

# Married love about more than hearts, flowers and feelings

There's an interesting transformation that happens in stores right after the Christmas holidays. As the sights and sounds of Christmas disappear, suddenly store shelves are filled with Valentine's decorations, candies and gifts.

The best Valentine's story I ever heard was not from a seminar or a sermon. It was from a toast that a firefighter offered at a wedding reception. After a very humorous roasting and toasting of the bridal couple, the best man told the following story.

He had been asked to transport a 92-year-old man by ambulance to a local hospital. He had no idea why he was transporting this individual, until they arrived at the hospital. The elderly gentleman was wheeled on a stretcher into a hospital room where his wife of 70 years was dying. He wanted to hold her hand while they unplugged her from life support.

That was the best presentation I had ever heard on married love.

Valentine's Day is about hearts, flowers and feelings - all good things. But married love is about perseverance, commitment and fidelity. As Marriage Encounter teaches us again and again, love is a decision, not a feeling.

Curiously, as I heard that story I was reminded of a Valentine's poem that I had written back in 1975, my first year on the radio on WPOC93.1 FM. My show still airs on Sunday mornings at 8:30 a.m. on WPOC. It's a long-running radio show - for no salary!

In the '70s and '80s my show was carried on as many as 300 stations, including WMZQ in Washington, thanks to Paulist Communications. Today, "The Country Road" is still syndicated but on fewer stations.

I found the poem that I had written for that show. Here it is, simply titled "A Valentine."

“Valentine is for lovers, ah, life’s exquisite clichés,  
Visioned bodies under covers locked in lovers’ special ways.  
Yet, love is more than fantasy, fabled pleasures all the time.  
Love writes with its own poetry, and sings with its own rhymes.  
Yes, Valentine is for lovers, but lovers are for life.  
And true love fully hovers over husband and his wife.  
So would you be my valentine? Would you walk with me through life?  
Would you follow life’s familiar line that leads through joy and strife?  
Will you gamble that the fates cannot part us on our way?  
Will you share the loves and hates that challenge us every day?  
For life’s too short to pass it by and too long to walk alone.  
And beauty gleams in earth and sky on those whom love has shone.  
I cannot promise that each day will sparkle like the dew.  
I cannot promise an easy way – only promise to be with you.  
I’ll be with you in the strengths and joys, and the uncertainty of our younger fears,  
And I’ll share the pressures and the noise and the magic of our middle years.  
And in the dusk of fading light, as twilight slowly nears,  
I’ll love you with all love’s might, counting joys and not the tears.  
So if you’ll put your hand in mine, if you’ll walk with me ‘til death  
Your life will be my valentine, treasured ‘til life’s last breath.”  
Poetry aside, how do we make relationships last a lifetime? Three practical

suggestions. First, focus on the good – focus on what’s right in your marriage, not what’s wrong. Second, develop an attitude of gratitude. Express your gratitude early and often to your partner for all the good things. Finally, practice forgiveness! Holding on to past infidelities, past indiscretions and past hurts only spoils the present moment.

Focus on the good. Express your gratitude. Let go of the past. Your love really can last a lifetime!