

---

## PASSION STILL BLAZES AFTER 22 YEARS OF MARRIAGE

*“...the raw ingredients of a healthy marriage are consistent no matter our measure of fame, fortune or lack thereof.”*

Wayne Gretzky and I share a few things in common. Sure he has outpaced me in minor matters like international fame, Stanley Cup rings and burgeoning bank accounts. But for 22 years I've matched him stride for stride in the relational event called marriage.



He married Janet and I wed Cheryl on July 16, 1988, just miles apart in Alberta. Guests at our wedding wondered aloud if anyone had shown up at the Gretzky event. Newspapers the next day proclaimed that a few had; I was glad for the couple.

Updates on the Gretzky union have been limited to quick perusals of “trusted” periodicals lining grocery check-outs. My marriage has been easier to monitor, and I'd conservatively grade it in the high 90s.

Passing of years has not diminished our passion. A glimpse of my bride still makes my heart perform back-flips. Sometimes I burst into ballad: “Wild thing, you make my heart sing. You make everything groovy.”

After sitting in the matrimonial classroom for 22 years, I'm convinced the raw ingredients of a healthy marriage are consistent no matter our measure of fame, fortune or lack thereof. All who are willing can fan a marital spark into a relational fire that blazes bright and lasts a lifetime.

Commitment to doing the “little” things well is crucial.

Cheryl and I choose to respect differences -- and we are *very* different. This morning is a prime example. I'm propped in bed pecking at my laptop, toying with words and

phrases. She's at the pool swimming her daily 70 lengths. We'll both arrive at the breakfast table shortly, refreshed and rejuvenated. I use lines to accomplish that purpose, she chooses lengths. She'll ask about my writing and I'll inquire about her swim, but we both know that tomorrow our roles will not suddenly be reversed with her poised over a keyboard and me slicing majestically through the water. It's just not going to happen -- and we're okay with that.

Recognizing and admiring unique abilities in a spouse is part of a healthy relationship. Conversely, ongoing critiquing of differences results in an atmosphere of negativity. Thriving becomes difficult, often impossible.

While respecting differences, we have also learned to celebrate similarities. Wise couples discover common ground and choose to meet there; on the battlefield of a backgammon game, the sandy shores of a nearby beach or the corner table in a favorite java joint. The fruit of such strategic rendezvous is colorful conversation, sharing of dreams and contagious laughter. Yes, the land of similarities is a pleasant place to frequent.

Ignoring similarities or berating differences has taught us to value a third relational tool -- repentance. Winner of the most-vital-marital-phrase contest is, "I love you" but a close runner-up is "I'm sorry, will you forgive me." Interpretation: "I messed up. Could you find it in your heart to wipe my slate clean once again?" Though not included in the Canada Food Guide, regular consumption of humble pie is an important part of every healthy spousal diet.

July 16<sup>th</sup> looms large on our marital horizon. I'll book the day off and we'll stroll a favorite river trail, holding hands and people-watching; two middle-aged starry-eyed lovers thrilled about the prospect of growing old together. We'll reminisce and dream and giggle like kids 'till the sun slips low, announcing the completion of another segment of this journey called "as long as we both shall live."

