

Wedding speech on the occasion of the wedding of Thorsten and Mirka S. and at the same time a proposal for the reform of the marriage law.

Some time ago I visited Lübeck (my hometown) and went as always with my "big round tour" the mill road "down" in the direction of the crow pond. If you walk on the right side, you pass the registry office. And just as I was passing it, a wedding couple came out of the portal, followed by the witnesses.

When I see a newlywed couple, I secretly say to myself: "*Good luck, hopefully, everything goes well*". But when the two approached me directly, and I looked at the groom in the eye, I said loudly, "*Good luck.*"

Then the groom laughingly stretched his upward right thumb towards me and answered, "*New game, new luck.*"

This freshly married husband is the embodiment of the spirit of today: Marriage as gambling, marriage as job rotation, with the next woman everything becomes different.

But he was one of those who still got married. A large group today considers marriage superfluous.

In Germany, there are 1.3 million couples with 560,000 children who are unmarried.

Can we say anything about the causes? One of the PowerPoint projections usual today would now be entitled,

"Cause analysis".

In the early Middle Ages, marriage was very simple. The bride and groom only had to jump over a broom style that was laid across the threshold, and they were already married. The only rule was that you were not allowed to touch the broom. Otherwise, the good spirits would be out of tune.

Then the church took care of the wedding, and the disaster began. At first, the wedding took place only in front of the church portal in order not to desecrate the church. Then the procedure was relocated in front of the altar. Everything became more and more ritualized. Until marriage was finally raised to a holy sacrament - until death do you part.

After the stranglehold of the church had been loosened a bit, the next stranglehold troop already started.

Who do you think?..... the lawyers.

The famous surgeon Sauerbruch was once asked at a gala dinner by his table neighbor, "*Professor, can people really live without appendix?*" And Sauerbruch answered, "*People yes - but doctors not.*"

Thorsten is a lawyer, and that's why this room is teeming with lawyers. If I asked you the question: Can couples live without a marriage certificate? Then there is only - admit it - an answer:

Couples yes - but lawyers not.

And that is one of the main reasons for today's unwillingness to marry. Marriage law has the same effect as today's employment protection law. This can already be seen from the fact that in German marriage law ten percent of the text is dedicated to marriage and ninety percent to divorce.

What can you do about it? Our former president Roman Herzog has asked the Germans to awaken from their lethargy and finally carry out reforms. And this culminates in his famous appeal, *"There must be a jolt through Germany"*. And I've also experienced such a jolt. Fortunately not a jolt to the right but a jolt to change the marriage law.

What can you do about it? Already in the 16th century Miguel de Cervantes, the writer of Don Quixote, made the suggestion that marriages should only be entered into for ten years. Of course, this reform proposal has not been implemented.

As a successor to Cervantes, I now have (in my eyes) a much better reform proposal.

Now the PowerPoint heading "Reason" is added.

What do Britney Spears and I have in common? Thorsten, do you have an idea? Don't you know? We're both statistical slip-ups: Britney was married for only 55 hours, and I'm it for forty-one years.

In which year are most marriages divorced? Of course, they all think of the "darn seventh year", but that's not true. The most frequent divorces take place in the fourth year. The marriage between our show stars Verona Feldbusch and Dieter Bohlen also ended after four years.

Then in the ninth year, there is another small peak and from the tenth year on the divorce rate is drastically low.

Why do you think? One has got used to each other.

What is more logical than to demand:

A marriage should only be possible after a ten-year probationary period.

Then all problems would be solved, and the divorce lawyers would have to look for a new job.

Thorsten and Mirka: You both have just completed a probationary period of ten years. This makes you the showcase couple of my reform proposal. If I now present my ideas in the Legal Committee of the Bundestag or in the relevant talk

shows, I would ask you to come along and support my proposal from your own experience. You've put all your quarrels behind you, now it can only go well. What the famous patient "Wolfsmann" was for Sigmund Freud - that's what you are for my reform project: the showcase couple.

But even if there is a ten-year probationary period, it can still go wrong and always get annoyed during the probationary period, that's not nice too. The subject of marriage is an endless story. And it moves between marriage heaven and marriage hell.

Two little stories are supposed to describe the condition of some marriages.

Some time ago I visited Hamburg and made a harbour tour there. When the participants crossed the gangboard and entered the launch, I accidentally stepped on the heels of a woman. Without turning around, she said: "Can't you be careful, you fool". Then she turned around, looked at me in horror and said, *"Excuse me, I thought you were my husband"*.

And the second story: My friend and colleague, Toni Egger, a charming Viennese, attended a reception and the host asked him: "Have you met my wife yet? He replied, *"I already had the pleasure,"* to which the host replied, *"If it was a pleasure, it wasn't my wife."*

In marriages like this, there's nothing more going on but the television.

What can one do at all to achieve a marriage that is as harmonious as possible?

Whose advice should one seek in this case? What do you think Thorsten?

Don't you know? However you know who I always quote, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, of course. Because he was secret advice, he gave so much public advice. His advice on marriage was:

If you want to marry a woman, you should first check whether you can talk to her for the rest of your life.

That is true. But can that also be justified? "Where is the evidence," as the Americans tend to say.

In Germany, the higher the level of education, the lower the divorce rate. Or also, academics have a lower divorce rate than non-academics. If one now assumes (and this is a falsifiable hypothesis) that academics have more to say to each other, then Goethe would once again be right.

Unfortunately, Johann Wolfgang himself did not follow his advice. Also in his case, the saying applies:

The signpost shows the way, but it doesn't go it.

Johann Wolfgang seldom spoke with Christiane. His conversation took place on a different level, and he did not hesitate to call her his "bed treasure" towards others.

He did practice a probationary period in my sense. But it was a bit too long, it lasted eighteen years. His son August was quite old when Christiane finally put her gun to his head.

Let's forget it!

Even though Johann Wolfgang had many bad habits, he was ingenious in one thing: he formulated many simple truths in a perfect and definitive way. One of them is:

**Unbound spirits strive in vain
A master limits his terrain.**

Goethe's words were actually aimed at spiritual work. But they also apply to marriage and especially to these spirits that are driven by their testosterone levels. And they also apply to a speech. And that's why I'm stopping now.

Just one more point: A godfather who held the bridegroom (in the St. Jürgen's Chapel in Lübeck) over the baptismal font is expected to give the newlyweds a saying on their way.

Unfortunately, I can't serve with that. With sayings it's a thing of its own.

My wedding saying, our pastor had chosen for us was,
"Everyone serves the other in love."

My wife says she hasn't noticed much about "serving" in the last forty years. And she is right.

Therefore I also think, in retrospect, another saying would have been better, namely the 2nd Corinthians verse 17

"What you do for me, you also do for yourself."

If no saying - what then?

Just a wish.

And that's plain and simple:

Good luck and all the best