

Even though we change places with circumstance the twists and turns of the love vine remain.

-Rhunette C. Diggs, 2004

Our Marriage: *Give It 20 Years*

Part II: 1987-1996

When I told a clever, married female colleague that I was working on a marital book project with the idea of *give it 20 years* before giving up or throwing in the towel. She quickly retorted, “That sounds like a prison sentence.” Ok, it’s true; there are struggles- twists and turns involved, and the 20-year perspective, though not apparently titillating, has practical and relational benefits and is totally against putting oneself in violent and abusive situations for time’s sake.

So, let’s deal with these twists and turns on the love vine. It’s September 18, 1986, I’m 34 years old, Larry’s 37, and I am enthralled by the sound of Larry’s voice and body when he said, “See ya.” Now, mind you, we were recently in a tense verbal combat. But at that moment, the words “growl-sensuous-cool” convey that we can quickly move from stern behavior, to passionate, and to calm in a matter of minutes ([click full “See ‘Ya” poem](#)). In this case, as it is with loving intimate partners, just the sound of the voice can send exhilaration through the entire body. He’s the total package: handsome, likable, and cool. At that moment, I enjoy being part of the package. LOL.

Larry chimes in to confirm that we were twisting and turning in late 1980’s to early 90’s by saying: *We lived in a family that is sometimes the tales of two cities and in two locations as a result of our upward mobility; we lived apart for a total of 5 years during these years. This was the hot – cold years of our relationship. During a hot time, we had another child (born 1992). I was the main caregiver (paid majority of the daily bills) and now with four children, this was a*

lot to deal with and little hands-on with the other half (he's talking about me, the wife—and to clarify, he had two of the children with him and I had two with me). During this time life was very overwhelming for me. We agreed that Rhunette would take the youngest children to her job location which was a 3- hour drive from our home base; I still in some ways regret making that move. I still feel a little sad about that and our second youngest feels that also.

During our geographical separation for work, we drove to see each other weekly most of the time, and we utilized email and phone communication. Our agreement that we live separately for work purposes reflects our desire for economic strength. This decision put pressure to be even more diligent in our efforts to care for the emotional and stability needs of our children, to create networks of support within multiple locations (husband and wife's different homes, churches, acquaintances, communities). **What's your twist-turn, up-down experiences in your marriage?**

We must admit, during the 20 years of marriage, we often wavered on our feelings of romance between stints of separation, but we never wavered on our responsibilities to our children; we never wanted them to feel at risk of abandonment or insecure during this long-distance period. This responsibility was one we consistently agreed on and approached with love and passion. We believe our children felt safe and secure. What an outstanding benefit for us as a family for hanging in there for 20 years. No regrets there!

Our natural independence, distinctive voices, and collaborative voices enabled pursuits of goals and, yet, this independence also was an aspect of our marital conflict behaviors that we had to address directly and mentally. In other words, we, well, I expressed my dissatisfaction with the quickness of a gazelle as one who perceives that she has a legitimate beef and deserves to be heard. This pattern of me appearing loud and outspoken and Larry appearing passive and quiet

characterizes the contradictory nature of our twists and turns because I saw his issues as very loud (big, as in Huge) as I exerted efforts to bring them to light. Even these efforts yielded a practical benefit. Our children observed that conflicts or differing opinions don't equal violence and the inability to work through problems together.

Finally, our 20 years did not erase the reasons why we came together in holy matrimony: we earnestly have attraction; we laugh together, and work/plan together. We are in good health and the sexual contact we enjoyed when together and remembered when apart facilitated positivity; that is, after the fighting and the pain ceased we still desired each other. Research about marriage post WW II reveals a focus on emotional and sexual satisfaction (Green & Valleriani, 2016; Walker & Luszcz, 2009). By maintaining a consistent schedule of contact, mutually or separately and reaching out to each other to break silence, we worked our way back to enjoy family, friends, and intimate times together.

Maybe now, my witty, married female colleague might not assign *give marriage 20 years* to a prison life sentence of negativity knowing that the model that I'm urging is that at least **one of us** (at any given time) strived to overcome psychological and physical distance to nudge the other back to a feeling of *it's worth it* to hang on and creep along the love vine. We sought and struggled for physical connection. **What do you do to find your way back to the arms of your lover?**

References

Diggs, R. C. (2004). *The Love Vine*. Unpublished poem.

Green, A. I., & Valleriani, J. (2016). Marital monogamy as ideal and practice: the detraditionalization thesis in contemporary marriages. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 78, 416-430. DOI:10.1111/jomf.12277

See Ya'

See ya!!

growl-sensuous-cool

all wrapped up in one!

See ya!!

The anticipation of

the rapture-smooches-

wishes-mixes

See ya!!

Uhhmm, the titillating

stroke to the heart string

makes you flutter-swing

Oh, baby,

See ya!!

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