

And I waited for God to speak to me, As God's Spirit does when I'm willing to hear. Spirit told me what would be helpful to draw my love near.

- R. C. Diggs (2004)

Part 4 With the *Spirit* -Worth Struggling Through

2007-2016: 40 years of marriage

As a reminder, these articles are primarily for people who desire to stay together in marriage and want to do so better. Communication is appreciated and valued as integral to living out the sacred marital commitment we've made and now accept "as long as we both shall live." This last four-part article about our marriage is to show some specific acts that have emerged from our marriage. We are now eldering, and we are thinking - legacy. Marriage is personal, familial, and public. I am taking our personal struggles and triumphs in marriage to bless others and to create lessons of marital learning and growth.

Do you think the struggle ended when we reached the 40-year mark? You guessed it, No. As Larry noted: *With a marriage for this long we are still growing and understanding better. We both know that some things are hard to die after 40 years - when items are left in the bathroom and dishes are left in the sink. So, some things you get over and other things you deal with, love, and understand. Also understand these items were not done on purpose but oh, well, my bad. We are still dealing with living together.*

Oh, yes! We've made commitments to do better and remade the same commitments. Such remaking, reviewing, and renewing will be everlasting, and that's not a bad thing when you finally realize that this is the stuff of life. It's like the dieting or healthy life-style mantra: It's better to have made a goal, earnestly tried, and lost some weight or reached the goal than never

to have made a goal at all. We keep re-setting and pursuing goals in our marriage because we earnestly want to keep our love near and expressive!

Blessing Others: Our oldest daughter was married May 2009, and as a gift I, being *the communicator*, created a personalized 16-page booklet entitled *Marriage Sabbatical Booklet* to convey the ideas and concepts gleaned over our years of marriage ([click show booklet cover below](#)). The booklet included: the marriage sabbatical rationale and beliefs and actions for a sustained loving relationship: put God first, sign-in as a Believer, message board for occupants, marriage prayer, range of marital emotion quotes from theatre/literature that state: “comedy happens in life; fantasy can seem golden in life; rage happens in life; but don’t be fooled; listen to your elder...Let God fight your battles,” two original poems “Please Don’t Let Me Go” an excerpt of “Temper, Temper,” ([link to poems](#)), conceptual message of Growth and Change, conceptual message of Sabbatical Moments, and message boards from community. The *Marriage Sabbatical Booklet* (2009) booklet attempted to capture internal and external influences. I selected the booklet example to reflect a shared symbol of what our marriage brought to bear – a gift, something beautiful. Certainly, I channel the voice and Caribbean rhythm of Rihanna’s refrain, “Work, Work, Work, Work, Work,” when I emphasize the complexity of constituting such a gift (preferring theodyssey online commentary). Also, my poems’ creatively capture the range of passions and experiences of our 40 -year marriage.

I have attempted to use my self-oriented process of writing and examining the intimate aspects of my marriage to help others who suffered and struggled through direct personal contact and in small-group structured educational environment ([link to Marriage web page](#)). **So, why me?** I am among those who has become instrumental in passing on something of value and

importance (Diggs, 2011). The idea is not that every marriage will survive, but that the individuals within them or move out of them can do so in wholeness and wellness.

Marital Learning and Growth: In December 2009 I wrote in my journal: *I was riding along in a neighbor's car when I was told that the kids of one family on the street thought of our family as the Cosby family (The Cosby Show aired from 1984-1992). Why? Our family represented two parents and four children. Funny how kids think. The Cosby Show which entered the homes of millions, including our family (positively) affected the lives of a few, but those affected went on to live and influenced others. I believe that a little of our reflection-two people working-intact -nurturing children- represented the ideal for many. Outside image was important-inside we were ↑↓- a mess, but the outside-what people saw was important. That was us too! Both/And!! The struggle was what is inside marriage. It was our process to deal with, not the outside, the neighbors, or the kids in the street. You're in a house, invisible from the outside for a reason – your protection from the outside. So, I'm impressed and sobered by this notion that the image - an image of intactness, happiness, successful, peaceful- communicated, reflected our image to the world. It gave several children hopefulness and aspiration.*

The community assessment of our public face of a successful marriage and family is heartfelt and means something special. We believe that we do live beyond ourselves; that the sacredness of marriage is for a purpose for oneself and beyond oneself (Bent-Goodley, 2014). So, to hear that our community of kids *high-five* us for representing a good example was uplifting and remains so. Though behind closed doors, many times, we were emotional, mental, physical wrecks, exhibiting movements of distance; advances to break silence; eye avoidance, and verbal communication avoiders. During these periods, the physical efforts to avoid each other did not spill over into street brawls, did not erase the heart that slowly peeked through with

a recognition of a slight touch, a gentle voice, an embrace that interrupted the deafening silence, and would ultimately lead to us *to try and try again* to behave in a way representative of the love we wanted and desired to display. Were we hypocritical because our “behind closed doors” was a mess? Certainly not. Closed doors are for all parties’ protection; many aspects of marriage are to be worked out between the couple and it is their choice to reveal. The forty-year mark doesn’t appear to represent the end of mundaneness or surprising struggles as we are still humans who are growing in this context of change: spiritually, physically, mentally, and emotionally. And as Larry noted, *some things you get over and other things you deal with, love, and understand*; that’s the best we can hope for in this life. **Do you agree or disagree? Why?**

We are among BPW-Black People Working; we are both employed to invest in our present and future: home, family, community, world-at-large. We like to finish what we started, we like to succeed, and we are rational about life plans and pursuits (e.g., work, children, financial). We believed that we owe each other that loyalty in support. Perhaps it is our self-identities and this loyalty to our children foremost that have been constructed in our relationship that limited sharing of our personal struggles of distrust and deception in a cavalier fashion. Our love and hard work of marriage have produced four beautiful beings; **we are a gift** to our children, and **they are gifts to us**, a rich legacy. We have created a strong couple image, something beautiful that we value. As to communication messaging, our family agrees that I have demonstrated greater skill in communication competence to the extent that when problems arose, I often initiated the communicative behavior to address (e.g., question, discussion, confrontation, resolution, dialogue). Of course, I’m a Communication teacher, researcher, and author so this is not altogether surprising. We came to realize that the benefits of our marriage,

legacies, and economic goals outweighed the costs of personal frictions and separation to keep tending the love vine.

Epilogue

A strategic effort to value communication is invaluable for married couples. The following characteristics emerged in our decisions to remain married for over 40 years. These are not presented in any order of importance: time matters - spend time in togetherness and separate, in reflection, thought, repetition of goals, creative communication such as poetry /letters; faith in God, power of prayer, forgiveness, private relational talk versus public relational talk, family time, practice relational communication, non-violence, memories of primal love connection, enacting passion-sexual desire, goal-oriented identity, perseverance, support of wise counsel, professional counsel and with selective friends, ancestral voices, desirable marital public image, speaking scripture ritual, and vision of legacy. Married couples with desire and training can enhance communication, overcome distrust, conjure romance, and envision legacies.

Writing these articles is an unfinished activity. Every day, I see something or feel something that seems to bear witness to the marital process. Just the other day I saw a rainbow. It was beautiful but short-lived. I relate that to our fantasies about marriage-the images come and are beautiful, but short lived; whereas, what we go through to build the foundation of a committed, sustained marriage is messy and unappealing. Out of this foundational work are joined hearts that seek happiness, forgiveness, and the beauty of holiness to sustain and persist in what they believe God has created. Our marriage has persisted beyond the fantasy as we continue to attend to the foundational work rooted in faith and love to bring each other closer.

References

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Understanding 'work' by Rihanna. <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/understanding-work-rihanna>



Couple's last name

MARRIAGE SABBATICAL BOOKLET

A getaway that doesn't take you away

STARTS NOW!

original 2005 revised 2009 for this couple



Messages for Love and Play

Please Don't Let Me Go

Verse 1

As the fog forms after mountains
As the mist forms after dew
I'm still misty over you, so

Chorus

If I ask, if I beg you, when I speak what I don't know,
Please remember this, 'I love you', and please don't let me go!

Verse 2

I love you more than ever, your presence makes me smile
When I watch you behind my sunglasses, I want to linger there awhile.

Chorus

If I ask, if I beg you, when I speak what I don't know,
Please remember this, 'I love you,' and please don't let me go!

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Messages for Fights and Anger

Temper, Temper (excerpt)

I dislike very much; I hate it
When he justifies himself by falsifying my words.

*That is, I thought you had a 2pm appointment.
Who told you that? You have my phone.
Why not call me and check?!
Why didn't you ask me to be sure? Who are you with?
So, that's it. You are **with** the appointment.*

It is now the reflection of the event that lingers
Disregarded: the me I am to him.
But I am regarded by my Great Creator.

I again purpose to keep my vow
To God, to live and know; My *temper*
Will grow!

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