

Defining Marriage All Over Again

Marriage is a funny thing. How you view it is drastically different if you are a teenager or youth with stars in your eyes compared to your vision of marriage when you have been ensconced in the practice for 20-30 years and looking toward a life in retirement as a married couple. Baby boomers have experienced every aspect of marriage from that early idealistic stage through divorces, various redefinitions of marriage and now taking their marriages into their retirement years. It may be that this next transition of marriage will bring as many changes to that special relationship as any that have gone before.

How you view marriage as you move toward your retirement years without a doubt depends on how marriage has gone for you over the decades. If marriages are rocked with difficulty, separations and other woes, retirement can bring a new dimension to that tension. On the other hand, part of the commission of retirement is to begin to seek resolution of life's struggles so working together with each other in the context of marriage can bring tremendous healing in this phase of life.

Each era of life seems to bring a new opportunity to define marriage and how it will be an important part of life. When the baby boomer generation became parents, the shift was notable as retailers responded to their emphasis on being good moms and dads and away from youthful issues to some extent. Then as baby boomers moved through parenting and into the empty nest phase of life, that seemed to bring as many challenges as when that nest filled up with children decades before.

There is no question that real life in the context of a very real and functional marriage, even with the problems that brings is also a huge resource for us throughout life's journey. While sometimes the romance can escape from the marriage relationship if life brings struggles and as our bodies go through changes, that partnership and intimacy of relationship is an incredible resource for coping with the big changes all baby boomers have had to face over the years.

This is the good thing about hanging in there with that marriage until you get to the stage of life most baby boomers are moving toward in this decade. The things that can rob a marriage of romance during the working part of your married years are the coming of children, the hard work of raising them, keeping a career moving forward in the tough business settings we have experienced in the last three decades and seeing your own relationship evolve under that kind of "pressure cooker" environment.

But a significant amount of those pressures begin to lift when you are able to

perhaps scale back the work life, enjoy the fruits of your labors and let the kids get out on their own. So that side of the pre-retirement years can actually be a fertile setting for a new romantic life between husband and wife to spring up. Many couples, as they leave the world of parenting behind, experience such late in life romantic rebirths. And this kind of late springtime in your relationship with your long time spouse can bring the birth of new creativity in many parts of your life making it one of the happiest phases of life for you and your husband or wife.

A marriage gets tested throughout youth and middle age and marriages that survive do so because of mutual support and the ability to accept the other member of the marriage and compromise. Since these traits will be well established in your relationship as you move into your fifties and sixties together, they will be a continuous resource to you as you face retirement issues, dealing with being a grandparent and being wise counsel for children who are facing life's struggles for the first time.

But baby boomers should not be surprised if they see their marriages continue to change, grow and mature in new directions as each partner explores this phase of life for the first time as well. A marriage is a living thing so we can take joy from seeing it become something new each new decade as, as we have done often in the past, we start defining marriage all over again.

PPPPP 724