

**Staying Together: Long Term Marriages**  
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ROGER FRITTS: Very long marriages are a recent phenomenon. In earlier times people rarely lived long enough to celebrate their 40<sup>th</sup> or 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Today people are interested in finding out what it is like to be in a relationship with the same person for many years. It is not always easy. A couple had been married fifty years. One day the wife said to the husband:

KATIE CULBERT: "Why don't you ever tell me you love me?"

ROGER: "I told you 'I love you' when we were married. If anything changes, I'll let you know."

ROGER: Over the past month, I invited members of the congregation who have had a long-term marriage to tell me what has kept them together. I received several thoughtful letters.

Jerald Moja said, "always remember you are on the same side as your partner."

And his partner Kim Roden added:

KATIE: When contemplating marriage, you should ask yourself if you would go into business with this person. That is what you are doing. Mingling all of your business (financial, health, emotional, physical, etc.) with this other person.

ROGER Here on the screen are Fred and Marilyn Sirasky. They wrote:

ROGER: We were married in 1969 after living and working together in the theater for two years, and we agree that this pre-marital try-out was a huge help in our later decision to make a permanent commitment.

Marilyn had been married previously, and she agreed to wed on one condition: "Whenever I say 'I hate you!' you have to agree not to take it personally." By this she meant that -- unlike her first marriage where disagreements were never discussed and allowed to fester and grow -- we would get everything out on the table, come to an understanding, and move on. This honest approach has worked countless times over the years, and we have never grown to "hate" each other, despite occasionally loudly disapproving each other's behavior.

During periods of stress (moving to a new city, being unemployed when the other was working), every few years we have had what we call "marriage tune-ups". We would meet with a marriage counselor we respected for just 6 sessions -- the first and last together with 2 individual sessions each in between. We found it was wonderful to have an impartial, third-party view of our

situation to help us sort things out. Very important: We have never opted for open-ended therapy upon which we might become dependent, and we always have had a "tune-up" before there was a real crisis in our relationship ... and there never has been one ... so far.

ROGER: Here is a 1963 wedding photo of Sharon and David Winkler, Sharon wrote:

KATIE CULBERT:

Dear Roger,

We have been married for over 51 years so I believe we fit into your category of long term relationships! I was cleaning out drawers recently and came across something that I wrote about 20 years ago when I was invited to a bridal shower and asked to bring a recipe card with some advice to pass along the newlyweds. Twenty years ago I said:

Never take each other for granted. Be as kind to and considerate of each other as you were on your first date. No matter how busy you are with jobs, children or friends, find some time for just the two of you to laugh and play together; but keep in mind that it is unrealistic to expect marriage or your partner to be perfect or your sole source of joy and happiness at all times. The "low" times inevitably happen, but then the "highs" are all the sweeter and are more appreciated.

I would give that same advice today but on the lighter side, I might add three "L's" that have been important in our lives: Lust, Luck, and Love

- o Luck that we met in the first place; and that our life together has been so blessed with good fortune and no real tragedies.
- o Lust or a strong physical attraction that initially brought us together and helped carry us through some tumultuous times.
- o Love has always underlain the lust and luck, and now in our later and 'more mellow' years just seems to grow sweeter and sweeter.

ROGER: Fred Sargent wrote from the perspective of a man who has been married for 67 years to his bride Shirley. Fred says:

ROGER: Shirley and I have been happily married since August 28, 1947. That is about 67 years - and we are planning to continue for another year. We don't have a secret formula but we follow three principles that have worked for many couples.

Number 1. The couple should have a humanistic value system (i.e. religion or philosophy). "Scientific Humanism" works well. So does Christian Humanism, Catholic Humanism or the U-U's Seven Principles.

Number 2. The couple should have mutual interests in several areas such as sports, church, politics, family, environmentalism, volunteering, anthropology, academia, travel or writing.

Number 3. The couple should be devoted to the use of common sense based on logic and the scientific method.

Bob and Mary Minter appear on the screen as they did when they married in 1965. They sent me a jointly written list of 14 major factors that have contributed to their successful 50-year marriage. They are not in any priority. They are a result of their brainstorming factors that have served them well over the years.

KATIE CULBERT: 1. We had a good start because we came from similar family backgrounds-- blue collar, working families that lived through the Big Depression. (That is part of what you take with you into a marriage.) [Shared values]

ROGER: 2. We met in graduate school while getting similar degrees in Organizational Communication -- another great shared background. [Shared knowledge]

KATIE CULBERT: 3. The "topping on the wedding cake" is that fact that we are both artists and share that wonderful hobby that keeps the "creative juices" flowing. [Shared interests]

ROGER: 4. Based on our eclectic education, training and work experience, we have continued to practice the intellectual, social, & emotional intelligence especially through our jobs in education and business. We both have a dedication to sharing our knowledge and experience with younger generations through education and training. (We are both still teaching in college in our 70's.)

KATIE CULBERT: 5. Compatible personalities with a healthy mix of extravert & introvert characteristics, social skills, yet ability and desire to work in solitude and respect for each other's space to do that.

ROGER: 6. We are "other-centered" vs. "self-centered"

KATIE CULBERT: 7. Patience (with self and each other); tolerance; and OPEN COMMUNICATION

ROGER: 8. Enjoying the feeling of harmony with each other that jazzes up "marriage music" with good humor through lots of laughs -- at self and situations.

KATIE CULBERT: 9. Living the life of COMPROMISE through sharing honest problem solving with useless argumentation held to a minimum and "agreeing to disagree" at times.

ROGER: 10. Persistence in "making our marriage work" by overcoming obstacles and "bumps in the road."

KATIE CULBERT: 11. Sharing the excitement of risk taking and making many adventurous moves for many different jobs, e.g., living in 10 different states in USA -- Ohio, Indiana, New York, Michigan, Iowa, Delaware, Connecticut, Texas, Colorado, Florida.

ROGER: 12. As for traditional/organized religion, we cannot label ours except to say that it is a personal one that we share and with which we are comfortable.

KATIE CULBERT: 13. Perhaps most important, we believe in recognizing and enjoying our precious moments together and not taking them for granted.

ROGER: 14. [and] We believe in the simple vows that we took 50 years ago: "Caring for each other in sickness and in health until we do part."

ROGER : Here is a photo of Ellie and Lou Altman at their wedding on October 30, 49 years ago. They prepared separate lists. Ellie writes:

KATIE CULBERT 1. Be Selfish - take care of your own needs first, and build a strong foundation. Then you can give easily, knowing that you are giving out of strength.

2. Exercise and eat healthy. You will feel better. (Yup, I've given up desserts; now that's dedication).

3. Touch each other, never stop touching.

4. Touch each other, never stop touching.

5. Touch each other, never stop touching.

6. Help your mate follow his dreams, because if he's happy, your life will be also.

7. Look into his eyes, and tell him how much you love him, and how lucky you are. (Hopefully it will be true.) Say this often.

8. Let him tell the jokes.

9. Fight clean. Stay with the issues, and don't go into the past and dredge up old stories.

10. Keeping a house clean doesn't make for an exciting marriage. Cooking is better.

11. Marry a man who has a vision and is passionate about life, and he will never be bored.

ROGER: Lou writes:

ROGER: First, you have to like each other. That's different from sexual attraction. It's friendship coupled with affection. Express that affection as frequently as possible. Leave no doubt about it. Affection will carry you through the rough spots.

Second, you have to have a balance between selfishness and generosity. If one is always sacrificing for the other, it breeds resentment.

Third, there will always be disagreements, so you have to deal with them rationally. Talk them out, be flexible. Compromise without resentment. Fight fair, speak your mind but don't be insulting.

Fourth, it helps to have a sense of humor, to laugh at the same things, to make each other laugh.

Fifth, shared values are necessary. That's especially important if you come from different ethnic or religious backgrounds. (I married a foreign woman, from Canada! When I was putting our son to bed one night, he reached up, put his little arms around my neck and said: Daddy, wasn't it nice of Mommy to come to our country and learn our language?)

Sixth, become a part of your spouse's family. Immerse yourself in the world your spouse inhabited before meeting you.

ROGER: June Brasgalla was married to Dick for 39 years when he died at 60. June writes:

KATIE CULBERT: Our first ten years were a struggle to get him through college and settle down into jobs, have children, etc. We had three sons, each two years apart, and those were busy but happy years. It seemed all our friends were in the same financial boat we were in, meaning slightly needy, so there was not the social pressure to have "things" and take fancy vacations that there is now. Our recreation was simple, mostly family and close friends getting together at a beach or to play games together. No one drank very much, although we were all heavy smokers. I know it sounds untrue, but we never argued or fought. Oh, we disagreed a lot, but he was clever enough to know that I would burst into tears, if he yelled at me, so he didn't. We often disagreed on dealing with three teenaged boys, but we deferred to the other when it was appropriate.

If I had to put a finger on why we were so happy together, I'd say it was love, common interests (we both valued education and musical talent), equal education level, mutual respect and a lot of unselfishness. We never had a lot of money, but we knew what pleased the other and we made sure that happened. We each had goals: His was to be an engineer, to be a naval officer, to be a Mason, and to join Mensa. He achieved them all. My goals were to be a good mother and a teacher who made a difference in the lives of children. I like to think I did that. We were proud of one another and quick to show it. And when we got in trouble, maritally, we went for counseling which greatly enriched our lives.

I thank my lucky stars every day for the good man I married and the years we shared. I see him in my three wonderful sons and that is his legacy. I like to think they represent the best of both of us.

ROGER: Marriage is not for everyone. I have fond memories of the years I spent as a single adult when I did not need to consult or negotiate with anyone about how I was spending the money, or what pictures I hung on the walls or who would do the dishes. The life style of a single person can be rich and meaningful and fulfilling. Some married people are miserable. As one young man said, "My wife divorced me because of illness. She got sick of me!"

Still many people do find happiness in joining together in a committed relationship. And perhaps the reasons go beyond language. I remember over 30 years ago visiting the home of a member of my congregation in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Bryant Prescott was a gay man who lived in a

committed relationship with his partner, John. John and Bryant were deeply in love, and devoted to each other for many years. I asked John to explain the success of the long relationship. He replied:

I don't know. Neither of us is without our faults. We're very different from each other. The key to our relationship is something that I can't put in words. It's a wonderful mystery.