

How To Stay Married for 50 Years—or MORE!!

by Bob and Martha

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Before we begin this our true story, we must acknowledge that ANY 50-year marriage requires longevity of at least 70 or 80 years for the man and the woman. Sadly, when either the husband or wife dies of a tragic illness or accident at a young age, this will not be possible. In generations past, antibiotics and medical technology that we take for granted today were just not available. Consider diseases and epidemics like smallpox, cholera, typhoid, yellow fever, malaria, polio, tuberculosis, whooping cough, and many more. In our study of genealogy, while most of our ancestors did NOT have the longevity that we enjoy today, very few of these marriages ended in divorce. What we propose at the end of this story are three common sense steps to avoid the divorce that seems rampant in our society today.

Yesterday, on December 22, we celebrated the 51st anniversary of our engagement in 1970. We had met on March 14 (Pi day!) of that year, both in our second year as teachers. We fell in “like” immediately, and in “love” later that spring or summer. I gave Martha my Phi Kappa Phi pin during that summer, so we were definitely in love and in a “committed relationship.” Life was about to take a complicated turn for us, in that, with my military deferment from the draft having been taken away, a war in Viet Nam, and my own desire to “serve” in the military locally, I had enlisted in the Florida National Guard. On December 26, 1970, I was ordered to fly to Fort Campbell, Kentucky to begin Basic Training for 2 months, followed by 2 months of “On Job Training” in Fort Eustis, Virginia.

So, what should I give Martha for Christmas that year? I was thinking that I should give her a sewing machine to be practical, but maybe I should give her something more personal. I went to my favorite jeweler of that day, Horsley’s Jewelers in Mt. Dora, to get some ideas. I found this lovely sweetheart ring that I decided to give her for Christmas. It happened that, Martha’s brother-in-law Elton Love was a mailman in downtown Mt. Dora. After I bought this sweetheart ring, I spotted Elton walking his route. I was all excited and rushed over to show the ring to him. Elton tried to share my enthusiasm, but I later learned that he reported this event to Martha’s parents with some disappointment.

Next, I headed home, and down to the Methodist Church where Mom was secretary to show the ring to her. It was common knowledge that my brother Jim was giving an engagement ring to his then girlfriend Ann Greene. After getting Mom’s approval of this ring, I proceeded into the office of Rev. Randall Parsons, known to all our family as “Uncle Randall.” Uncle Randall looked at the sweetheart ring, but instead of congratulating me on my selection, he asked me, “Why don’t you get her a REAL ring??” “At Christmas,” he reminded me, “there will be Ann showing off her ENGAGEMENT ring, announcing her upcoming marriage to Jim. Then, here is Martha, showing off a tiny little ring that people will need a magnifying glass to even see it!” We are both SO THANKFUL that Uncle Randall had the courage to tell me that truth that day instead of telling

me what I wanted to hear!! He will always be my hero for this. Uncle Randall saved me from making a terrible mistake!

I went back to Horsley's Jewelers, picked out an engagement ring, and asked them to hold it for me. That evening, we were going to a Christmas party at our church. I picked Martha up, but I asked her to stay in the car while I talked with her parents about something. I took the sweetheart ring in to show them, not knowing that Elton had already told them about it. When I showed them the ring, I asked, "Would you mind if I traded this ring for a REAL ring?" Martha's dad looked a bit confused, but her mother caught on right away! Her mother immediately responded, "YES! That would be fine!" She probably poked Martha's dad under the table. When he caught on to what I was really asking, he agreed that giving her a real ring would be fine! Meanwhile, Martha still had no idea that any of this was going on! She was still expecting a sewing machine for Christmas!

The next step was a few days later, on December 22. At that time Armellini Trucking Company delivered directly from Pierson, Florida to Vineland, New Jersey. So, to send some of that delicious Dawson citrus to my relatives in New Jersey, Martha and I spent the afternoon picking oranges and delivered them that evening to Pierson. I had exchanged the sweetheart ring for the real engagement ring. Mr. Horsley put the ring box in a larger box that he wrapped, and I put the package in the back seat of the car. As we were driving back from Pierson, I told Martha that I had a surprise for her, so we stopped, and I pulled out the box from the back seat. Martha opened the box, and indeed she WAS surprised! I said, "Will you???" Martha replied, "Will I WHAT?" So, I said, "Will you marry me?" I am pleased and very proud to say that she answered in the affirmative!! We drove home with the interior car lights ON, gazing happily at the ring. It really looked GOOD on her finger!

Now, 51 years later, we have the evidence! We are still together, and most importantly, we are still in love! The Lord has blessed our lives and our marriage with longevity. Now, here are THREE steps that should eliminate the need for divorce in any marriage:

- 1. Choose the RIGHT ONE the first time.**
- 2. BE the RIGHT ONE the first time.**
- 3. Make Jesus the Lord of your life and the Lord of your marriage.**

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Dr. Robert J. Rapalje, Retired
Seminole State College of Florida
Altamonte Springs Campus
Email: rapaljer@mathinlivingcolor.com