

Introduction

I will always remember that cold winter morning. The steely-glass doors hissed in quiet protest as I slipped softly into the nursing home. I was only in town for a few hours and felt duty-bound to visit my grandfather. Not that he'd ever know I'd been there—he'd suffered a severe stroke a few years back, and now his world was peopled only with strangers.

It was still early, and the nurse at the desk merely nodded as I explained where I was headed. My sneakers squeaked faintly as I walked down the polished hall. *I'll just see if he's awake*, I thought as I peeked through the slightly open door.

Early-morning light painted highlights on the handmade quilt that covered him; his ruffled gray hair nestled in a downy pillow. And by his side sat Grandmother, steadily crocheting yet another heirloom-to-be. I'd forgotten she came here almost every morning to spend a few hours by his side.

As I paused a moment, reluctant to disturb this peaceful scene, Grandpa stirred in his sleep. In an instant, Grandma reached out and gently covered his wrinkled, work-scarred hand with her own. Two hands, clasped in an embrace born of years of struggling together toward a common goal. It's a moment I'll always remember.

I spent much longer than I'd planned in Grandpa's room that morning. Grandma and I talked about their life together—a rough life in many ways, yet the good always outweighed the bad. As we talked, I began to catch just a glimpse of the depth of true love—something few of us ever experience in today's busy, bustling world. And as I began the interviews that led to this book, those clasped, wrinkled hands were always before me.

This book celebrates the immense storehouse of wisdom and love that resides in the hearts and minds of older American couples. It's a tribute to their rugged common sense, a reflection of their good-natured banter, and a testimony to the strength of their commitment to one another.

May your heart be softened, your understanding deepened, and your relationships strengthened as you share in their lives through the following pages.

-Bill Morelan

You only get out of a marriage what you put into it.

ELDON & GINNY PHILLIPS

MARRIED: OCTOBER 30, 1946

BELLE CENTER, OHIO

*Eldon and Ginny went to high school together. His first move:
he stole her shoes during a play rehearsal! "It took him eight years
to convince me to marry him," laughs Ginny.*

A young entrepreneur starts with an idea for a unique, new product. He carefully lays plans for a start-up business, calculating revenues and expenses. He meets with consultants, accountants, and attorneys. He works hard to sell the concept to banks and investors to raise capital. In time he leases space, purchases equipment, and hires employees. Finally he is ready to begin. He works hard, pouring himself into the business, determined to make it succeed. And it thrives.

But does he now merely sit back, relax, and enjoy the fruit of his labor? No! He works harder than ever, while conjuring up ideas for improving efficiency, bettering customer relations, bolstering profits.

If a marriage is to last a lifetime, it requires the same level of devotion and energy. Both partners must give 100 percent. Each must be available to the other when needed, fully present, ready to listen, to talk, to act. Both spouses must pour their heart and soul into this enterprise, making whatever sacrifice necessary to ensure success.

Yet what an investment! The payoff is a rich, healthy, loving relationship that lasts. And everyone involved reaps countless rewards.

Sound good? Devote time and energy to your marriage.

Whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6