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When I was growing up, there was this song we used to sing on the playground,

and it went like this,

"Tracy and so and so, sitting in a tree, k-i-s-s-i-n-g,

first comes love, then comes marriage,

then comes baby in a baby carriage."

And I'm like,

"OK, that's it! That's how you do life. That's how you do a relationship.

Love, marriage, baby carriage. OK, got it!

(Laughter)

Then I grew up, and this is what my life turned out to be.

(Laughter)

Slightly more complicated, right? (Laughter)

Love, marriage, divorce, dry spells, love, marriage,

co-parenting, another marriage, another divorce;

you got the picture.

(Laughter)

(Applause)

So if you're good at math and/or a fast reader, what you've got there

is that I've been married three times.

Yep, three, and divorced.

What that is supposed to mean is that I'm a total failure at relationships.

And that is one way to look at it, but not the only way.

Because what I think really happened is that I kept marrying the wrong person.

No, it's not that I didn't-- it's not that I chose bad guys.

My first two husbands were amazing men

who are now married to wonderful women who aren't me.

(Laughter)

And my third husband, well, we're friends on Facebook now.

So, all is well that ends well, right?

After the collapse of my third marriage in 2005,

I realized that I've been marrying everyone in sight,

except the one person that I really needed to marry

in order to have a great relationship

and that once I married that person,

all of my relationships would be successes, even the failures.

The so-called failures, actually.

Since we're talking today about women inventing,

I'm going to talk about inventing relationships.

What I've found through a lot of trial and obviously, many, many, many errors,

to be the thing that has transformed my life and love,

and that is this idea of marrying yourself.

So what does it mean to marry yourself?

It's a big idea.

It is as big as marriage itself except, if I could just summarize it,

it would be that you enter into a relationship with yourself

and then you put a ring on it.

(Laughter)

In other words, you commit to yourself fully.

And then you build a relationship with yourself

to the point where you realize that you're whole right now,

that there is no man, woman, job, circumstance that can happen to you

that is going to make you more whole because you already are.

And this changes your life.

By now, I'm sure at least some of you are wondering

why you should be listening to a three-time divorcee

talk about marriage?

(Laughter)

Even to herself. And I understand that.

Here's what I have to say about that:

what I've learned and my experience is

that *the places where you have the biggest challenges in your life*

*become the places where you have the most to give*

if you do your inner work.

I kind of want to say that again:

*the places where you have the biggest challenges*

*are the places where you have the most to give*.

So let me tell you a little bit about the person I truly needed to marry:

myself.

I am from Minneapolis. Wooh!

(Laughter)

My mom was a prostitute and an alcoholic.

She put me in foster care when I was three months old.

My dad was a criminal;

he was a drug dealer and a pimp with a heart of gold

- actually, they both had hearts of gold -

and he spent more or less my whole life in prison.

He just got out of prison after his most recent sentence

which was 20 years.

Until the age of nine, I was probably in two dozen foster homes.

The thing you need to know about this story

- there are a lot of details, obviously - but the thing you need to know

is that I came out of that childhood with one goal: to never be left.

The way I was going to do that is that I was going to get married.

That was the way I was going to accomplish that goal.

So I got married the first time to a guy I met when I was 17.

We got married a couple of years later, when I was 19.

He was a really good guy from a great family, he had an MBA.

I mean, it was like, you know, marriage material.

You know, I was thrilled.

I was like, "I have a family. I belong somewhere. This is wonderful."

And then after five years I left him.

Then ten years later, I got married again to another wonderful guy,

who is the father of my now 16-years-old son.

We still have a wonderful relationship. He is a really good guy.

But after four years I left him, too.

And I am not proud to say that I did that, but in order to really marry yourself,

you have to get sometimes very painfully honest with yourself

about what it is that you've done.

So I'm not proud of that.

Then eight years later, I got married again, when I was 40,

and I was like, "OK, this feels right!"

Let me tell you what felt right to a girl who was in 24 foster homes:

a guy who started to date after nine months of marriage;

essentially, he started dating a 21-year-old girl.

OK, I mean, it would be funny, if it weren't so tragic.

You have to have a sense of... that is why we're Facebook friends.

So, here I am looking at this person that I just described

with a terrible track record of relationships,

and I'm like, "I'm supposed to marry her?

This is the woman you want me to marry?"

And the answer is yes.

Because here is the deal:

the thing about marrying yourself is not just like cohabitating.

You're not just going to date for a while and see how it turns out.

You are going to do this till death do you part.

You are going to take vows.

So here are the vows.

Number 1:

you are going to marry yourself for richer or for poorer.

This means you are going to love yourself right where you are.

You don't say to yourself, "When you get to the corner of Hollywood and Vine,

then I will marry you."

You don't say, "When you lose ten pounds, then I will love you."

And you don't say, "If you hadn't married that loser, I would love you,

but since you did, I'm sorry, I think it's over."

When you marry yourself, you walk yourself down that aisle

exactly where you are.

And paradoxically, I found that loving myself exactly where I am

is the only way to get where I am going.

Number 2:

you are going to marry yourself for better or for worse.

What this means is that most of us are willing to love ourselves for better,

I mean, sure, I am having a great hair day today.

I love me.

(Laughter)

That's not what I am talking about.

I'm talking about for worse, you know, the big life disappointments.

Maybe you don't own a home, you didn't get the career you wanted,

maybe you didn't graduate from college, or get the relationship you wanted.

Maybe it hasn't turned out-- maybe you fight with your mum,

maybe you watch too much reality TV,

whatever it is, it doesn't matter anymore.

Because when you marry yourself, you agree to stay with you no matter what.

Third,

you marry yourself in sickness and in health.

What this means is that you forgive yourself for your mistakes.

A mistake isn't actually a failure unless you don't learn from it

and unless you don't grow.

There is a saying, "You ask for patience, and what you get is a line at the bank."

(Laughter)

What that means is that life does not give you what you've asked for,

it gives you the people, places, and situations

that allow you to develop what you ask for.

And the thing is if you don't get it right the first time,

life will give it to you again.

(Laughter)

Because life is very generous that way.

It's like I didn't get it the first time, in the first marriage,

and I didn't get it the second time, maybe the third time I'll get it.

So inside that terrible experience of that third marriage,

I learned something about "in sickness and in health".

What I learned is how to sit by my own bedside,

and how to hold my own hand, and how to nurse myself,

and how to comfort myself.

What I learned is that I am a person that I can count on.

Last but not least, you marry yourself--

when you marry yourself, it's to have and to hold yourself.

What does it mean to have and to hold?

Well, I think it means that you love yourself

the way you want someone else to love you.

I had always been going through life with this sense of lack.

I felt like I was kind of half a person, and that I was missing something.

I went into my relationships

hoping to solve this feeling that I had my entire life:

that I was not whole unless someone loved me.

The truth was

that I wasn't ever going to feel whole until I learned to love myself.

So this business of marrying yourself transforms every area of your life:

your business, family relationships, kids, social relationships, friends.

Because when you marry yourself, this huge thing happens:

you become able to love in this whole new way.

You become able to love other people right where they are, for who they are,

the same way you're already loving yourself.

And of course, this is what the world needs more of.

So when I married myself, and I realized that I already had everything I needed,

I started seeing it as my job

to basically just light up my little corner of the world.

That's my new job.

Because I don't need anything, I already have it.

So when I take meetings,

it's all about how can I help this person achieve her goal?

When I'm in my social communities,

it is like what can I bring to this that only I can bring?

When I go on dates,

it is like how can I just discover another person maybe for just one hour

which, of course, brings me a full circle.

Because people always asked me about my love life; they want to know.

(Laughter)

You know, the answer is, I am still working on it.

Aren't we all?

So this is where I am right now.

About three months ago, I went on a first date.

About 30 minutes into the date, I found myself paying attention

not to whether he liked me, but how I felt in his presence.

I noticed that I was light, happy, joking.

As I reflected on the date afterwards, I was like, "Wow, I got really excited!

Look, this is how committed I am to myself."

I am not even on this date trying to get someone to like me.

I am more interested in how I feel about me than how he feels about me,

not because I am selfish, but because the only relationship

I am ever going to have with another person

is the one that I am already having with myself -

just going to have it with them now.

So it turned out he liked me, and we are still together.

It's cool and amazing, but I've been married three times,

so slow down!

(Laughter)

The thing is that I am not trying to get security from him through marriage,

and, God forbid, a baby carriage.

I am only here to just be in a relationship.

I am not dying to hear the words, "Will you marry me?"

Because even though those words are very powerful

- and very powerful to a person like me -

I don't need them to hear it from him

because I have already heard them from myself.

The way I see it is like I took myself to the top of a mountain,

or maybe to the bottom of the ocean,

and I got down on one knee, and I said, "I'll never leave you."

And now I am married to the one person I really wanted to be with all along,

myself.

(Applause)

Thank you.