

“If you’re seeking freedom in love and in life overall, *The Right Combination* is the faith-builder and guide you need. Barbie and Richard share their story of surrender and redemption with complete transparency, giving you freedom to move beyond shame or embarrassment to own your story. Grounded in God’s Word and heart-stirring questions to prompt your own process, this book will empower you to seek God first, to trust him, and to stay full of hope for whatever God has for you.”

Tiffany Hendra, founder of The Coaching Sanctuary™ and former lead on *The Real Housewives of Dallas*

“*The Right Combination* is written with just the right combination: permeated by Scripture, purposed through pain, and penned by trusted friends. We’re so glad this resource is now available to empower those on marriage ‘next’ with blended homes.”

Shannon and Cindy O’Dell, senior pastors of Brand New Church

“Richard and Barbie Armenta take readers on an incredible journey of love, faith, and marriage done God’s way. By candidly opening up about their imperfect lives and their up-and-down relationship, the Armentas show us on a very personal level how trusting in God is the only way to succeed, not only in marriage but also in life. Whether you are single, divorced, or married, this book will inspire you to seek God’s purpose for your life, your relationships, and, ultimately, your marriage!”

—Ed and Lisa Young, pastors of Fellowship Church and authors of New York Times best seller *Sexperiment*

“Richard and Barbie have an amazing story to tell on issues the church isn’t talking about nearly enough. Their experience and testimony will impact a huge portion of the population today because they not only talk the talk but walk the walk.”

—Brandon Hensley, president and cofounder of Team Impact

“Inspiring. Thought-provoking. Challenging. This remarkable book is a must-read for all Christian couples contemplating marriage after divorce. Barbie and Richard Armenta write with honesty about the challenges of finding love, blending their families, honoring God, and waiting for his timing. You’ll laugh out loud, wipe a tear, and find answers within the pages of this book. *The Right Combination* should be in the resource library of every church and Christian counselor. Don’t miss it!”

—Carol Kent, speaker and author of *A New Kind of Normal: Hope-Filled Choices When Life Turns Upside Down*







THE Right  
COMBINATION

FINDING  
LOVE AND LIFE  
AFTER DIVORCE

BARBIE & RICHARD ARMENTA

 Kregel  
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*To our big, beautiful, blended family.  
We are so grateful for your love, support, and encouragement.  
We appreciate your willingness to let our story be heard.  
We love you!*





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## INTRODUCTION

GOD IS A GOD WITH A PLAN. The Bible tells us, “He has made everything beautiful *in its time*” (Ecclesiastes 3:11, emphasis added). In today’s world of instant gratification, we want what we want, and we want it all now. Faster downloads, groceries delivered in an hour, swipe-right dating—anything and everything is available at our fingertips, and we’re upset when it’s not. So waiting through a process, waiting for a plan to unfold—no one has time for that!

*The Right Combination* is our story of learning to really live and love again after divorce. It’s a journey of God’s grace and redemption, of how God took our choices to be obedient to his call on our lives and made something beautiful from our broken pasts. It starts with my husband Richard’s decision to surrender everything to God, and it shows the power one simple choice can have to positively change the lives of others forever. It is our story of how God took Richard and me from our individual messy places and directed our steps toward one another to create something neither one of us was ever sure we could have in a relationship.

Most of my recollections come directly from the pages of my personal journals, words I thought nobody would ever read, in the hope that you will be inspired in your own journey to find the kind of love God wants for you despite your life’s imperfections—not just the love of a mate but the love of God and love for yourself. I relived many of the emotions and pain of the days I wrote the entries as I searched through them for the threads that bound Richard’s story and my story together into *our* story. It may not be the most vulnerable thing I’ve ever done, but it’s up there.

I would never have been able to experience all that I have without the willingness to believe that if I want to *be* something different, I have to *do* something different. Sounds easy, right? That is, until you are challenged to actually put it in practice. Doing what it takes is hard, and it requires us to get out of our comfort zone, go against what we know, and make new choices. Sometimes those choices are uncomfortable or unpopular, and we find ourselves being the odd man out. It might feel like the biggest risk you will ever take. But take it from Richard and me: it is so worth it. True freedom comes through doing; it comes from making a new decision and taking the first step.

Each chapter tells you a bit of our story and what we went through in learning to live and date God's way. At the end of every chapter, we challenge you to begin your own process. Through these pages, we share Scripture to encourage you in God's truth: you are worthy, and it is never too late to have the abundant life God wants for you. Richard and I share lessons we learned along the way in hopes of inspiring you to know that if we can do it, you can do it too. We also pose some questions to get you thinking about who God made you to be so you can freely embrace all he has planned for you. It will take faith to believe it is possible, it will take courage to step out, and it will take commitment to see it through. Just remember: with God, nothing is impossible!

—Barbie Armenta

*Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid  
or discouraged, for the LORD God, my God, is with you.*

—1 Chronicles 28:20

## PART 1

TWO LIVES ... ONE SPARK





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## CHAPTER 1

# Richard and Barbie Yahoo!

### *Finding Hope After Divorce*

*I just don't want this night to end.*

—Richard

“PADLOCK LOOKING FOR THE RIGHT COMBINATION.”

That was the first line of Richard’s Yahoo! Personals dating profile the day he reached out to me about getting together to meet.

*Hmm. I like it!*

After a while, it seems like you’ve seen and heard it all. I’d had my hopes of meeting the right guy crushed more than once, so I had recently decided to take a break from the online dating scene. Yet there I was again, scrolling through my potential matches, feeling more than a little bit panicked as a week of lonely days stretched ahead of me. My kids were scheduled to visit their dad for spring break, and as much as I didn’t want to admit it, I just couldn’t stand the thought of being alone. A seven-day free trial on Yahoo! Personals was all the encouragement I needed to get back in the game and give it one more chance.

I had only been back online a few hours when the note came: “I have no idea where Aubrey, Texas is, but maybe we should meet.”

Not exactly the strongest start, but I was intrigued. I scrolled through Richard’s profile trying to get a feel for the guy before making the leap.

*He is cute!*

He had uploaded a few pictures with friends and family and a couple more with his beautiful daughter. In my head, I was running down the list of positives and checking them off enthusiastically. His profile read like someone who knew how to have fun, but the part that finally got my attention was that he was a Christian. I so wanted to meet someone who could walk with me as I grew in my faith.

*What do I have to lose?* I typed back an answer, and he responded right away: “Let’s meet somewhere in the middle. How about Sherlock’s in Addison? Friday for happy hour? 4?”

I was feeling a little excited. This guy looked promising, but I was still nervous. I’d had too many bad first dates, so I agreed to meet him with a full backup plan in place in the event that the date went south. I had reached out to my girlfriends just in case I wanted to meet up with them later.

Maybe past experience was clouding my ability to keep a positive focus. Whatever it was, I did not give it 100 percent. I didn’t even dress my cutest. There I was, waiting outside of Sherlock’s at 4:00 p.m. wearing an outfit that was slightly nicer than casual—jeans, heels, and a white eyelet top (which he later told me reminded him of something his sisters would wear when they were little), but as soon as I saw him, I let out a sigh of regret. I knew I’d made a mistake. I should have worn my best outfit for sure.

### **He’s Gorgeous**

Richard is Puerto Rican, so I noticed his beautiful, tan skin and thick, dark hair right away. The pictures on his profile were encouraging, but in person, holy moly. He was almost too good to be true—classic tall, dark, and handsome good looks. He had a great smile. He obviously worked out. His arms were fantastic, and his body was lean and toned. And then, jackpot! I noticed he was wearing jeans with flip-flops, and I was all in on seeing where this date would take me. Check, check, check! I had

never felt that kind of instant attraction to anyone. It was like lightning struck—and then I was suddenly very nervous.

*I hope he calls again. Why did I wear this shirt?* Richard was telling me about himself, but my head was spinning with all these crazy thoughts and questions. I was completely taken by his easygoing manner, and I loved every minute we spent talking and getting to know each other. I especially loved how full of life he was—he talked loud and laughed even louder. There was a joy in his spirit that was just amazing, and I was drawn in by his charm and wit. I wanted to know more about this man. I was glad I had given this online dating thing one last shot, and I was hoping that Richard felt the same. At some point, we realized that we didn't even know each other's last name. I asked him for his and pulled out my phone to change his contact information. I showed him how I had him listed in my phone—Richard Yahoo. He smiled and held up his phone for me to see. There I was—Barbie Yahoo. I, of course, thought it was a sign.

When we got ready to leave the restaurant, Richard said he wasn't ready for the night to end. "Let's go dancing," he said. I was thrilled. Dancing sounded like so much fun. I had raised my eyebrows and looked down at the flip-flops on his feet as we left. He laughed and assured me that he had real shoes stashed in the car. I guess you never know when you'll want to dance.

Richard is an amazing dancer. He attracted a lot of attention from other women on the dance floor, but that night I felt all of his focus on me. I went with the flow and danced wherever Richard wanted to dance. He was so much fun, and he kinda got me out of my shell. I liked it. We danced to everything from Flo Rida's "Apple Bottom Jeans" to a throw-back of the Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's Delight." We ended the night with Bob Marley's "No, Woman, No Cry." It was one of the best nights I'd had in a long time. You know that thing guys do when you're dancing, and they hold your hand against their chest? Yes, he did that. He was already stealing my heart.

You have to love a man who knows how to lead on a dance floor. It made me optimistic for how he would lead in life. I was probably putting the cart before the horse, but I couldn't help feeling this was just perfect. When I had gotten divorced three years earlier, I had lost hope that God could still have an amazing relationship for me. That night was the first time I had ever had a date like that. It gave me a glimpse of what was possible and renewed my hope.

And it was far from over. I could not have been more excited when Richard asked if I wanted to go for pancakes. I am not sure I had ever had that much fun on a date. We talked over pancakes until almost 4:00 a.m. The place was crowded and very noisy, but Richard had all my attention. I barely remember noticing anything that was going on around us or if I even ate. I listened to every word of every story Richard told. We covered a lot of ground, sharing about our past, and basically broke all of the dating "rules." I appreciate someone who doesn't play all of the dating games and can have real conversation. When we got ready to leave, he walked me to my car and kissed me good night in the parking lot. That night was even more fabulous than I hoped it would be!

### **Date Two**

Since my kids were still with their dad, I was excited that Richard agreed to come over for dinner the next night. I was so proud of the home I had recently purchased for my boys and myself. It was a little—well, maybe a lot—out of the way, but the location made it affordable, and I loved its fabulous southern style and the front porch swing. Living in that little community was an escape for me from my old life. It was my safe place, and it allowed me to feel like I was doing right by my boys. The divorce had changed our lifestyle drastically, and moving there felt like we had made a step back up.

I didn't usually invite men over to my house, but that time I felt like I could make an exception. I really liked Richard, so I made one of my Italian favorites, Chicken Marbella with angel hair pasta, I hoped he would

be impressed with my “domestic skills.” When he arrived at my house, he was as good looking as I remembered. We spent a few minutes in my favorite place, my front porch swing, and we picked up where we had left off the night before, chatting over a glass of wine. I still had butterflies.

Richard and I enjoyed a delicious dinner and another glass of wine. It was always a plus when I don’t burn anything! (I love to cook, but things don’t always go as planned.) We were enjoying another really great night together. We talked some more, and he helped me clear the dishes from the table before we moved to the living room to relax on the couch. We kissed, and it was fireworks. There was no mistaking the chemistry between us. Then it happened. Richard stopped kissing me and said, “Can we not have sex? It’s just been a long time.”

In my head, I was okay with him wanting to slow down. That was kind of sweet, right? We kissed a couple more times, but Richard stopped again and told me maybe it was time for him to leave. *Why?* I didn’t really get it. I was so not prepared for what he was about to say. That gorgeous man told me that he had made a commitment to himself and to God that he would no longer have sex outside of marriage.

*Really?*

Thoughts raced through my head. *It’s not like we’re eighteen. Who are we fooling? We’ve both been married before.* Richard left me stunned and a little panicked. I totally would have had sex with him that night. I wondered if he knew that. I wondered if I had blown it with him. If there was anything to wonder, it was flying through my head since I have always been a bit of an overthinker. That was all not on my radar, but I had to gather my thoughts and sort through them later. In spite of my walk to be a better Christian, I had never considered this aspect of dating. Is it really possible for someone to date this way after divorce, or was Richard just not interested in me?

The next morning, I had to call him to see where I stood. He was a gentleman and so nice. He reassured me that he’d had a great time and that he was looking forward to getting to know me better. I was relieved

and maybe just a little bit sad. I knew this was a good thing, but it was just so foreign.

The next day, as I was sharing with my girlfriend about my two dates with Richard, she laughed because it sounded like something from a romantic comedy. I knew it all sounded crazy and too good to be true, but it really happened, and it gave me a hope that I had not felt in a long time.

*I met the most amazing man this week! His name is Richard. He is completely different from any man I have ever met. He has a larger-than-life personality. He is incredibly handsome and has a huge heart for the Lord. Our first date we totally clicked. We talked, we laughed, and we danced. It was so perfect! Please God, I hope so much that this is for real.*

—Barbie's Journal

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## FINDING YOUR RIGHT COMBINATION

### *What Barbie Learned About Finding Hope After Divorce*

When we find ourselves single again, most of us just focus on filling the empty space that's left behind. We lose our identity; our self-esteem takes a blow; we're lost. We don't know how to move forward alone, so we repeat our comfortable patterns, expecting that the next relationship will somehow be different. When it isn't, we find ourselves reliving those old feelings of guilt and shame—feeling worthless and right where Satan wants us. When my marriage ended, I lost hope. Hope that God could still have a beautiful relationship for me.

What I realized is that I was putting my hope in the wrong place. I was putting my hope in a man and not God. We cannot put God expectations on a man; they will fail us every time. God's Word says that he has an abundant life for us. It does not say, unless we get divorced. God's grace covers it all. You are worthy. He gives us the thrill of hope.

***What God's Word Says About Finding Hope***

Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God. (Psalm 146:5)

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jeremiah 29:11)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. (Hebrews 11:1)

As God shows you more Scriptures that relate to finding hope, write them on this page too.



*Isaiah 40:31; Romans 8:23–25; Philippians 1:6; Colossians 1:27; 1 Peter 5:10*

***Begin Your Own Process***

- In what ways have you lost hope?
- What are you hoping for in your future?
- What would it mean to you to receive what you are hoping for?

As you go through the chapters, spend some time in prayer before you work through “Begin Your Own Process.” Ask God what he wants to show you in your own life. Let him show you patterns that you need to let go of and give you the courage to move forward.