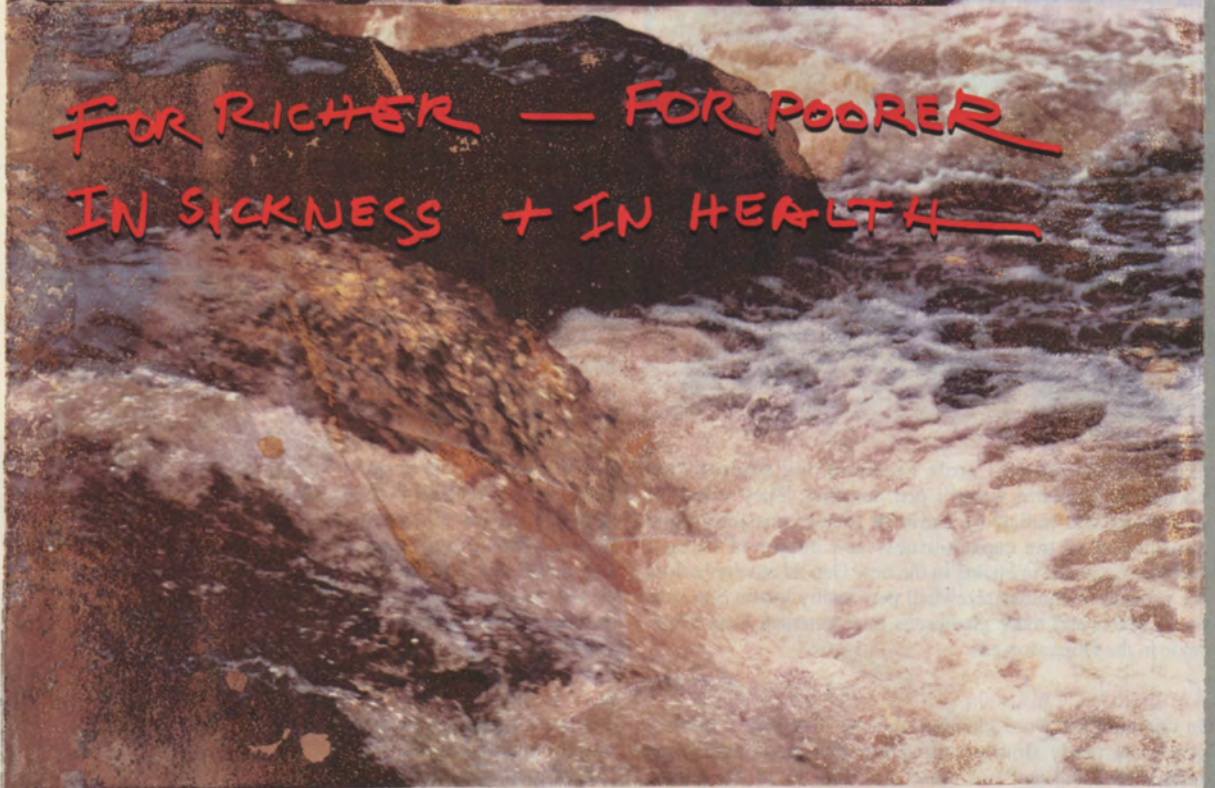




FOR RICHER — FOR POORER
IN SICKNESS + IN HEALTH



Rauschman

WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT

Love is the Holy Grail of modern relationships. We're always looking for it. We get married for it, and we get divorced for it. But we're still never sure we've really found it.

by John Sedgwick

IN THE MASTER BEDROOM THAT TIM AND LORETTA Connors* shared for nearly a decade as husband and wife, an air of tragedy clings to the heavy bureau, the walls and the flimsy double bed. With its drabness and poignancy, the room might be a murder scene, and in a way it is. A marriage died here, a marriage that began with bright hopes on a gorgeous June day in 1983 and officially expired the February before last upon issuance of a divorce decree by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Actually, the marriage was finished nearly six months before at the marriage counselor's office when, after a few months of pointless conversation, Loretta quietly but firmly declared she wanted a divorce. Tim's eyes moistened, but he said little. Then, when he got back to their modest triplex on a quiet cul-de-sac in Worcester, Massachusetts, he ripped down

the framed picture of a smiling Loretta that had always hung over the bed, and, for good measure, grabbed the large photograph of their wedding from its spot above the dark walnut dresser. He tore the pictures into long, thin strips, carried them outside and threw them into the trash. "That felt really good," he says.

Now two small landscapes hang in place of Loretta's likeness on his bedroom walls. "Just some things to hide the hooks," Tim says dismissively, keen to obliterate Loretta from his past altogether. But no marriage ever disappears without a trace, and the most salient aspect of this one is eight-year-old Nathaniel, who is sleeping now in a small bedroom across the hall. As the result of a complicated divorce agreement that both Connors regard as a triumph of negotiation, Tim and Loretta share custody. Nathaniel spends Monday, Tuesday and alternate weekends here with his dad, and the rest of the time about a mile away with his mom in a house that Tim bought for her with his \$200,000 retirement savings.

**The names of the Connorses, along with a few identifying characteristics, have been changed to protect their privacy.*

The Connorses' marriage was not *The War Between the Tates*, and their divorce was not *The War of the Roses*. Their relationship was never ideal, that is, but it was usually tolerable; and their divorce, while emotionally charged, was sufficiently free of rancor that they could work out a deal that was fairly good for everyone. It was the sort of relationship that has probably made up the bulk of marriages over the long history of that increasingly troubled institution. It is also the sort of marriage that is now failing as never before, leaving behind a mounting heap of the wreckage that used to be called, in more moralistic times, broken homes.

Half the marriages in America end in divorce, a rate that leads the world by a wide margin. More than half the children in this country will spend some portion of their childhood outside of an intact family—many of them, no doubt, wondering what they did wrong to be separated from Mom or Dad. Judith S. Wallerstein, Ph.D., a lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley, notes in her classic study of divorced families that one seven-year-old girl harbored the guilty thought for five years that her failure to relay a message from one parent to another caused their marriage to fail. Such seeds of guilt are scattered widely, and they grow. There is increasing evidence that the children of divorce never quite recover from the trauma and are doomed to do less well in school, to grow estranged from one or the other parent, to suffer economically, to have a more difficult time forming permanent attachments and to pass on their bitter legacy by forming shakier-than-average marriages of their own. Women, too, have been the unwitting victims of what Lenore J. Weitzman, Ph.D., of Brandeis University, terms the Divorce Revolution. In her study of the effects of the 1970 California no-fault divorce law, Dr. Weitzman discovered that while men gain economically when freed of their families, women who get custody of the children—as most divorced mothers do—suffer terribly from the loss of the husband's income.

In spite of all these difficulties, Dr. Wallerstein reports that when she interviewed a group of adults 10 years after the dissolution of their marriages, a solid majority said their own divorces were for the best, even in those cases where the partner



When SELF's Executive Editor Nancy Smith and National Correspondent John Sedgwick started working on this piece, they thought of it as a story about divorce. But the more they investigated, the more they came to see a deeper, more troubling aspect of contemporary life: the lack of commitment. Why, they wondered, can people skip out more easily on their marriages than on their mortgages?

TWO THIRDS OF ALL DIVORCES ARE INITIATED BY WOMEN, EVEN THOUGH WOMEN TEND TO LOSE MORE ECONOMICALLY.

remarriage into a "blended family" of stepchildren and half-siblings. Seen in this light, the high divorce rate appears to be contributing to the atomization of the culture, a pattern of nationwide free agency that may represent the final, dreary triumph of individualism in American life. Over the course of this century, only one other demographic statistic is as striking as the soaring divorce rate, and that is the increase in the percentage of Americans living alone, which has gone from near zero at the turn of the century to about 25 percent today.

Perhaps it is because divorce has become so commonplace that it is so difficult to discuss publicly. Only the mean-spirited among us could disapprove of marital breakups that, doubtless, have already been painful enough for those involved. Yet, for the very same reason, because divorce has ceased to be a possibility and become a presumption, married couples can't stop thinking about it. "The fear of divorce is absolutely universal among married people," says Ann Swidler, Ph.D., a professor of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley. "Even among the happiest husbands and wives, much of their conversation

about love and marriage is about why they won't divorce." So divorce stands like a big, unacknowledged elephant in our midst and before we can do anything to bring it down to size, there are some truths that need to be said out loud, in public. One of

the more obvious is that the Divorce Revolution has gotten way out of hand.

How did this happen? The answer depends on who is assigning the blame; feminists have a far different view than conservative clerics do. But almost everyone agrees that one very important contributor has been the dramatic change in the roles of men and women since the Fifties. Although the redistribution of the domestic workload has made a good deal of sense in terms of gender equality, it has also put a strain on many marriages as both halves of the couple are pushed into new, often unaccustomed, responsibilities—men into cooking and cleaning, women into yard work and bill paying.

At the same time that these factors were making individual marriages more difficult to sustain, other forces were raising the generally accepted standard of what was to be considered a satisfactory marriage. Traditionally, marriage was a merging of economic interests, an alliance of convenience. "As an institution, marriage created an economic partnership in which each spouse contributed his or her own specialized function," writes historian Lawrence Stone in *Road to Divorce: England 1530-1987*. Indeed, some social scientists argue that one reason for the marked division of labor between husbands and wives was to bind the couple together in mutual dependency. If love was to form within the marriage it was welcome, but it was hardly expected or necessary.

With society's new affluence after World War II, American husbands no longer depended quite so much on a wife's contribution to the household. "Previously, a man could not lead a normal middle-class life without a wife," says Dr. Swidler. "He absolutely had to have her to run the home front." With

the postwar economic boom, a man could purchase those wifely services. The market rushed in with products varying from automatic dishwashers to frozen dinners. Now, especially in upscale two-career households, marriage is no longer a matter of husband and wife, but, in effect, two husbands, a paid nanny and lots of takeout. No longer joined by financial necessity, marriages depend on shared passion to sustain the union, and that passion can be hard to muster at, say, six o'clock on a weekday evening when two weary professionals come home to a house full of noisy children and an empty refrigerator. No wonder millions of Americans sang along with Tina Turner as she cried out, "What's love got to do with it."

THE CONNORSES' MARRIAGE WOULD PROBABLY HAVE survived in an earlier age. As a practical matter, they did depend on each other. They just never quite worked out the love part. Tim Connors actually did love Loretta, a fact Loretta always found a little peculiar. "Sometimes I would look at him, and he really looked like he loved me," she says, still amazed. "He really did." Tim says he felt that way from the very beginning, when, at a singles bar in downtown Worcester, a gentle, good-looking 25-year-old blonde materialized in front of him, and they started talking. Right away, he felt differently about this woman than he had ever felt about anyone in his life. "There was a chemistry," he says. "I can't explain it. The first thought that went through my mind was that I could see myself marrying her." Loretta had no such feeling when she met the slender, heavily bearded 37-year-old Tim and only dimly recalls their first encounter. All she acknowledges now is a "neediness, the need to have someone who was established, solid, dependable. Tim was the kind of person who, when he said he'd call me, he called me. He gave me a security I never had before."

They moved in together, and one evening about a year later Tim proposed in a fashion that inadvertently captured much of the uncertainty between them. He handed her a card on which he had written "Want to make it forever?" Loretta wasn't entirely sure what the "it" referred to. "I was angry," she recalls. "I said, 'It? It?' And that upset him because he thought he was being so romantic." She agreed all the same, and together they picked out what she calls a "pretty nice" \$2,400 ring. Still, she remembers that as she strode down the aisle at St. Mary's Church to marry Tim, she wished acutely that she could be someplace else.

Tim earned a decent income working for an engineering firm, and Loretta took good care of the household. The problems came when they tried to bring their lives together. It always bothered Loretta that she was moving into Tim's house instead of one they had bought together. It seemed as though she was the last acquisition, after the dining room set, the end tables and the big bed in the master bedroom. On one level, that did mean security. But on another, it disturbed her profoundly. She felt Tim had the power to make all the big decisions, and it was up to her to go along. When it came time to paint the house, for instance, she wanted a nice, rich red, and he dismissed her idea out of hand, saying that red was for barns. She knocked herself out to have dinner ready

for him at seven when he got home, but sometimes Tim would unknowingly infuriate Loretta by flipping through a magazine while they ate, rather than having a conversation with her. At night, after they made love, she was so angry she would roll away from him and make fists with her hands, not that she could exactly say why.

As time went by, all Loretta could think of was the many differences between them. He was 12 years older, which meant, among other things, that he was thinking ahead to retirement when she was still looking forward to a career. He liked Neil Diamond; she was into Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. He'd gone to college; she hadn't. He didn't get her jokes; she didn't appreciate his. He worried endlessly about money; she paid no attention. The many differences seemed to be summed up one day when Tim, concerned that she didn't understand their worsening financial circumstances, sat her down to graph them for her, and she went, in her word, "berserk."

Nathaniel came along, and he was a joy, but as the years wore on, Tim and Loretta seemed to occupy parallel universes, only merging occasionally on vacations, where they could lose themselves in the pleasure of easy living. "The communication wasn't what it should have been," Tim admits. "It was like a one-way dialogue. I couldn't tell where she was coming from." And with increasing regularity, there were fights. "We'd have these periodic flare-ups where she'd get extremely angry and frustrated and everything would come out. There were periods of tranquillity, and then *brrroom*; then periods of tranquillity, then *brrroom*."

Finally, in the last year, relations closed down almost entirely. Tim had the distinct impression that Loretta was trying to push him out of his own house. Loretta says that she simply withdrew from him. She started taking long walks around a nearby lake and she met an older man there, Edward, who, even though he was nearly 60, seemed to offer much of what Tim did not. He was, Loretta says, "someone I could relate to on an emotional level." He was also separated from his wife. They walked together and talked, and then one day he said he had a note for her that he would (*continued on page 127*)



Robert Rauschenberg, an internationally renowned artist, created the art that accompanies this piece. He has made a life-long commitment to use his work to support those in need. You may remember that Rauschenberg first appeared in SELF in June 1992 when he created a poster for the Earth Summit, which was held in Rio de Janeiro. This time his art will be used to raise money for Abuse and Counseling Treatment Inc. (ACT), a nonprofit agency founded in 1978 to help the homeless and victims of domestic violence and rape. If you would like to buy the poster and contribute to ACT's efforts, it is available, signed by Robert Rauschenberg for \$110, or unsigned for \$55 (price includes shipping and handling); make checks payable to Arts for ACT, Box 60401, Fort Myers, FL 33906-6040. Or call 813-337-1291 for more information.

**DIVORCE HAS
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glamorous

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the political aversion to glamour is a religious fear of vanity and self-love, the idea that it's the devil's work. But to refuse to look good is as rigid and self-denying as being obsessed with looks, and an act of aggression as well. In a marriage, if a man doesn't take a shower or shave, or dress to please, it's a sign of hostility. Why shouldn't women, as long as they can express themselves in important ways, also aim to please? More and more, women are having to go before a public and say their piece. Whether sports figures, politicians or movie stars; tenured professors who lecture, writers who hawk their books on television, artists on panels, executives on committees; the flavor-of-the-week feminist on the morning news or the codependent-of-the-week on *Oprah*, television has made performers of us all, and we have to get used to the sound of our own voice and the image we project.

We understand that if we don't look good while we're conveying our

message, somebody else will. And we realize we're not just doing it for ourselves. There's an aspect of altruism: Others are watching. We are ambassadors from the world of women.

At the same time, glamour is not necessarily for every occasion and may be counterproductive. Mothers and homemakers want time off from having to be "on" (remember the "total woman"!), and older women needn't go to extremes. Glamour may be something we put on and off, a public persona that carries with it the notion of performance, and like living in the city and getting away from it, goes hand in hand with the contrasting bliss of privacy and solitude. Every woman knows the utter deliciousness of those evenings when you don't have to dress up at all, or the long workdays when you go for hours without combing your hair or applying lipstick or *thinking* about how you look. Certainly the time spent on what to wear or how to look is time taken away from things we'd prefer doing. Can't we enjoy the women whose vocation it is to look glamorous without thinking we have to *be* them? Who, after enjoying to the hilt the

star-studded evening on Oscar night, wouldn't also sympathize with director Jane Campion, who (wearing an oversized tuxedo—very androgynous glam) told a reporter, "It's so hard to make an effort to look glamorous. I'm just relieved this evening is over."

There's a spectrum, with supermodels at one end and dowdy-and-proud-of-it at the other. And in the middle are those of us who every so often, with humor and irony, adore strutting our stuff. We may be dressing to kill for similarly drop-dead friends, adopting a role for a larger public, or playing out our fantasies with our soul mates, who in their way enjoy the same playful illusions. If by day we strip mercilessly for action, encountering the no-nonsense part of ourselves, by night we go out dancing with other glamorous alter egos. And don't we *feel* more glamorous for being somebody and doing something by day? □

Molly Haskell, adjunct professor of film at Columbia University, is a SELF contributing editor. She wrote about fashion and self-image in the April issue and will be writing regularly on style.

love

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bring the next day. That night, Loretta was sufficiently innocent about what was going on between her and Edward to mention the note to Tim, who expressed surprisingly little curiosity about it. In retrospect, his indifference amazes her. "Wouldn't you think the average husband would want to see the note?" she asks.

Edward brought her the note the next day. It asked her to go out with him some time. She thought about it for a week and then agreed to see him for coffee. More meetings followed, and a few weeks later, she went over to his house one afternoon while Tim was at work and Nathaniel was off at school, and she had sex with him. With that, an act she calls "totally against my grain" but nonetheless "really exciting," she effectively drew her marriage with Tim to a close.

STATISTICALLY, MOST MARRIAGES end between years one and seven, perhaps because this is the time that the children are most demanding. In the Connorses' case, though, Nathaniel's birth was probably not to blame. If any-

thing, both parents doted on him with a passion they rarely felt for each other. He may have awakened in Loretta, at least, the realization of how much love she was missing in her marriage. The birth may also have broadened the gulf between the parents as Tim, already inclined to worry about financial security, felt compelled to focus all the harder on his job now that he had another mouth to feed. And Loretta may have felt her life draining away as she passed her days as "just" a mom.

So their marriage blew apart. It is amazing how quickly it can go when it goes. After Loretta said she wanted a divorce, she was out of the house and into a full-blown relationship with Edward in a matter of days. Certainly, no-fault divorce laws have been beneficial in allowing people to escape from abusive marriages, but one unintended consequence has been a devaluing of the so-called marriage contract to the point where it has a fraction of the hold on an individual that, say, a 30-year mortgage does. "The marriage contract is the weakest contract around," says David Popenoe, Ph.D., a Rutgers sociologist and author of a book on divorce called *Disturbing the Nest*. "Anybody can walk out of a marriage at any time for no reason at all." And that's what Loretta did.

It is tempting to say that Loretta Connors suffered from a deficiency of commitment, a commodity that is in grievously short supply in many areas of American life. Obviously, it would have helped the relationship if Loretta had tried to work through her frustrations with Tim, rather than give in to them and abandon the relationship. Similarly, Tim should have been more attuned to Loretta's needs and interests. But, more than commitment, what the Connorses needed was a redefinition of love, one that went beyond the swoop of passion to include the pleasures of having a shared history and merged lives. Besides, feminists argue, marital commitment is unfair to women, since they are the ones who bear the heavier burden in most marriages. Women certainly appear more dissatisfied with the institution. According to most surveys, two thirds of all divorces are initiated by women, even though they tend to lose more economically.

It may be that the most valuable form of commitment is supplied less by the participants than by society at large. For instance, it is far easier to obtain a marriage license than a driver's license, even though lives are at stake in both cases. It might have helped (continued)

love

(continued)

if when the Connorses were still considering marriage, someone had sat the couple down for a little talk about what they were getting into. Marriage, after all, is not easy. As it was, no one questioned Loretta's intention except for a bridesmaid, who offered the judgment that Tim seemed a lot different from the other men she'd dated.

Today, there are a number of programs being tested across the country that could have given Loretta the help she needed. For example, Dr. Popenoe is currently heading the National Family Project, a branch of Amitai Etzioni's Communitarian movement, which is trying to figure out ways to bolster marriage. One of the organization's proposals is for schools to offer marriage education in much the same way they provide sex ed. Also, the government might back up its much-professed commitment to the family by beefing up income tax deductions for children. It is amazing to realize that shortly after World War II those deductions were worth, in present-day dollars, over \$3,500 per child. The figure has fallen to about \$2,400 today.

And finally, although it may seem heartless, there is something to be said for whatever vestigial stigma is still applied to those who leave their marriages. There was a time when a divorced man or woman would be so savaged socially that he or she would be obliged to leave town. That is obviously extreme, but it does seem reasonable for society to defend its interests in the preservation of marriage—especially when children are concerned—by conveying its displeasure to those who fail to live up to their marital vows.

OF COURSE, NOW THAT THE tremendous social disruption of the Sixties and Seventies is well behind us, the divorce rate may have peaked and might begin to descend to a more reasonable level of its own accord. Now that men are indeed starting to help more around the house and women have more freedom to work outside the home, some of the friction may be worked out of the system, says Scott Coltrane, Ph.D., a professor of sociology at the University of California, Riverside. "Once women get to a more equal bargaining position, the divorce rate will stabilize or come down," he says. That would certainly be welcome.

But it is too late for the Connorses. It has been more than a year since the divorce, and Loretta has moved on from Edward to another man, Phil, whom she met through a personals ad. She has gotten a nursing degree, giving her financial independence, and is thinking about marriage again. Curiously, in this new relationship, it is Phil who is the younger one, by four years, and the one who is struggling professionally, as he works as a courier for a photo studio. "Phil's not living up to his potential, which could be a problem," she admits.

As for Tim, he has advertised in the personals, too. In fact, Loretta thinks she saw his ad, and laughed at it. "It said 'Owns own home,'" she says. "That's so Tim, it broke me up." He has dated, but he has yet to find anyone he wants to settle down with. Truth be told, he is not over the divorce and wonders if he ever will be. He has suffered wild mood swings, heart palpitations, and things have not gone well for him at his job. "I've been an emotional wreck," he says. He misses his wife, misses *having* a wife, someone to share his life.

And he worries about Nathaniel. He remembers how hard the boy cried the night he and Loretta told him about the divorce. "Oh my God, he turned red as a beet, and he screamed his head off," Tim says. "He ran downstairs. We had to drag him back upstairs to talk to him about the whole thing." Gradually, when it dawned on Nathaniel, then seven, that having divorced parents meant two birthdays and two Christmases, he calmed down a little. Then he went through a phase where he would, as Tim says, "act out." If Tim was going out on a date, he'd grab hold of Tim's leg and beg him not to leave the house, as if he couldn't bear to be separated from his dad for even a minute. "Stay here with me!" he'd scream. "I don't want you to go out!" Later, he'd warm to Tim's dates excessively, wanting to go out with them as a threesome or insisting that they take him to a museum or a baseball game. That posed its own problems. But lately, Nathaniel has grown quiet again and that worries Tim most of all. "I can't get him to tell me what's on his mind," Tim says. "I ask him what he thinks about me and his mom. But he won't say. He kinda retreats into himself. And that scares the hell out of me. It's like I don't know him. And I wonder, God, what have we done?" □

cancerdrug

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fear was that she would be rejected.

Finally, after all the tests and paperwork were finished, with Machia and another nurse as witnesses, Thomas signed her name at the bottom of the last page of the "informed consent" form, agreeing to participate in the now controversial but potentially lifesaving tamoxifen breast cancer prevention trial.

WE CALL THEM CLINICAL TRIALS BUT the reality is that this and countless others like it are *human* trials—designed to test new drugs and medical procedures on real people. While they sometimes provide a small group of desperately ill patients access to the latest experimental treatments, that's not the primary purpose. They exist because drugs must be proved to be both safe and effective for the treatment of a particular condition or disease before they can be sold for that use in the U.S.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) licenses drugs, but it does not oversee nor does it pay for the testing. The funding can and most often does come from the drug company wishing to get its product on the market, although the federal government, through agencies such as the National Cancer Institute (NCI), also provides some money. Whoever is paying for the trials contracts with an independent research institution, usually a university research group, which in turn subcontracts with independent clinics, hospitals and universities to recruit subjects and collect the data. The experiment is designed by the overseeing institution, but a good deal of latitude is given the separate research groups in deciding how the experiment is executed. After all the research is done, the results are presented to the FDA for its approval.

The breast cancer prevention trial is being conducted for the NCI by the National Surgical Adjuvant Breast and Bowel Project (NSABP) at the University of Pittsburgh with \$68 million of federal money. But that is not nearly enough to sign up, medicate and monitor 16,000 women over five years. So the NCI asked Zeneca Pharmaceuticals, the British-owned firm that markets tamoxifen in the U.S., if it would provide \$70 million worth of the drug and placebos to hospitals and researchers free of charge, and the company agreed.

Routinely, a new drug, device or procedure will go through three phases