

36th Storyworth: How Did You Decide To Get Married?

On the surface, this seems an odd question. How does one respond? I threw dice? Dealt cards? Maybe a more salient question is WHY did I decide to get married, and WHEN. Then at least you have a frame of reference to ask why I did not change my mind between then and the actual date? The wiseass answer would be a shotgun, but no such thing was ever suggested nor needed ;-)

Perhaps before any of that, one should be aware of the circumstances preceding my asking, and Lynne's accepting me. Pretty much all other considerations are pointless. So you need to look back to April 1, 1971. Lynne had just had a bad accident on I-81 on her way to visit me at Clarkson from her school in Alfred, NY, which is a four + hour drive in good weather, which was NOT the case on I-81 near Adams, NY at that time of year. Add to that the fact that her Toyota Corolla had been improperly winterized, which caused a head crack, which led to frequent misfire in one of the cylinders. Not a healthy way to arrive on black ice if you suddenly get firing on all four cylinders, which is what happened. That threw the car into a spin and she wound up in a ditch. My roommate Dave Phillips took me to pick her up after he received her call from somebody's home.

I was a nervous wreck, and she was not much better. I tried to empathize, and in an attempt to soothe her, asked her to marry me. We had met the previous summer while she had been working as a lifeguard at the Rhinebeck swimming hole, where my brother and I were not legally supposed to be swimming as non-residents from Hyde Park. When she had approached Franz to admonish him not to run chasing another girl there onto the dam, which was a spillway for the pond, so covered with slippery algae, I had interceded to ask who SHE was, since her "uniform" was her handmade white velvet bikini, with twist-lock buckles looking like gold square knots, and a white tee shirt, but no official markings of any kind.

When she made her best hand-on-hips huff at me, I simply grabbed one hand and tossed her into the pond. She came up sputtering, and walked up to the beach to grab her towel. And promptly happened to release one of the side clasps on her bottoms, which heavily fell to the sand. I was more embarrassed for her than opportunistic, as she yanked her shirt waist down and grabbed the panties to race to the water. After returning again clothed legally, I struck up a conversation with her, and she informed me it was her plan to date as many guys as she could during her summer away from school. Our interactions became frequent, and she wore that same suit, sans the tee shirt, to my boss Hal's, where she ate TWO lobsters. But her Dad was soon admitted to Albany VA Hospital, which was more than an hour away, with terminal cancer. Since I enjoyed driving then just as much as now, I offered to assist her almost daily drives there after work, and we became intimate friends as a result.

We shared driving duties between our colleges during the school year. I was studying to become an Engineer, despite having no real idea what that even meant, while Lynne was studying to become a Registered Nurse. I know she did have a good idea what that would entail because she had actually been an LPN, having attended a nursing school before she met me. In that regard, Lynne was far more mature than I was when we met. And the roles she played at her sorority and with her roommates showed that maturity, which appealed to me.

Somewhere along the way I guess I realized I loved her, although it was not until that following April that I realized how much. So when I popped the question, she answered in the affirmative, which showed she had similar feelings. It was only later in the evening that I recognized the significance of the date, and in my true style as a joker, said "April Fools". Thankfully, our relationship didn't end right there, which I suppose told me she could accept being the butt of a joke as well. And, I hope, she saw something of substance in me, too. It should be noted that I did again ask her to marry me, after noting that it was now the following day, at a little after midnight, so she didn't have TOO long to wait, although we agreed to postpone actually marrying until we both finished school in 13 months, and our wedding happened about four months later on ;-)

I doubt it would surprise many people to learn that most guys imagine themselves partnered with pretty much every girl they meet, certainly if they are both unattached. And I was no different. So it would be illogical to assume I “wanted to marry” as such. Nor was I in any hurry to “start a family”. So it is not really clear in my mind when and why I decided it was “time to pair bond”. That is why I believe the trigger that day was more a desire to soothe Lynne’s hurt from the day’s activities than from any romantic notion. At the same time, I had no misgivings either, so I suppose it was more of an evolutionary step in our relationship we had reached at that point, rather than some light bulb suddenly flashing in my groin or something. We both seemed interested in our careers, were both serious people, had both had the opportunity to deal with adversity, and demonstrated personal courage in doing so. So it was not a leap of much faith in either case.

What perhaps got more thought and planning was what our lives and living arrangements would look like from the moment I asked her through the actual occurrence of marrying, not least because I think most people would immediately do cognitive discord and ask whether they’d had enough chance to “sow their wild oats”. There was never any question of my commitment once the step actually occurred, but I have enough integrity to admit I was briefly asking myself if I had been too hasty. I think the next 40 years proved I had not been, and I was truly surprised when Lynne told me she wanted a divorce. But I rarely spent a lot of time second guessing either way in life – I have viewed myself as an adult, and adults accept consequences for their actions.

I had a similar ambivalence when Lynne started mentioning her “biological clock”, and then when it came time to commit to moving Jess from Liverpool School District to Manlius Pebble Hill and the tuition that would entail when we became frustrated with the school system’s “divide and conquer” approach to “community involvement” in their planning for facility utilization, when they assured each of the groups they split the committees into wound up with an overbalance of people with vested interest in the status quo instead of actually trying to do as the stated purpose of the published request for participation had suggested, thereby wasting a lot of my evenings needlessly. In retrospect, however, I recognize now that I was doing that same critical review as I did for almost everything in my life before making decisions I would then learn to adapt to, whatever came down the pike.

As I look back now on my preparation for choosing a spouse, and then the steps involved in moving from that to actually becoming a married man, I realize that it was never a fear of making ANY decision, just a fear of making the WRONG decision which kept me awake at nights. So it never occurred to me to question how I decided to get married, which simply seemed the logical progression in the development of our relationship. I am sure that it is the nature of biology, which through much of history has made an important part of why MOST people eventually married a somewhat “pays yer money and takes yer chances” affair; sexual relations. We were fortunate to bypass much of that because Lynne was prescribed the pill for medical purposes. But that allowed us to experiment and learn compatibility with little fear of consequences BEFORE we were married, and protected us from legal costs etc. for divorce, or worse; children who would be victimized, from early on.

So I cannot honestly state that I know WHY I chose to marry, except to state that I am certain I chose well, and was never sorry I had done so. I also know that we ALL change over time, and that some of those changes are not always in parallel directions. So when incompatibility occurred, I suppose it became the best decision then to divorce. I am glad Jess was an adult already, so she was free to interpret as she saw fit. And I know she is a person who is capable of realistic analysis, good or bad. She will always be daughter to BOTH of us, so Lynne and I will always have some kind of relationship, although it can never again be what it once was. I know THAT decision was easily reached because some things are just too painful ;-)

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