial remuneration that came from a profitable business. And Abel agreed. I just think that's such an interesting thing. It's so different in our culture where we squeeze our kids around our busy schedules. And I've done that myself in our family. My husband -- we were living in Hong Kong for four years and he was traveling over 50 percent of the time and it's not ideal.

So I'm not saying that dads can travel or moms can't travel or have careers, but the idea that kids come first, that your family comes first, that is just an excellent way of viewing these little treasures you've been given.

Lee Rosen: Well, and it makes sense and it is important. But I remember when I was going through the book there is a chapter -- and I can't think of the title of it. But it's basically children -- oh, here it is. "Children are loved but not adored."

Ms. Woods Fisher: But not adored.

Lee Rosen: Right. How is that consistent with what you're telling us about the decisions being made in the family that you observed?

Ms. Woods Fisher: Well, that's interesting because that story in "children are loved but not adored" is a little bit more about probably the parenting issues than, say, the marriage. But that's a story by a gentleman who's now dean of Eastern Mennonite Seminary and he was raised Old Order Amish. And it was his perspective in looking at how the families are large -- an average family is six children -- 10, 12 is not unheard of -- and parenting in the Amish home is a different story.

Kids are part of the family. They are part of the chores they're given at a young age. They are a vital part of the family. But they aren't adored in a way we probably adore a child, almost making that child the center of the universe. The family is a whole unit, like a piece -- it's a pie. And when you think of just the way modern families are going, I think that was just a really interesting quote that Dr. Stetsman [ph] made, "Children are loved but not adored." Not to the point where sometimes even in marriages where children become more important than the marriage.

Lee Rosen: Right. Well, it does sound like a subtle but important shift. I was at a kids' softball game last night -- my daughter's softball game -- and so many of the families that are involved in these sports, it takes over -- your kids' activities take over your life. And it does become sort of the child is the center of the family rather than the family as a whole where there's respect for every element of it. I mean, it is a little -- a slightly different twist on it that I think may be something that more families ought to emulate.

Ms. Woods Fisher: In fact I think that's a really interesting point as we think about just how the Amish live intentionally, where they look at -- before they accept something new they ask the question, "Where will this lead?" So if we were to take that into our day and, just what you said, adding another activity, adding gymnastics on top of soccer, that kind of thing, the Amish would probably look at that and say, "Does that splinter our family or does it gather us? Does it stress us out or does it make us more cohesive?"

And if something doesn't really answer those questions to the health of the family or their community or their church, they reject it. So they don't reject, for instance, all technology; they're just very selective about what they bring into their lives. I think that is a great, great takeaway point for modern families.

Lee Rosen: Okay. And I want to -- I agree with you. So you're sort of explaining this idea of being very intentional about your decision making. So tell me, how would they evaluate -- let's go right back to that -- to adding that extra sport to the family schedule. So they would look at it and what questions would they ask themselves again? I know I'm asking you to repeat yourself but I want to be clear about it.

Ms. Woods Fisher: Let's pretend there's sort of an Amish modern American family. So we're trying to put this into takeaway value. I think they would ask themselves, "Does this mean we're having less family dinners? Does this mean the evenings become stressful? Does this mean dad is spending the weekend at a gymnastics camp with eldest daughter for the weekend and the rest of the family is alone at the house or sent off in a number of different directions because each child has a schedule that's overloaded like that?" And I think they just would take -- protect what they value most.

So I'm not saying they say no to things; I'm just saying they think carefully before they bring something new in.

Lee Rosen: Right.



Ms. Woods Fisher: Let me give you another example just with the technology, not even just busyness. But I have a friend who has a very, very introverted son and they -- I don't know why they did this but they brought in some videogames for him. And as I've observed over the years and the way technology has grown, these videogames have become so complex that this boy now no longer even needs to play videogames with his friends. They can just all stay in their homes and interact with each other online.

So you've taken an introverted boy, given him a videogame that can be sort of obsessive for some personalities, and he's gone even further. I mean, that's exactly what I -- I mean, I'm not saying all videogames are wrong. I think it's really smart to say, "Where will this lead?"

Lee Rosen: Right. And for that kid with that personality it could lead in exactly the wrong direction.

Ms. Woods Fisher: Exactly.

Lee Rosen: And no one really takes -- and I agree with you. I mean, it does sound like a valuable lesson because very few of us take the time -- in part because we're so busy with the 12,000 other things we've already let into our lives -- we don't take the time to do that intentional evaluation about the impact of each of these decisions. It's very challenging because at this point for most of us, we're already sort of on overload and it's tough to start at square one. But it makes perfect sense.

Do you feel like you incorporate this idea of living intentionally into your life based on what you've learned?

Ms. Woods Fisher: I think there are so many things that have stayed with me from this book. I can't even begin to tell you. Things like, oh, just keeping a simpler schedule or forgiving more easily. I mean, I may never have a child hurt in a school shooting, but I can let a grudge go more quickly. You know what I mean?

Lee Rosen: Right.

Ms. Woods Fisher: That idea that just forgiveness becomes a way of life instead of just randomly handed out. There's so many examples I gained from spending time with the Amish. I stayed in their homes. I've been back a number of times, communicate with all of them. And I made sure that as I wrote these stories that they corrected the stories. So they saw it and signed off. I really want to honor what they've given to me and not take anything from them. And I have just the greatest

respect for so much of the way they live their life with the simplicity and valuing what's really important.

I think it's a good time for our country where people are ironically busier, despite technology that promises us more convenience. Somehow we just pack more in.

Lee Rosen: Right. Well, that's because we're busy getting our iPhones repaired.

Ms. Woods Fisher: Yes.

Lee Rosen: But you're right. If you're not intentional about it, it does not always work out the way that you might have hoped or guessed that it would. You have to really think it through. Tremendously valuable advice.

I understand that you are -- this is not the only Amish-related book. Are you doing more? Is this part of a series? What are you up to?

Ms. Woods Fisher: I have another non-fiction Amish book coming out next August about Amish proverbs, because they tend to use proverbs as a teaching tool in their lives. It's part of the Penn Dutch culture. So it was really an interesting experience to explore the roots of proverbs just historically. So that's coming out hardback in August.

And then in between that I have a fiction series of three. The first one is releasing January 1st and it's called *The Choice*. And it's about a young woman in a little fictitious town in Lancaster County called Stony Ridge. And she's really on the edge of where her life's going to take her, hence the title.

Lee Rosen: And that's one of three?

Ms. Woods Fisher: Yes.

Lee Rosen: When are the other two -- are the other two already written or they're in process?

Ms. Woods Fisher: No, they're already written. The second one will be out next September and the third one I believe will be spring. So I have working titles for them but the publisher hasn't narrowed down the title exactly yet, so I hesitate to mislead anybody. But they are part of the Lancaster County Secrets series.

Lee Rosen: You're pretty amazing. You are really a prolific writer. You've got a lot going on. I'm very impressed.

Is there anything else that we ought to know about what's going on with you or things that we can apply to our lives from the Amish?

Ms. Woods Fisher: Just that I hope people will look at a book such as *Amish Peace* and just look for the takeaway value and see what they can do to just help their life flow down a little and prioritize what's really important and cherish our marriages and our families. That's the whole point of the book.

Lee Rosen: Perfect. Suzanne, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us today. I appreciate it.

Ms. Woods Fisher: It was a pleasure, Lee.

Lee Rosen: Those of you that are interested -- and I think that that ought to be everybody because this is pretty interesting stuff. And when you're talking to someone that has spent time with a group of people that have figured out how to stay married, there are lessons to be learned there. They have got something figured out. And I recognize that we're not all going to grow the beard and turn off our electricity and become Amish, but it does seem like there are some very valuable lessons.

It's interesting because when I listen to Suzanne and I relate back to a lot of the marriage counselors and other experts that I've had on the show, that a lot of the lessons that we're getting from the Amish are a lot like the things that the professionals are telling us. They really do dovetail together very nicely. But the book, *Amish Peace*, I think in a way is almost easier to take and to apply to your life because there are so many good stories of real people doing real things that do make a difference. And they all add up to families that work. So you ought to take a look at it.

You can find out more about Suzanne and this book, *Amish Peace*, along with everything else that's coming out and coming up. You can read her blog. It's all at [SuzanneWoodsFisher.com](http://SuzanneWoodsFisher.com). I'll put a link to that in the show notes. You can order *Amish Peace* by calling (800) 877-2665, or you can find it at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com). And we'll put all of that in the show notes.

Thank you so much for joining us today and I hope that you will join us again next week. I love to hear your comments and suggestions about the show. You can post your comments right on the site at [StayHappilyMarried.com](http://StayHappilyMarried.com). You can also call our comment line at (919) 256-3083. Or you can shoot us an e-mail at [comments@stayhappilymarried.com](mailto:comments@stayhappilymarried.com).

I'm Lee Rosen. Until next time, stay happily married.

---

*Thank you for joining us today on Stay Happily Married. If you'd like more information, please visit us on the Web at [stayhappilymarried.com](http://stayhappilymarried.com). We would love to hear your feedback or comments. Please e-mail us at [comments@stayhappilymarried.com](mailto:comments@stayhappilymarried.com) or call us at (919) 256-3083. Until next time, best wishes.*