

FEBRUARY 2010

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p. 111

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**“I’m stubborn.
He’s got a temper.”**

How Amy Grant & Vince Gill make it work



He's got a temper.
She's stubborn.

And between the two of them, they had enough baggage to last a lifetime. But **Amy Grant & Vince Gill** have forged a fantastic marriage. Here's how

The Second Time's the Charm

Ask **Vince Gill** and **Amy Grant** what makes a marriage great, and their answers come tumbling out, not a whit of time for reflection required: "You can laugh together easily." "And trust each other." "And spend lots of time together." "And have great fun in bed!" "Yes! A fabulous sex life!" And on they go...

These two are no shrinking violets when it comes to the topic of love. Gill, 52, a renowned singer-songwriter/guitarist and an icon of country music (he was inducted into its Hall of Fame in 2007), and Grant—at 49, the best-selling artist in contemporary Christian music—are about to celebrate 10 joyful years of marriage. And while they seem to be soul mates, things didn't simply fall into place, storybook-style: Each had been married before, and had to navigate the choppy waters of divorce. Each had offspring with a previous spouse, and they discovered that blending the families took serious work. And then there was the maelstrom of bad publicity surrounding their union and its alleged improprieties, which even caused Amy's religious faith to be called into question. There were hard choices to be made in the name of love, and the rippling effects of those choices. And the story is still unfolding.

BY JENNIFER GRAHAM KIZER • PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW ECCLES





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See page 198 for details

Marriage, Southern-style

It's hard to envision megastars like Gill and Grant leading a leisurely, no-rush life, but in fact that's just what they've engineered. Their home, located on a cul-de-sac in Nashville, isn't the glitzy mansion you might expect of music-industry royalty. Tasteful and subdued, it has the spirit of an old-fashioned country home. Flowers border the front lawn; the scent of honeysuckle tinges the air; and half a dozen rocking chairs idle on a generous porch, along with a tail-wagging mutt named Chester. The home is a throwback to another era, a time before IM-ing and date-night scheduling, when romance blossomed while lingering over iced tea and listening to a country ballad. It's a clear and purposeful haven for Gill and Grant, who also work here, writing music and recording in their just-finished home studio.

"Two nights ago, I was out on the porch swing," says Grant. "Vince just came and plunked down, and we talked about the day. He's not ever in a hurry, in a conversation or with a kiss. And that's really, really rare [in a man]."

As she talks, Gill leans in closer to Grant; he appears to have something to add. But she's not done, so he holds his thought till she's finished.

"I think the quality of our relationship—the romance in it—it's him," she continues. "I think a woman can have all of the ideas and mental pictures. She can be a real planner and a motivator. But in the end, I think a woman does best when she responds to a man. You can't make a man be romantic. You can't make him slow down if he doesn't want to slow down."

Gill smiles, shrugs.

"I'm just grateful [to spend time with her]," he says. Ten years into their marriage, he still longs to be around her and admits he feels adrift when they're apart, playing concerts out of town. "We talk several times a day," says

"He's not ever in a hurry, in a conversation or with a kiss. And that's really, really rare in a man"

Gill. "I want to. I find myself going, I don't want to call her too much, or she'll think I'm nuts. But it's when I feel safest, when I'm talking to her."

There's a noticeable and natural ease about this partnership, with Gill's even keel setting the tone. But like all couples, they have their moments: "He has a quick temper," Grant says, "and I'm as stubborn as the day is long. Through our early lives, we came to understand that you make the choices you make, and if those screw up, then you learn to make new choices. Somebody who has been in a very bad wreck is going to be very conscientious about not speeding through a yellow light....You just learn so many good lessons when you go through a failed marriage.

If we had married at 21 and 24, it would have been completely different."

The long (messy) road behind

Grant and Gill have been schooled by love's complications. When their paths crossed in 1993, both were married (Gill to country singer Janis Oliver; Grant to Christian musician Gary Chapman) with children. They met at a taping for Gill's Christmas TV special, on which Grant was a guest performer. "The connection there [between us], that was kind of rare," Gill told Larry King in 2003. "The hang was easy. The conversation was easy." The Christmas shows became a yearly collaboration, and the backdrop for a growing friendship. "November would roll around and I'd go, Hey, we're doing that Christmas show again," Grant told King. "In my mind, I justified it: He can be my friend."

Though they have always maintained that there was no infidelity (during Gill's divorce, he and Grant were reportedly prepared to sign affidavits saying so), there was no hiding their emotional connection, both onstage and offstage. Gossip columnists noticed it; so did both of their spouses. Gill's ex-wife, Janis, reportedly told her sister that she initially tolerated the close friendship he struck up with Grant. But, Janis said, when she found a handwritten note from Grant saying, "I love you...Amy," in her husband's golf bag, she unsuccessfully asked Gill to cut his ties with Grant.

In 1997, the Gills divorced. "There was never like a magic plan—'I'm going to go do this, and a couple years later, you [Amy] go do this,'" Gill told King. "I got a divorce, and said, Well, I think she'll probably stay [in her marriage]. I really did."

Grant, who learned of Gill's divorce by reading about it in the newspaper, was in the midst of her own marital

woes. "The real pain of it is trying to take the high road," Grant told King. "But when you have such an easy rapport with another person, what it really does is it highlights where you don't have as easy a rapport."

She and Chapman tried marriage counseling, but began divorce mediation in 1998. Grant then moved out of the family home and filed for divorce in early 1999, with the marriage officially ending that June. During this time, Chapman was being quoted as saying he "literally, on [his] knees, begged [Grant] not to leave." In one of her own interviews at the time, Grant said a counselor told her, "God made marriage for people. He didn't make people for marriage. He didn't create the institution so He could just



plug people into it. He provided this so that people could enjoy each other to the fullest.”

But Gill and Grant weren't just any celebrities swapping partners as celebrities so often do. Gill was as known for his good-guy image as he was for his guitar chops. And Grant was the most prominent Christian entertainer of her generation. Not surprisingly, her divorce upset many of her fans, who viewed marriage vows as a spiritual covenant not to be broken.

Christian commentators debated whether a performer like Grant, who influenced others in Christ's name (and benefited financially from doing so), should be held to a particularly high moral standard. Some Christian radio stations stopped playing Grant's music; she remained mum on the topic at the time, refusing to enter the fray.

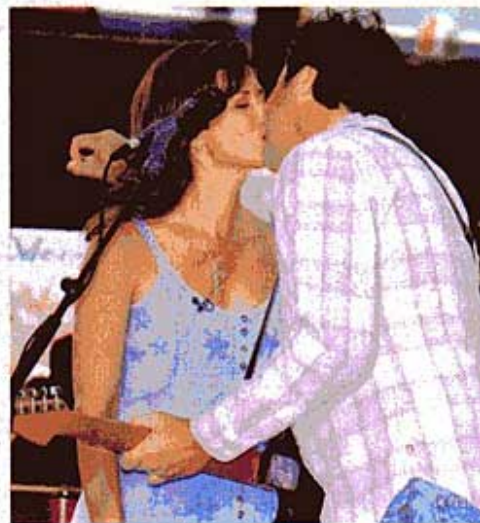
Today, she speaks thoughtfully and evenly about the media firestorm that swirled around her in those days. As pundits weighed in on the sanctity of marriage, Grant recalls, she had starker worries. “I don't mean this in a flip-pant way, but I was so unconcerned by what somebody who I would never meet wrote in a rag,” she says. “I felt like I had flipped a car over three medians and I was trying to figure out if my children—if we all—still had a pulse. I could not imagine going through life not by Vince's side. [Then I'd] hear people saying, ‘I heard so-and-so say they're not playing your records anymore.’ I had to trust that eventually everything was going to be OK.”

In fact, both their careers weathered the criticism. The year of her divorce, Grant went on a successful concert tour. Several months after her divorce was finalized, she and Gill began to be seen in public together, as a couple. And, a little less than a year later, in March of 2000, in a fairy tale-like ceremony on a hill, they married and embarked on “happily ever after.”



LOVE, ACTUALLY

Family portrait, *above left*: Gill, Grant, and their blended family (from left, Gill's daughter, Jenny; their girl, Corrina; and Grant's kids, Sarah, Millie, and Matthew). *Above*, a moment from their wedding day. *Right*, Grant and Gill, onstage together



Of course, they weren't traveling alone. There were four kids in tow—Gill's daughter, Jenny, then 17; and Grant's three children, Matthew, Millie, and Sarah, who ranged in age from 12 to 7. “It was a long haul to feel like a family again,” says Grant. “The parents have made a choice, but none of the kids have made the choice. And wherever it's going to wind up, you're not going to get there quickly. You just have to give people their space.”

Blending the two families was an arduous and sometimes painful process. “There have been a lot of hands-down, pivotal turning points, with a lot of words and tons of emotions,” Grant says. When asked for specifics, the couple clam up. Says Gill: “When I went through my divorce, there were some things [printed] in certain magazines, and I despised the way it made my kid look. So as a parent, there's a side of you that just builds a wall and says, ‘You can ask all you want, but you're not gonna get any of that stuff.’” Even in the face of the challenges, Gill and Grant made a point of always acknowledging the past. “The one thing we never tried to do is to say that life began for us the moment that we said, ‘I do,’” Grant says. “A whole lot of life had gone before that, and it was worth, in time, integrating in a healthy way.”

continued on page 190

Gill and Grant's daughter, Corrina, now 8, was born a year after they were married. (She and Sarah currently live with Grant and Gill; the three oldest now live on their own.) "[Corrina's birth was] a great blessing for us," says Gill. "All of a sudden, we all had something in common. And we didn't know it at the time, but it really provided a sense of glue."

Meanwhile, the passage of time, plain and simple, has helped to mend the double fractures of divorce and public chastisement. "From time to time it still comes up, and you want to say, 'Come on, we've beat this into the dirt,'" Gill says. "But we just dismiss it in a way that is respectful." He recalls a day when a man approached him in a guitar store. "I'd never met him," says Gill. "And he said, 'I owe

Laughing heartily, she adds, "[You say to yourself, I guess] I shouldn't have been so hard on that first chapter!"

She recalls the time that her propensity for running behind schedule made them both late for an engagement. "We got in the car," she says, giggling at the memory of it, "and Vince said, 'I'm feeling a lot of empathy for your first husband.'" Similarly, Grant says of Gill, "I'm glad I'm the second wife. I don't know what it was like the first time around, but for the most part now, he's very patient and level." She tests his patience from time to time, Grant admits. Halfway through a trip to Africa last summer with the whole family, "we were in this little, two-room, thatched-roofed building, and I was really proud of him because he didn't ever lose his temper or mutter under his breath or any of the things that men do. And I opened the doors between our room

to turn their relationship issues into personal ground rules for a strong and respectful marriage. Though these guidelines may sound simple, it's the following through on them, Grant and Gill admit, that can be challenging.

• **KNOW WHEN NOT TO TALK** Granted, communication is the cornerstone of a good marriage, but there's true value in knowing when *not* to speak. "When we first got married, we got sideways about something," Gill recalls. "I could tell she was firing up to really unload on me. I said, 'Hold on. If you just take a second and be still, you might not say some things that you'll regret. If you start saying things, then I'll start saying things.' And it wound up being a pretty good pattern for us. Now, if we get sideways, we let a little time go by. And then you can attack it without your anger coming through. Being a great companion is more about what you *don't* say than what you do say."

• **BUT BE READY TO PINPOINT A PROBLEM** Grant has had the same "you never help me around the house!" complaints as many wives. Hers tend to come out at the holidays, when she and Gill host dozens of relatives and, notes Grant, "I have that tradition from my grandmother and my mom to have all the tables set up, everything with a tablecloth, and you pull out your best whatever. It's Southern. And there were several years there that I was grinding an ax pretty hard because Vince was watching a ball game. I would just go, I can't believe that I'm in here doing all this stuff and he's totally content to sit in there! I would get *really* bent out of shape. And when I tried to talk to him, I'd be all snippy and 'Hmpf!' And he said, 'If you will just ask me, I'll do it.' And I said, 'But I don't *want* to have to ask you. I want you to notice what I'm doing and just jump in.' It took me several years to realize what he was saying. I've been through so much counseling and Vince has been through some, too, and I think at

"We were running late, and as we got in the car, Vince said, 'I'm feeling a lot of empathy for your first husband'"

you an apology. When you and Amy got married, I told my children that you were wrong. And now I'm going through a divorce." At that moment, Gill was glad that he'd never lashed out at the finger-waggers. "Not all Christians feel and act and do things exactly the same," he says. "If you always try to take the high road, then everybody has a chance to benefit."

Marriage, version 2.0

Now, the couple say, their happiness draws heavily on lessons learned from youthful missteps and from the early days of their union.

"There's no such thing as riding off into the sunset," says Grant. "You get into a second marriage and you go, Oh man, some of those weird dynamics, those were just me, and I've just dragged them off to the future!"

and the room where Jenny and Millie were. I had probably been in there 10 minutes and I said, 'Jenny, your dad has been so patient,' and as soon as 'patient' came out of my mouth, I hear him say, 'AMY!!!' I had left the bathwater running and the entire floor of the room, our suitcases, it was all soaked. And the door slammed and Jenny said, 'Oh, gosh, I hope my dad's not yelling at your mom.' And Millie said, 'I've never heard your dad yell at my mom.' Which is interesting. I do a lot of things that are easy to yell at!"

In fact, Grant's penchant for leaving appliances on—irons, stoves, faucets—has earned her a nickname at home: "Absentminded Professor," says Gill, laughing. "I just follow her around the house with the fire extinguisher, putting out the flames."

But the pair have also learned how

some point you have to realize, This angst I'm feeling is real, but I have to learn to say, 'Hey, will you help me set up these tables?' rather than building up a big head of steam."

• **GET OFF YOUR SOAPBOX** "I think that most people are more concerned about being right than they are about being kind or forgiving," Gill says. "As I get older, I don't care as much about whether I'm right. There's never that friction of, 'Well, my point is, what I'm saying is right and what you're saying is wrong.'" This, in turn, allows Grant to let her own guard down. "The great thing about really liking somebody is that I want to get along," she says. "Usually you can sort of tell, if you're discussing something, that it doesn't matter equally to both people. If you are inclined to have peace between you, it's OK to say, 'This matters more to you than it does to me.'" Even if you're not particularly thrilled with how things pan out. Take, for instance, the leather couches that Gill was getting for his home office. He had made his selection, but then, without telling him, Grant went ahead and changed his order, opting for a lighter shade instead. "We just kept them," he says, acknowledging that it clearly mattered to her much more than it did to him. "And then later she said, 'Honey, I think yours would have looked better.'"

• **KICK THE KINDNESS UP A NOTCH** Grant recalls a time, a few years into their marriage, when she got an advanced-level seminar on this subject and turned her attitude around. It happened on a bike outing, an attempt at "couple time" that went downhill fast. In previous years, the pair had usually golfed together. (Gill is an accomplished player; he's even installed a putting green in their yard.) But that year, Grant threw herself into a new passion: biking. "He didn't really like it," says Grant. "But I said, 'Please go with me,' and he went."

Problem was, he was a little slow. "I forgot that when you first start,

it's really tiring to ride a bike," says Grant. "I was behind him, and I shouted at him, 'Is this as fast as you're going to go?'"

Then she passed him. Or, as Gill grumbles, "You left me in the dust!" In mock disgrace, Grant buries her face in her hands.

They both double over in laughter.

How did it end? Gill pulled his bike alongside his wife's. As Grant remembers it, Gill said, "How would you feel if I teed off and then said, 'See you at the next tee?'" Chastened, Grant reconsidered her motivation that day. "What was my ultimate goal there?" she says. "I was acting like I wanted to go do something with him, but really, I wanted to work out...and I learned a good lesson the hard way."

Keeping the faith

This philosophy extends beyond how Grant and Gill treat each other. They're dedicated to giving back: Grant's notion of "not working" (she's been taking a break from performing after releasing *She Colors My Day* last May) is actually a schedule chockablock with benefit concerts, fundraising appearances, hospital-wing dedications, salutes to heroes, and nonprofit kickoffs. Gill, meanwhile, presides over his own expansive roster of humanitarian efforts. (Most famously, there's the annual Vinny Pro-Celebrity Invitational golf tournament, which helps support junior golf programs in Tennessee and gives money to a host of charities as well.) Between the two of them, they've supported sick children, wounded veterans, extraordinary women, MS sufferers, community activists, the mentally ill, Africans in poverty, and a growing list of aid organizations that count on the couple's fame to raise awareness.

A few days after this interview, in fact, Grant will host a giant yard sale in a nearby university parking lot, with dozens of volunteers and scores of donated items (many from Grant's

own closet), all to raise money for two local charities. "Everything that Vince and I do, all of it has come out of relationships," she says. "You know someone, and then, 'Oh my gosh, her husband's been diagnosed with what? Of course I'll come help raise money for that.' Life is about investing in people. And then tragedy strikes, and it pulls you together, and then you reinvest, and it's a constant cycle."

Gill nods in agreement. "I hadn't set out to be the Giver of All Things," he says. "It's just, people ask. And we say yes more."

A strong spiritual undercurrent runs beneath their drive to help others, but Grant chooses her words carefully when discussing it. She realizes that she is one of the faces who represent the marketable Christian industry, but she's troubled by certain elements of that industry. "The toughest thing, as a believer, is to see how Christianity is pigeonholed into this one did-you-get-the-memo-on-how-to-vote kind of thing," she says. "I am somebody who feels very spiritually alive, and prayer is an integral part of my daily life, along with confession, worship—all those things. But I see how all that's been quantified, and made a caricature of, and I don't want to add to a cultural experience that turns people off."

Gill calls himself "a novice of Christianity." "I didn't grow up in the church the way Amy did," he says. "This is not to say 'Yay, me!' But because I don't have all the rules drilled into my head and all of that, I feel like I do it from an honest place and live my life serving people, lifting her up, being kind and compassionate."

There it is again: the word "kindness." Gill considers it and says, "A big reason why our relationship is so good is that it begins with respect and kindness. If you have those two things on the front burner, then the rest is kind of easy." Grant gazes at her husband, as if considering this blessing, and smiles. ■