

## On the Road ... to Infidelity

*Would Henry's Business Travel End His Marriage?*

By Wayne Laugesen

Henry sold insurance that backed municipal bonds, a boring job that kept him hopping from town to town. His wife, Jo Anne, was the perfect soccer mom devoted entirely to the couple's two kids.

"Boring job, boring wife, boring life," Henry thought to himself as he sat on the airport tarmac for a business trip to Miami.

It hadn't always been that way.

In the early days of their 14-year marriage, Henry and Jo Anne partied with friends and went out on the town. Henry worked as a lawyer, always staying close to home, and Jo Anne was beautiful, fun, and focused entirely on Henry.

"It was easy for us back then," Henry recalled. "I took the lowly cases the firm handed out to young associates, worked until five, and we lived just fine off my modest wage."

The birth of their first child, however, changed things. They had both been brought up Catholic, but had strayed from regular church attendance as young adults. Baptismal classes led them back to the Church, and they made new friends.

Most of their new Catholic friends were a bit older, and they seemed higher on the socioeconomic ladder.

With a new child and new friends, Henry and Jo Anne moved a mile north to Chevy Chase, Md., where the zip codes came with more prestige and loftier price tags.

"For whatever reason, once we were parents we both developed this need to keep up with the Joneses," Jo Anne said.

The couple had their second child and thought they needed a bigger car. Friends told them a Mercedes would be safest, so a Mercedes it was. Tuition would soon be an issue, because few of their new friends used public schools.

"This lifestyle began costing too much," Henry said. "If you drive a Mercedes, people start talking like they expect you to join the local country club — which we did."

"It quickly became a financial nightmare," Jo Anne said.

Henry began a job search, sending out resumes and talking to his network of colleagues. One day, the managing partner handed him a case file involving the legal

affairs of a company that sold bond insurance. In a conversation with one of the client's executives, Henry heard of a job opening at the company in sales — and he applied.

### **New Job, New Challenges**

The job mostly involved brokering insurance deals with municipalities and other governing entities that had less-than-perfect credit and needed insurance to ease the fears of bond investors.

"I had done legal work for insurance companies," Henry said, "and the starting wage was considerably more than I was making at the firm. It sounded perfect, but there was an issue."

The position involved significant travel. Most weeks, Henry would fly to another city with a small team of colleagues. He would live during the week on airplanes and in hotels, meeting during the day to hash out deals.

"It was going to very quickly solve this financial situation we had caused for ourselves," Henry said. "But the travel schedule looked ominous. It looked like the perfect job for a single man, not someone with a wife and kids at home."

Henry and Jo Anne discussed and listed the ups and downs.

"Basically, I'll be gone during the week and I will see you and the kids on weekends and vacations," Henry said. "The upside is money, and the potential for considerably more money in the future."

The two prayed about it, but didn't discern a clear answer. Jo Anne took the question to church, praying before the Blessed Sacrament.

"I wanted to hear Jesus say, 'Yes, Jo Anne, Henry should take the job.' When I didn't hear that, I assumed God was ignoring the question," Jo Anne said. "I think I began to pretend that no answer meant, 'Yes, have him take the job.' All I was thinking about was getting out of debt and moving us ahead financially. I thought it would strengthen our relationship."

Henry jumped at the chance to take the job and quit practicing junior-flunky law. All he needed was this green light from Jo Anne. He was certain their relationship would thrive with the alleviation of financial stress.

Henry's first few months of work were fun. He was always in a different city. Bond insurance wasn't exciting, but closing deals was exhilarating. Each agreement felt like a victory that would move him closer to success.

“I would go back to the hotel room, crack open a beer, and call Jo Anne,” Henry said. “We would have the most loving conversations. She’d tell me what the kids did all day, and I’d tell her about my deal. She’d tell me about the church and the school, and I’d talk more about the deal. I heard about my life back home, and she heard about bond insurance. And it seemed to work just fine, for a while.”

### **On the Outside Looking In**

For the first six months or so, Jo Anne would try to meet Henry at the airport on Thursday or Friday. She was there with hugs and kisses and the kids.

“I remember the first time Jo Anne said, ‘Can you catch a cab?’” Henry recalled. “It hurt a little, but I knew she couldn’t keep up the romantic, mushy airport welcome forever.”

“Take a cab” became the routine from that point. The weeknight phone calls also started to fade, going from nightly love talks to weekly discussions of the upcoming weekend’s logistics.

“Jo Anne was simply bored speaking with me on the phone,” Henry said. “I wasn’t bored, because she was telling me about all the interesting things she and the kids were doing — about the life I wasn’t experiencing. I was telling her about boring meetings in distant places.”

Weekends also started to seem odd to Henry. The family suddenly had hobbies he didn’t know about, and close friends he’d never heard of.

“I started feeling like a visitor at home,” Henry said. “Sometimes I wondered why I made this trek home at the end of the week. It seemed more logical just to go straight to the next business destination. I loved them all, and they all loved me. But I wasn’t on the inside of this intimate little family anymore.”

Two years into the new career, Henry sat on the runway at Washington’s Reagan National Airport. Sure, he made a lot more money now, but his life was a bust. He lived in hotel rooms, while the people he loved lived their lives without him most of the time.

“Boring job, boring life, boring wife” became his self-pity mantra.

### **Temptation**

As Henry sat on his first-class pity pot, Laura boarded the plane and sat next to him. The newest hire by Henry’s boss, Laura was also a lawyer-turned-insurance geek. She was 27 — 10 years Henry’s junior. She had thick, shiny black hair and a body that struck

Henry as the perfect physique. On the plane Laura was flirtatious, treating Henry as the older, wiser colleague who warranted respect.

“She wanted to know about my favorite deals involving bond insurance,” Henry said.

“She would *ooh* and *ahh* when I spoke of convincing a client to increase the coverage on a particular bond issue. Suddenly, someone understood what I was about.”

That night, when the plane landed in Dallas, Henry planned to follow his routine. He would go to the hotel room, do research for the next morning’s meeting, crack open a beer, watch TV, and go to bed.

At the baggage claim, however, Laura asked Henry if he wanted to meet for a drink at the hotel bar.

“Why not?” I thought. “Yes, I found her profoundly attractive. But I reasoned that she was only an associate wanting to discuss business, and it would be fine to get together socially.”

At the bar, Laura continued waxing with fascination about all that Henry knew.

“She was all business, but in a way that seemed really refreshing and exuberant,” Henry said.

After two hours flew by, Henry told Laura goodnight and left the bar. They met with customers the next day, and later that night met again at the bar. Later that week in Los Angeles, they met again. Soon they were sharing most meals together, and meeting nightly at the bar.

“It still seemed quite innocent,” Henry said. “I was speaking openly with Jo Anne about Laura, and it was all in the context of business. There really wasn’t anything more to it than that, it seemed.”

But just as Henry and Jo Anne had been letting time and distance translate into unplanned estrangement, Henry and Laura were allowing close proximity and time together to become unplanned intimacy.

“I’m telling you, we didn’t touch each other for nine months,” Henry said. “I had only passing thoughts of physical intimacy, and I would instantly beg for God’s mercy and move on. I was married, I loved my wife, and I never had any intention of cheating.”

Then came that two-week break, which Henry spent at home with the family.

“I had to take vacation time or lose it,” Henry said. “I was home feeling like a visitor. Jo Anne was expecting me to help around the house, and I didn’t even know where we kept the vacuum cleaner. The kids were involved with school activities and off with friends. I didn’t know what to do with myself, and Jo Anne and I started snapping at each other.”

“There came a day when I was looking forward to him going back to work,” said Jo Anne. “He wasn’t a part of the flow, and we really had very little to talk about.”

Henry started missing Laura, and their business talks. At the hotels, nobody asked him to vacuum or load the dishwasher.

“That’s when it got frightening,” Henry said. “That’s when I began to realize that I was closer with this business associate than I was with my wife, a woman I had once loved more than life itself.”

His last week at home, Henry crossed a line he had avoided. He called Laura. They discussed the logistics of their coming week on the road. Henry found himself longing for the hotel bar and his business talks with Laura.

“After that terrible two weeks at home, I think I felt more free,” Henry said. “I got the idea that I wasn’t really appreciated back there. I had this feeling that what happened a thousand miles away, in some other town where nobody knew me, couldn’t hurt anyone.”

Laura had respected the boundaries Henry set, but she seemed to instantly sense Henry’s decision to ease them.

“That week, the space between us at the bar very quickly narrowed,” Henry said. “Soon we were holding hands, and from that point on it progressed very quickly to a situation of full physical intimacy.”

Jo Anne knew.

“I can’t explain how I knew, I just knew,” Jo Anne said. “It was in his voice, just kind of a deflation when he spoke with me that week. And I knew how badly things had been between us at home. I was scared, alone, and sad.”

The couple pretended the affair was a secret for the next year. Jo Anne’s intuition was confirmed by whispering phone conversations and e-mails she discovered on Henry’s laptop.

“There was this part of me that just wanted to live in denial,” Jo Anne said. “I would try to be a more loving wife to Henry and just hope that he would change his ways and give up the other woman. I knew better, but I did not want to confront this. I feared it would end our marriage.”

Henry had a three-week break that year for Christmas and the New Year. For the sake of his children, and a wife he still loved, he decided to cut it off with Laura. At least during the break there would be no e-mails or phone calls. Laura said she understood.

Jo Anne decided the Christmas break would be a great time to remind Henry what she could be like. She decided to treat him like a king, to heap love on him, fix great meals, and feign interest in his work. She even invited friends over just before Christmas for a couples' party.

Meanwhile, Laura was home alone. Another Christmas alone seemed unbearable, especially considering she had spent much of the last year with a man she thought she loved. It seemed unfair that she couldn't speak with him. So she called.

"She called Henry's cell phone just as we were sitting down in the living room for drinks with some of our friends from church," Jo Anne said. "I picked up the phone, which Henry had left on our piano. She asked to speak with Henry, and I told her he wasn't available. She hung up."

Moments later, the phone rang again. It was Laura again, this time *demanding* to speak with Henry. Jo Anne hung up on her. The phone rang again, and this time Laura was in tears. Jo Anne used profanity, breaking into tears herself in front of their friends.

One of Jo Anne's closest friends took her to a bedroom where the two visited for the next half hour. Henry and the other guests tried to make small talk, but the sounds of Jo Anne's hysterical crying were hard to ignore. Friends demanded that Henry explain what was wrong, and soon the entire gathering knew of Henry's affair.

"Thankfully, these were all Catholic couples from our church," Henry said. "That made it quite embarrassing at first, because we had been trying to keep up appearances. By the end of the night, however, it was clear that they cared about nothing other than helping us find a way to salvage a marriage in ruins."

### **Beginning the Journey Back**

Jo Anne, Henry, and their friends sat in a small circle in the living room and heard about some of the challenges the other couples had faced. One couple said their marriage survived only by the grace of God and a program called Retrouvaille.

"We had been to Marriage Encounter after the birth of our first child," Jo Anne said. "It was a great experience, but I really wasn't up for something like that. I was too embarrassed for any kind of a group discussion with couples I didn't know."

The couple told them Retrouvaille, unlike Marriage Encounter, was designed for marriages that had gone bad. They explained that it mostly existed to help couples engage in intimate communication that involves bold disclosures of truth, promoting the

slow process of rebuilding trust. They insisted that it might represent the only possible hope for Henry and Jo Anne.

“We went to Retrouvaille, and a lot of things came out,” Henry said. “All kinds of problems had manifested in both of us, mostly because we hadn’t been spending the bulk of our lives together.”

The couple devised a plan to back Henry out of his job, immediately.

“Basically, that involved saying ‘I quit,’ and then finding ways to scale back our lifestyle,” Henry said. “I would get back into law, avoid business travel, and we would live within our means.”

And the two would have a bold and honest conference call with Laura, doing their best to respect her dignity while telling her it was over with Henry.

“My message was, ‘I know about you, I know what’s been going on, and it’s over.’ I told her that Henry no longer worked with her, she would never see him again, and that she should immediately begin the process of moving on,” Jo Anne said. “I told her I was sorry that she, too, would undergo pain. We both cried a lot.”

“I just told her ‘I love my wife. I’m sorry I did this,’” Henry said.

None of it was easy. Financially, the family fell on hard times while Henry transitioned from one career to a fallback that paid less. Laura struggled with spells of resentment and anger, knowing that Henry had violated the couple’s marriage vows.

The couple continued with follow-up Retrouvaille weekends for the next year. Jo Anne made it her goal to achieve genuine forgiveness. The couple began weekend confessions. All non-work time became family time.

“It has been a long, difficult road,” Jo Anne said. “In some ways, it would have been much easier to just continue pretending not to know. But that wouldn’t have lasted.

Today, we’re together. It’s not always pretty, but our marriage works. It’s real, it’s honest, and it works.”