

How to Grow Old Together— Despite Lying, Cheating, Arrogance and Secrecy

Statistics tell us that in today's America, 50 marriages out of every 100 end in separation or divorce. In second and third marriages, the ratio is higher.

I've loved and stayed married to the same woman for over sixty-four years. Let me tell you why and how.

Having spent the first 38 years of my professional working life in a courtroom listening to the unraveling moans of domestic breakups, I know that divorce most often means that you will lose ownership of half of all the assets the two of you have acquired during your marriage. And that's *after* your net worth has been legally ravaged by attorneys' fees! If you think it was tough raising a family while living in one household, think about the emotional and economic challenges of supporting two households. Divorce teaches hard lessons. So, why not avoid all this catastrophic trauma by choosing to love one person your whole life and grow old together?

As a published author of sizzling novels, romantic poetry and life-changing essays, I'm asked frequently by separated and divorced persons to share the secret of my long and happy marriage. Unfortunately, these persons took the "until-death-do-us-part" vow of their marriage ceremony as a given fact, thinking about the reality of life only after the unexpected breakup of their own relationship.

Finding someone to have sex with is easy. But having sex is not the same as having a loving relationship. Owning and keeping a loving relationship with the secure promise of growing old together takes dedication and commitment (just as success in one's job and career takes dedication and commitment).

In the haunting melody "The Story" sung by Brandi Carlile, we hear the wonderfully romantic refrain, "I was made for you." Sounds magically simple, doesn't it? Yet in many published works and in the church-sponsored program "Marriage Encounter," we learn that love is a decision. First comes attraction and infatuation followed later, perhaps, by loving another.

A lifetime of honeymoon love is a fantasy based on the false assumption that you've married the perfect partner. But the perfect partner doesn't exist. We're human beings with individual likes and dislikes and unique personalities that for certain do not exactly match another's. If you want a committed, enduring love relationship—absent the emotional and economic trauma of divorce—you each must consciously make the decision to love and cherish the person you married and then act on your decisions.

I admit that over the years I've been attracted to dozens of women and have been infatuated with at least a couple. Several times along the way, the prospect of ending my marriage entered my mind. In secrecy and arrogance, I schemed and lied and cheated in pursuit of love, but I never made the decision to love my paramours, that is, commit and dedicate myself to any of them. I created enormous marital strife with my ego-centric and selfish "love" pursuits, and my actions inflicted agonizing pain on my steadfast and treasured partner in life. I regret deeply every transgression. But, as they say in the courtroom, "You can't unring a bell."

What saved my marriage was waking up to the fact that years ago when I asked my wife to marry me, it was not only because I loved her but because I also admired and respected who and what she was. I "picked" her, so to speak. It's illogical to second-guess my own judgment. She is still and always has been someone I love and admire and respect.

In the most important moment of my personal history, I made a life-changing decision. I consciously chose to love and cherish forever the woman I married, no matter what. In all the years since, I have learned that enduring loves takes work. Forgiveness, trust, and understanding are essential to an enduring love. It requires commitment and dedication and the belief that you can do it or not do it.

If you want a committed, enduring love relationship for yourself, you and your spouse each must consciously make the decision to love and cherish each other. Choose a time and place—such as a weekend getaway—for the two of you to sit down together in "Growing Old Together" sessions where you name all your issues and secrets and expectations and disappointments, and then treat them all as learning experiences. Forgive each other and promise to get over the issues and avoid stewing about them.

Just as in making a contract, you offer-and-accept your individual needs in open conversation until you reach the point where you both agree and decide on a life-changing finality that is so important that you each must speak it aloud one to the other: "I will love and cherish you forever, no matter what." Then you act on your decisions by giving the best of yourself to your partner, expecting the same in return. Let these twelve simple words reinforce your decisions: "What I focus upon becomes reality. I have the power to choose."

You're not perfect. There still will be times when you hurt each other, when you bruise the ego and soul of your partner. But with a "Growing Old Together" commitment in hand, your marriage no longer will be headed for a shipwreck. Each of you will have a firm hold of the rudder, and your marriage will be on course to the glorious *Safe Haven* of growing old together.

Finally, adopt your own version of the "Good night" routine that my precious wife and I whisper to each other every night, and never go to sleep without it—

"I love you."

"I love you more."

"I'll wait for you at Heaven's Door."

Growing old together—I guarantee it's bliss on Earth.

Why should you listen to my advice? Because you're sitting there fantasizing about growing old together, and I'm 83 years old and I've done it!

