

The makings of a long-lasting marriage

Valentine's Day brings thoughts of love and marriage. We may especially marvel at couples who have remained married for 50 plus years - and who love and appreciate each other even more than they did on their wedding day! Peggy Rowe and her husband, John, fit that model. You might know them better as the parents of Mike Rowe, host of the TV series "Dirty Jobs" and advocate for careers in the skilled trades.

At age 80, Peggy recently wrote the best-selling memoir "About My Mother: True Stories of a Horse-Crazy Daughter and Her Baseball-Obsessed Mother." It's a warm and funny remembrance of how she and her mom, Thelma Knobel, differed vastly in personality, yet loved each other anyway. But the book also recounts the relationship between Thelma and her husband, Carl, and how it served as a model for Peggy when she got married.

During a "Christopher Closeup" interview, Peggy told me, "I've never seen a love story quite like that of my parents. Both of them grew up poor and married during the Depression...She was always at his side, right up until the time they passed away in 2005 and 2003. Her one wish in her senior years was that she would outlive my father so that she could continue taking care of him. She outlived him by two years. He was an invalid for the last 11 years of his life. He had glaucoma and had lost his eyesight, and he had a stroke earlier on which left him very weak on one side. So she took care of him."

In essence, Thelma was living out the virtues taught by her Christian faith. Peggy said, "I joke that our church was like a sibling. We lived just one block from the little gray shingled church, Kenwood Presbyterian. My father was the Sunday school superintendent. My mother was the president of the women of the church, and they were involved in every phase of the life and work of the church. We were there multiple days a week. I'm still a member of that church. My husband, John, and all three of our children came through this church."

Speaking of John, Peggy admits that she was blessed with finding such a devoted, compassionate husband to whom she has been married for 58 years – and whom she now calls “Prince Charming.” And while Thelma wasn’t a fan of John’s when they first met, she came around. Peggy noted, “My husband is the best gift that I [ever gave] to my parents. He was the son my father never had. He was like a son to my mother, and he was there for them throughout their senior years especially. He and my dad were pals. When Dad could no longer drive because of glaucoma and John had retired, every morning John would take Dad back to McDonald’s so that he could meet his retired friends. They had a wonderful relationship.”

John’s willingness to help others is one of the qualities Peggy admires most about him. She said, “It’s been good for me through the years to see his giving nature. If it’s Tuesday, it’s Meals on Wheels. If it’s Wednesday, he’s volunteering at the oncology unit at our local hospital...It’s such a priority, and people are so appreciative.”

People often wonder what the secret is to a successful marriage. Based on the Rowe’s relationship, the answer is love, understanding, faith, compassion, and selflessness. They don’t sound like such a secret at all.

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