

To Love, Honor And Cherish

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Marriage! It used to be so simple. We all learned the rhyme in elementary school; "first comes love, then comes marriage, then comes Sally pushing a baby carriage."

As little girls we were given toys that would prepare us to be good wives and mothers. Kitchen sets, baby dolls. Told that when we grew up we should want to have a "princess wedding and a family." That we will live happily ever after!

"Happily Ever After?" Does it really exist? Should those who marry expect happiness and roses for the rest of their lives once rings are put on fingers, vows taken and kisses exchanged?



I interviewed eight married readers for this blog. Combined they have been married 134 years! From 39 years to 6 years. Let's see what these "Marriage Veterans" have to say about what keeps their marriages strong.

I will say what surprised me most is that those married the longest and therefore, have had many decades to find fault with their spouse; are the ones who answered a resounding "YES," knowing what they do now, they would for sure marry their spouse all over again!

Some would change the way they handled certain issues that have brought stress to their marriage, but all agreed they married the right person for them. One reader, 34 years married, made the statement that if anything ever happened to her husband, she does not know if she could go on. That she married her "best friend."

Another reader, married 20 years shared; "the perfect marriage is two imperfect people who refuse to give up on each other!" I think that quote is very revealing.

When we decide to marry, we basically are molding two personalities together. We will be waking up together, going to bed together, sharing meals together, possibly raising children together and basically spending more time with the person we choose to marry than any other person on this planet.

The obvious question then becomes; how important are shared values, religion and politics to making a marriage successful? The answers may surprise you as they did me.

Faith and Values:

I was raised in a religious household in a faith that is not shared by most of the men I met and considered as husband material. I was always told, however, that sharing the same religion can make a marriage more healthy especially if one decided to have children.

Now I must define "religion" and "faith." They are two different things. For example some feel that they can only marry someone who is of the same RELIGION as they are, for example, Greek Orthodox, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim. Many will not marry unless their intended convert to their Religion and promise to raise any children from the marriage in that one specific religion.

Others of faith only required that their spouse believe in God and need not attend church regularly but that any children from the marriage have some sort of religious upbringing.

I found that two things played a role in how much weight was given to faith when choosing a spouse: Age and family expectations.

My younger readers were less likely to make religion a major factor when deciding whom to marry. However, those who were brought up in an organized religion, while marrying someone raised in the same faith was not a requirement, they did require a potential husband or wife to convert to their religion before agreeing to marry them. Almost all in this group also wanted to raise children from their marriage in the religion they were raised in.

Statistically, I found faith to be more important to women than men. Many women reported that they wanted their spouse to share their faith, however some of these same women attend church alone or with their children. Their husbands refusal to attend church regularly was not a big issue in the happiness of the marriage. I also found that children make faith a more important issue than it is in marriages where there are no children.

The importance religion plays in the decision to marry often comes down to the requirements, some that make no sense to the couple; organized religions insist on in order to marry a couple in the church. Many organized religions try to control who a church member marries, even where they marry.

One Catholic reader met her Catholic husband after they had both been legally divorced. The problem is the Catholic Church did not recognize their divorce and told them they would need to get an annulment through the church before her priest would agree to marry them. This annulment would have cost them \$1000 each and their were no guarantees the Church would grant the annulments.

This couple chose leave their Catholic upbringing and instead married in a beautiful little stone church the found in their neighborhood where their previous divorces and their love for one another was not questioned. Their marriage has lasted 34 years and still going strong!

Some Christian Churches will not marry a Christian and Jew. Some, like the church I was raised in, will not allow a church member to marry anywhere other than the Greek Orthodox Church and if we do, we lose all our rights to be a "member in good standing" in the church. This means we can not receive any of the sacraments including Holy Communion.

While this can put pressure on a relationship at an already stressful time of planning a

wedding, I have found that those, like myself and my Catholic reader, have not let religion play such a huge part in our relationships that it affects the most important thing: ***We both married the men we love, the men who we want to spend the rest of our lives with.***

Politics:

Another surprise in this survey was that shared politics had very little to do with a happy marriage. One reader commented, "it makes things easier when you have the same political views. We don't have debates about politics. We confirm each others suspicions and points of view."

I have to say politics and current events are very important to me as most of you know. My husband is the least political person I know. What I find is many adults tend to vote the party their parents voted and my husbands family is very conservative. I am more liberal and this has caused great debates in our home but also some fights as well.

One thing I am grateful for, is the main political issues like woman's reproductive rights and health care, we agree on. Other issues we debate intellectually and while some of his views disappoint me, the fact is, I married a man who really hates politics and has no interest in debating me. I accept this about him. I guess this is why I have a blog.

Does it affect our marriage? Sometimes it does because I get really worked up about some political issues and he simply walks away and does not want to hear it. This both frustrates me and hurts me that something that is a major part of my life does not interest him.

Would having a great debate partner and avid political scholar as my husband make my marriage better? It would make it more interesting, especially dinner conversations, but at the end of the day, I married a good man who loves me. He supports my passions even if he does not share them. He has never tried to stop me from writing about or voicing my political opinions, even when they completely differ from his own. I will say, for someone like me, I married the absolute right person where politics are concerned.

When I asked my readers what makes their marriages last, all said that it is work. Like any job, it takes attention, vigilance, focus and commitment. Many met their spouses when they were least expecting to and many expressed surprise when realizing that their spouse was "the one."

My readers, like myself, looked for more than simply marrying a clone of themselves. In many cases, "opposites attract" seems to make for a healthier longer lasting marriage.

Perhaps when we marry someone different than ourselves, who comes from a completely unfamiliar background, we also open ourselves up to new experiences for better or worse! We see our marriage as a new adventure instead of simply a replica of our parents marriages or a continuation of the life we have always led.

I spent fifteen years of my life looking for the perfect mate. Several broken hearts and

a lot of lessons later, I stopped looking for perfection and started looking for a person to share this crazy, unpredictable thing we call life.

Two people may be perfect, individually, even together, but "LIFE" has a way of getting in the way and it is how we handle what life throws at us, how we live in an imperfect world, that defines a marriage.

Please look forward to the next blog in this series--"The Baby Carriage." How children affect a marriage.

Paula Luciano is a writer, restaurant critic, comedienne and apprentice chef.