

we took about 100 pics and we picked this one b/c we were looking for one where it looked like I was a little ticked off but could not stay angry at her.

KIM AND PENN  
HOLDERNESS

# Everybody FIGHTS

SO WHY NOT GET Better AT IT?



we had to come up with a cover photo DURING a pandemic. We Covid tested then had our

photo also tested come in with a mask for 10 minutes we had not had hair cuts in months. I highlighted my own hair the night before !!

← Look at my sideburns, I look like Andrew Jackson. There were no barbershops open when we took this.

# Everybody FIGHTS

It's true.

We debated on the title.  
Penn loved the sound of  
the title "Everybody Poops."  
Seriously. That was the inspo  
for the ~~the~~ name of the book.  
We took two years to write.

—I also liked "Marriage Fight Club"  
but in the end it sounded a bit confrontational  
and pretty sure it's Plagiarism or Something



# Everybody FIGHTS

SO WHY NOT GET Better AT IT?

KIM AND PENN  
HOLDERNESS

WITH DR. CHRISTOPHER EDMONSTON

↳ He has helped  
us with so many  
of our biggest battles.



W PUBLISHING GROUP

AN IMPRINT OF THOMAS NELSON

↳ His name  
should probably  
be the same size  
as ours here as he  
was MASSIVELY  
influential, but  
whatever

*Everybody Fights*

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never thought I'd  
see this sentence.

ummm... This is fancy.

*For Lola and Penn Charles.  
Love is at the center of this book,  
and your love inspires us.  
Love, Mom and Dad*

The dedication was the hardest part. I kept crying thinking about how our kids inspire us. We are so lucky God picked us to be their parents.

The dedication was the easiest part b/c Kim wrote it.  
(But perfectly done by her...)

we have a lot more fights. A lot.  
But capping at 10 gave us a chance  
to really break these down.

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## Acknowledgments

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## About the Authors

My mother, a former English teacher, was one of our proof readers. I told her to skip the cover two chapters where we cover the sexy time stuff. Except I told her the wrong pages. So now my mom knows all about my sex life. 00000PS.



# INTRODUCTION

## KIM

I owe my marriage to pigs in a blanket.

One night, when I was working in television news in Orlando, Florida, my boss sent me to cover the opening of a new mega mall. It wasn't glamorous, but at least I knew I wouldn't have to worry about dinner because the press release promised heavy hors d'oeuvres. PSA: If you are trying to get media to an event, offer free food. Nothing gets local news reporters to show up like some mini hotdogs and some booze.

As I was stuffing my fourth pig in a blanket into my mouth, I noticed a small crowd gathered around an extremely tall, insanely handsome guy with great hair. Everyone around him was laughing and smiling and hanging on his every word. Mind you, this was a gathering of people whose jobs were to be magnetic on television, so it was no small thing to be the life of this party. Did I mention he was handsome? I didn't introduce myself because I was seeing someone at the time, and besides, Tall Guy was there with his girlfriend. Of

I can't imagine anyone ever feeling this favorably about me. I am actually a bit of a spaz at public gatherings.

\*and bonus points if you have wine in little plastic cups.

\*I still remember what he was wearing: a navy suit and a blue shirt.

She was so sweet and, of course, gorgeous.

course he had a girlfriend. I wiped the mustard off my fingers and figured that was the last I'd see of him.

But then a few months later, I ran into him again. In the middle of the bar I'd gone to with my girlfriend (I'd broken up with my boyfriend) was Tall Handsome Good Hair Guy up on stage. He cleared a spot and starting dancing. He went from the robot down to the worm then flawlessly contorted himself into a backspin. He ended with a huge flourish, striking a pose on his side. I had made enough bad decisions in men to realize a good one breakdancing right in front of me. The crowd was still cheering when I turned to my friend and said, "That's the man I'm going to marry."

Before I knew it, that tall handsome dude and I were dancing together. It seemed he'd broken up with his girlfriend too. *Score.* It wasn't romantic—there was no swoony-eye contact or *Dirty Dancing*-style heat. It was full-on goofy. For every cringe-worthy dance move I had, he matched it and then some. I did the Mrs. Mia Wallace, and he came right back at me with the Vincent Vega. He cast his imaginary fishing pole; I took three steps out for him to hook me. I laughed harder than I had ever laughed before. In those moments, I knew I wanted to feel that way forever.

We talked and exchanged numbers. You guys, we had "home phones" back then. He called me on a phone that had a *dial tone*. For weeks, every single night after our newscasts we went home and called each other and talked until the wee hours of the morning. I'd never had so much fun talking on the phone. The conversation flowed like we'd known each other forever.

Finally, nervously, we decided we should go on an actual date—in person. I spent hours picking the right outfit so that I could hit that perfect "Oh, this? I just threw this on" look. He picked me up and the first thing he did was hand me a cassette tape. I coolly accepted

Some women like a man with a fancy car--I like a man that can breakdance.

\*we still rock this more at weddings.

Vodka/Red Bull

we would pick a movie (on DVD) then start it at the same time to watch on the phone together

Totally forgot about that!

That would have been a good addition to a book if we were... oh wait.

I had the same thing. My fashion sense was terrible. I had good suits for my job but nothing else. I bought this fancy shirt that Florida people wore.



it with a smile, but my brain was yelling, "He made you a mixtape. Marry this man immediately!"

That evening ended with a monster make-out session and a total confidence that this was my person. After only a few weeks of dating, we had the "you're-the-one" conversation. It went like this:

**Penn:** I think this is it, right?

**Kim:** Yeah, you're it.

**Penn:** Cool.

**Kim:** Cool.

It was just easy. About nine months after that, with sweaty hands and a voice cracking with nerves, Penn asked me to marry him.

During our engagement, I'd occasionally run into a well-intentioned couple who would warn me, "Marriage is a lot of work." I would nod sympathetically, but inside, I'd be thinking, *Those poor people. They must not have a solid relationship like we do. I picked the right person. We love each other so much. How could this ever be work?*

You can laugh now. If you need to put down this book to wipe the tears from your eyes, I'll understand.

## PENN

Before Kim, I was guilty of what they call serial monogamy. I'd date someone I liked but didn't love and then immediately become exclusive. I'd stay with that mate for well over a year, which was often well past the expiration date. I craved the companionship and intimacy, but I didn't want to get too serious.

This pattern resulted in a lot of breakup conversations like this:

\* on that mixtape: Ben Folds, "I am the luckiest"

Mixtape was heavily influenced by "Scrubs"

MIXTAPE:

Luckiest - Ben Folds  
Overkill (Acoustic)  
Colin Hanks

Rhett Miller - our love

Dropout in  
Din Toa  
Some Adam Sandler song

I + was seriously that simple.

yep.

He proposed in NYC where I had just landed a job.

can you imagine? :)

**Girl:** Penn, I really like you.

**Penn:** I really like you too.

**Girl:** But we seem to be about the same as we were a year ago.

**Penn:** You're right! *(Pause)* What's wrong with that?

**Girl:** I think we should break up.

**Penn:** Okay!

Need to clarify here—  
I had some fantastic eyes.  
Really lucky there,  
but Kim was clearly  
the one, and I knew  
it very early

Then along came Kim. She remembers me breakdancing at a night club, but I remember meeting her a year earlier than that.

Back when I was a local sports reporter in Florida, I worked Florida Gator football games on the weekend. Not only did I put on a coat and tie to deliver the news from behind a desk, I also had to film the action on the field. I would be on the sidelines of big-time national TV games (which I loved), running up and down the field toting a twenty-pound camera to get coverage. It was a serious workout, and I ended every game soaked in sweat.

One night when the Gators were playing Tennessee, I was hoofing it down the sideline to get to my next location when Kim walked by me. She had her hair down—it was darker than it is now—and she was holding a microphone, wearing jeans and a black leather jacket. She looked <sup>\*</sup>annoyed and walked straight past me without looking around. I almost dropped my camera. I thought to myself, *Wow, that is the best-looking woman I've ever seen. And I bet I will never see her again.*

Thank you  
highlights!

And I didn't.

→ and I later got to know that boyfriend  
and once loaned him a pair of

Until one year later, in the FOX Orlando newsroom. I was looking up at the long bank of TVs nearby that showed our competitors' newscasts. As a sports anchor, I didn't go on the air until the very end of the hour, so it was my job to watch what the other stations were leading with. In the middle TV screen, I saw that face again.

shoes for a  
Date (with another  
girl). True  
story. Kim  
thought it was  
super weird.

I was  
annoyed bc  
I was there  
with a boyfriend.  
That boyfriend  
was TERRIBLE



This time her hair was pulled back, she was wearing a suit, and she was bathed in the bright light of a live shot, but I immediately knew it was her.

I don't get why she is insecure about her voice. ← I turned up the volume and heard her voice. It's funny: Kim doesn't love her voice, but I think it's one of her best attributes. It is lower than some female voices, but in a cool, sultry way. My heart started racing. I couldn't believe it. She lived in my town.

She can sing too! About a week later, I went to that media event in search of free food, and we started down the path together. Kim broke my breakup mold. I didn't want to break up with her after a year. I didn't want to break up with her *ever*. ← Isn't he the sweetest?

. . .

Remember those? Paired w/ low waisted jeans? Who was I? Cute story, right? But that, of course, was just the beginning. So much goes down in a shared life after the heart-pounding early days. As you might expect, we went through changes big and small as a couple over the next decade and a half. For example, Kim used to have a “going out tops” section in her closet, max price eight dollars, dental floss shoulder straps, cropped above the navel. Now that section consists of flannel, flannel, turtlenecks, ironic Target T-shirts, and more flannel. In the time it took for her to make that transition, we moved a few times, threw a couple of kids in the mix, and started our own company. It hasn't been an entirely smooth ride. We still love each other, but when your kids act out, your parents get sick, and/or your dog pees on the carpet, we've learned it gets harder to *like* someone. Suffice to say, it's a lot to ask of marriage to be constantly attracted to and in sync with another human.

The upshot was that we fought all the freaking time—and not just little “Can you please take out the trash?” fights. Fights that reduced us to middle school drama-level simpering messes. Every

Our worst fights were when we got engaged and moved into a ~~TINY~~ NY apartment and she saw what a slob I was.



couple has the kind of fights that go from zero to fantasizing about dialing a divorce lawyer in 0.0 seconds. They leave you feeling cold, resentful, and terribly alone. We had them all the time.

The two of us have been married now for more than fifteen years. Maybe you've seen our videos online—we're the fools who put on matching Christmas jammies, went viral, and then launched a full-time business turning out song parodies that (we hope) bring a smile to your face.

You may very well have come away with the impression that we don't have that kind of fight, that we are always in harmony with one another, and that the worst arguments we have end with Kim giving Penn an indulgent "Oh, *you!*" look. Now it's our turn to laugh. A few years ago, we started noticing comments on our videos that said things like "What a perfect couple!" or "#couplegoals," and we thought, Who us? These people want to be more like us?

Those videos *are* us, but they are us *plus*, us enhanced, us with the benefit of a suite of editing software, rehearsals, and carefully written scripts. In between singing, dancing, and goofing around, there are countless moments where we shoot lasers out of our eyes at each other, willing the other person to be instantly rendered mute.

Having a healthy marriage means learning how to disagree without it leading to a breakdown every time. Like when we were all sheltering in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. We saw so many posts of people pulling their hair out as they tried to figure out how to spend 24/7 with their spouses. Although we were struggling with sadness and confusion along with everyone else, we had a jump on the all-day-every-day-no-break-from-each-other-ever marriage. For the past five years, we have worked together out of our home. We talk to one another easily seven hours a day. Six of those hours are debates about what rhymes best with booty, or how to get a camera angle that doesn't take Penn's chin from a double to a triple,

I still have them in a box in the attic. ♡

we talk about that all the time. Reality TV is always a bit of an illusion

It was seriously confusing.

We kept joking "We've been training for this for YEARS"

\*cutie, duty, moody, etc

but the last hour of our day is us talking about our relationship. As the whole world has learned, disagreements are inevitable when you spend that much time with someone, and if we had a knock-down, drag-out fight every time we saw things differently, we would never accomplish anything. So we've made it a priority to put in the work required for a healthy marriage, and here's why.

\* You know how when you get a new car, it's perfect? It looks good. It smells good. It makes you feel good about yourself. But after a bit of use, even the best car starts having issues, and you need to take it in for little maintenance—an oil change, brake pad replacements, new tires. Maybe the A/C is making a weird noise like there's a dead rat stuck in there. It's still a great car; it just needs care to keep it from exploding into a glorious fireball.

When we notice something going wrong with a car, we take it in to the shop. We drink terrible coffee and wait in a filthy room for two hours, because that's what it takes to fix whatever is wrong. We do the work because we know that ignoring a problem could lead to bigger troubles down the road. Our question for you is—why don't we do that kind of maintenance on our marriages? Surely our marriages are as important as our cars, aren't they? !!! ~~DO THE WORK~~ ~~IT'S WORTH IT.~~ **THIS!**

Not one single marriage in the history of marriages has run perfectly all the time. We have fights, but we just keep driving down the road. Philosophical differences grow over time, but we figure out ways to avoid them, and we just keep driving down the road. Intimacy issues crack open, but we keep driving down the road. As long as things don't break down completely, we keep driving down the road.

Is it our pride that makes us terrified to admit our marriage needs a tune-up? Are we afraid that when we take it in, someone will open up the hood and say, "Oh, man, you have *a lot* more problems than you thought! That'll be \$4,264"? → So funny—I got jobbed on an estimate like 3 days after writing this

When friends are STOCKED we've been through marriage counseling Penn gives them this analogy.

I came up w/this. Plop my most important contribution to this book Kim did a lot more than me but this was mine.

DO THE WORK IT'S WORTH IT.

**THIS!**

→ So funny—I got jobbed on an estimate like 3 days after writing this



!!! This is *marriage* we're talking about, our most sustained and sustaining relationship with a person who we promised to love and support as long as we both shall live. Shouldn't we look at the 55 percent divorce rate and say, "Forget pride—what do I need to do to take care of this thing"?

\* He has saved us from so many spirals. But find a marriage therapist you trust if you feel you would benefit. You may not click right away. Keep looking. Ditto

At our worst, when our fights reached critical mass, we were miserable. We knew there had to be a better way to keep our marriage running smoothly, so we found ourselves an honest mechanic—our lifelong friend, Dr. Christopher Edmonston. Christopher is the pastor of our church, and, lucky for us, one of his special interests is marriage care—plus, we trust that he won't hose us on repairs. For years now, Christopher has gone under the hood to show us how to tweak the way we communicate with each other so that our marriage is a well-oiled machine. In this book, we will share what we've learned from him and from our years together.

Before we go any further, this part is also important: sometimes marriages get totaled. We know that happens. It happens more than half the time, and it has happened to a lot of people very close to us. If your marriage is teetering on the brink, this book may not be for you. If you are dealing with infidelity or addiction or mental illness or chronic illness or serious trust issues, please feel free to read this book and take from it whatever resonates, but it would be irresponsible of us to pretend to have the background to help you surmount those obstacles. We aren't scientists or therapists or even polyamorists. We try to make people happy by dancing around in our jammies on the Internet. We try to make each other happy by communicating clearly and effectively using the techniques Christopher has taught us.

Disclaimer time

I really hope people take this to heart.

This book is for those of you who are married and want to stay that way. It's for couples who just aren't feeling heard by their partners, who can't break out of their bad patterns of communication.



This book gives you strategies that have made our marriage stronger over the years, and we hope they do the same for yours.

Why should you listen to us? After all, most books about improving your marriage are written by someone who has a bunch of letters after their name or a lab named after them. We don't have secondary degrees. We're not performing rigorous double-blind studies on the mating habits of rats; we *are* the rats. We're not decked out in lab coats testing hypotheses; we're in the maze looking at each other like, "Where did you put that &\*!% cheese?" We're going to tell you what we've learned from the times we've felt helplessly stuck in the maze, and then we'll share the strategies we've discovered that have helped us get out of the darn thing time and again so we can enjoy our lives and each other.

With Christopher's help, we've learned how important it is to confront the topics we want to avoid (*Why aren't we having sex? Who gets to decide how we spend our money? Can you please help out more?*) and how to have conversations that don't dissolve into toxic puddles of conflict sludge.

Our goal has been to make our fights productive. You know how when you rake the yard, if you let the piles of leaves just sit there, the first gust of wind will send them scattering across the grass again? You might as well have not raked in the first place. But if you turn those piles into compost, you can use them to nourish your yard and make your soil richer. We want to teach you how to turn your recurring fights into useful conversations that will help your marriage thrive.

In this book, you'll learn how to

- ask for what you want.
- stop hijacking conversations.
- use magic words to change course midfight.

~~Both~~

~~Penn~~

~~Kim~~

wait - I'm not supposed to be doing this.

\* This is part of the 1.5 chapters on Sexy TIME. Sorry man.

we want this book to help people. We do NOT have fancy degrees BUT we have walked these paths together and we're grown stronger as a couple.

- tell your partner exactly what they want to hear—without faking it.
- declare bankruptcy on perfection.
- treat your partner like a stranger—and feel closer than ever as a result.
- amend your secret contracts.
- banish the three Ds—distraction, denial, and delay.
- harness the power of metacommunication.
- stop stonewalling.

Every technique in this book was forged and battle-tested in our own relationship. We'll go into the gory details—the real masks-off, gruesome, nitty-gritty—of our most stubborn fights. We'll start out with a he said/she said story so you can hear both sides of how we landed deep in the jungle of our stickiest issues, and then we'll pass along the wisdom Christopher gave us that helped us hack our way through and come out the other side feeling closer to one another and better understood.

### Rules of War

*These were so helpful!*

In a marriage based on respect and love, some behaviors are off the table no matter what. Early on, before we had even met Christopher, we had the sense to establish what we call our *rules of war* to guide us. Our list:

- No name-calling or other insults.
- No swearing. *\* I struggle with this one.*
- No leaving. *And this one.*
- You know how to hurt your partner—don't do it on purpose.



We're going to spend the rest of this book focusing on the do's of good communication, but before we do, take a minute and write your own list of behaviors that are forbidden. You might include rules about your tone, whether you should do it in front of the kids (we do!), or when to call for a time-out.

## WHAT'S THE MAGIC WORD?

If there's one thing we've learned under Christopher's guidance, it's that there are no magic bullets—but there *are* magic words. You know how when you were younger and you wanted something so bad it felt like your life would end if you didn't get it immediately? After you had begged and pleaded, your mom would say, "What's the magic word?" and you would spit out "Please?" and *ta-dah*, ice cream. Christopher is a master of coming up with choice phrases and key words that, while they don't solve everything instantaneously, help end your misery because they illuminate a way forward. We use these magic words as beacons to show us a better way. In each chapter, we'll share not just techniques and strategies but also the magic words that have helped us to get through fights with the least amount of drama—and even avoid a few in the first place. We can't tell you the number of times Christopher has given us notes on our fights and we've said, "Oh, man, why didn't I say it like that?" or "Well, if you had put it that way, we never would have gotten into that fight in the first place!"

We want to be totally upfront with you right from the start.

\* This whole endeavor—marriage, communication, enduring love and respect—is a work in progress. We have not found a cure for

This is so important

we toyed w/  
Easy Button  
Simple Switch  
but magic  
word fit  
best

These phrases  
that you will  
learn, are  
on repeat in  
our house.

\* I wanted  
"magic words of  
marriage" to be  
the title.  
Penn won, obvi  
This works for  
all relationships,  
not just  
marriage

I like it  
b/c it  
harkens back  
to your mom  
telling you  
the simple  
way to get  
what you  
want.

We put these  
tools into  
practice on  
the daily.



being two different people with two different perspectives and sets of experiences. To be honest, we wouldn't want that—it sounds a little Stepfordy. We cherish our differences. They add a sense of excitement and the promise of growth in our relationship that we would miss if they weren't there. We know that the trade-off is that we will get in another fight soon. In fact, just this morning we were in danger of combusting over whose turn it was to go for a run while the other stayed with the kids. It's a daily practice. But we are armed with the confidence that we will work through it and feel good about the result.

Yes, it takes vigilance and a willingness to try and try again, but loving your person should never be a chore. Those well-meaning people who warned Kim were right—marriage *is* work. But keeping up on the maintenance is worth it.

Thank you  
for reading this.  
Penn and I really  
pulled back the curtains  
on how we work together, raise kids  
together, and yet, still find ourselves  
silly in love. I think we would have  
stayed married forever-- but after doing  
this work-- we are genuinely excited about  
growing old together. Isn't it going to be  
the cutest grandfather one day (a loooong  
time from now!)  
to Kim.

# EVERYBODY FIGHTS



My wife drives me crazy sometimes. My husband should already know what I need. Is our marriage in trouble if we fight all the time? Is it possible to learn how to fight?

For the last several years, Penn and Kim Holderness have done the hard maintenance and the research. With the help of their marriage coach Dr. Christopher Edmonston, they breakdown their biggest (and in some cases, funniest) fights. How did a question about chicken wings turn into a bra fight (no, not a bar fight; a bra fight)? How did a roll of toilet paper lead to tears, resentment, and a stint in the guest bedroom?

## PRE-ORDER THE BOOK

