

GOING THE DISTANCE

By SUSAN BLOOM

TEN COUPLES REVEAL THEIR SECRETS TO A LONG AND HAPPY MARRIAGE

Comedian Henny Youngman once joked that “the secret to a happy marriage remains a secret.”

Or does it?

We interviewed 10 happy, loving couples from across the Garden State who have been married for a long time to find out what they’ve been doing right.

Sure, we know marriage can be complicated and full of ups and downs. But we learned from our couples that strong unions are about love, friendship, communication, respect and compatibility, with a dash of humility and patience.

Our couples represent all ages, backgrounds and geographic areas of the state, and their partnerships have spanned anywhere from 20 to nearly 70 years.

Here, they talk candidly about what has made their marriages successful, and why, all these years later, they would still say “I do.”



All In a Day's Work



JOY & FRANK WARNER

Washington

THEIR BACKSTORY: Sweethearts since their freshman year of high school, this couple has also worked together in the fashion industry for more than 30 years, Joy as a hair colorist and Frank as a stylist and owner of a successful hair salon in Morris County.

JOY: You're not going to agree on everything — we didn't then and still don't. But you still have to like and respect the person you're married to and work things out. I love Frank's integrity and generosity and our relationship is about communication and compromise. Laughter is part of it, too.

FRANK: In a long-term marriage, the passion comes and goes, and there will be periods where you even fall out of love. But I still always enjoy spending time with my wife and my respect for her will never fade. Joy has a great way of being honest with me and keeping me in line. We're best friends in a lifetime relationship.



Friends 'Til the End



PAT & RICHARD MORGAN

Beach Haven

THEIR BACKSTORY: This couple, both previously married, worked in neighboring school districts — Pat in central administration and Richard as an assistant superintendent — and were friends before they married in 1991.

PAT: You not only marry a person, you marry a lifestyle. So, having a lot of things in common is important for a relationship. Richard and I had a lot in common, but we support each other in new and different things that we want to try. It's great to be close as a couple but to give each other the space to pursue things that interest each of us.

RICHARD: It's a fairy tale that things turn out happily ever after — couplehood is a dynamic thing and it happens by effort. Our willingness to talk things through and to "keep at it" is a strong part of our success. It's also helpful if you marry your good or best friend.





Faith, Family, & Friends



IVY & RON STEPHENS
Franklin Park

THEIR BACKSTORY:

Ivy, an accountant, thought that “he was cute” when she and Ron first met at Mr. Bee’s, a Somerset County hamburger joint, in 1972 while in high school.

After reconnecting at a party several months later and dating, they married in 1979 and renewed their vows 25 years later in 2004.

IVY: One of our sons died in a car accident in 1998, which was devastating. But it pulled us closer together and made us stronger. There have been tough spots and there always will be — things won’t be perfect and you both have to bend and work together. But we still love, enjoy and laugh with each other. Our faith, family and friends have kept us together and been our rock.

RON: Trials and tribulations go with the territory, but we have very strong faith. I adore my wife — her dedication, trustworthiness, support, understanding and patience are phenomenal. If you love each other, someone has to be the bigger person sometimes and you have to accept that you’re not going to win all the time, nor should you have to or want to. But you always want to be able to laugh together. You can’t take fun out of the equation.



All For Each Other



KAREN & TIM MORAGHAN
Long Valley

THEIR BACKSTORY: Tim, a golf course consultant, and Karen, owner of a public relations firm that specializes in the golf industry, met in Minneapolis in 1991 while attending the United States Golf Association’s annual meeting. Because he lived in New Jersey and she lived in California, a cross-country relationship ensued. She eventually moved to New Jersey and they wed in 1993.

KAREN: Laughing together, listening to each other and understanding each other’s needs is critical. A willingness to compromise is also key. You have to be dedicated to the marriage and you can’t take each other for granted. Making each other happy should come naturally. And never underestimate the importance of knowing how to slice limes correctly (laterally, of course).

TIM: We don’t worry about “date nights” or contrived meetings at pre-determined times. I don’t think the word “work” should be attached to a marriage, because that denotes “tedious” and marriage isn’t a job. In a successful marriage, you recognize that you have to share equally for the rest of your lives. It’s not a one-way ride.





A Soul Mate Bond



SHERYL GOLDSTEIN & CINDY SHERMAN
Montclair

THEIR BACKSTORY: Cindy, a guidance counselor/therapist was previously married and had a daughter. Sheryl was a sales director at Yahoo who was single but had dated men. When they met at a party in 1993, they felt a deep connection. Later that year, they moved in together, had a commitment ceremony in Montclair in 1997 and were married in Montreal in 2011.

SHERYL: We give each other plenty of room to be individuals in our careers and hobbies, but we have a lot of things we love to do together, too. It helps to know who you are and what you like to do and to try to find someone who shares those interests. Because we're both busy and I also travel a lot, we cherish date nights, "Sacred Sundays," and other opportunities to have a little "you-and-me" time and keep the romance alive.

CINDY: If you have to "work" hard at a relationship, it may not be the right one for you. We're very different people, but I've never thought of this relationship as work. Disagreements are an opportunity to try to understand each other, not to try to change someone or force compromise. We still have many deep and interesting conversations, but we're just as comfortable sitting together in silence.



Calm, Cool, & Collected



JUDY & SID DAVID
Livingston

THEIR BACKSTORY: This Philadelphia-born couple, who will celebrate their golden anniversary this month, met on a blind date arranged by Judy's brother's wife and were married in 1963 at the Ben Franklin Hotel in Philadelphia.

JUDY: Our secret to a long and happy marriage? It's a fake. We only stayed together for the kids! Seriously, it helps for both partners to share equally in everything — from household chores to child rearing. But the real secret to our success is that I'm always right and Sid knows I'm always right, so we never fight.



SID: If you fight over every little thing, you'll never have a relationship. So, we don't get uptight about silly things. Most things aren't important enough to fight about anyway. We try to stay level-headed, calm and relaxed.



A Love For All Time



EULAH SCHARDT
Sea Girt

THEIR BACKSTORY: This active and upbeat 94-year-old met husband Courtney — whom she describes as a “6-foot, blue-eyed Greek god” — at a dance in Seattle when she was 17 and he was 18. They wed in 1940 and were married until Courtney died of a brain tumor in 2009.

EULAH: We fought like cats and dogs, and I could have killed him a few times, but I loved him and he loved me and we had a great marriage. We had our ups and downs, but he was fun and we loved to golf, dance and travel, and we had a very interesting life together. I miss him. The worst thing is the silence in the morning, because he was always around making coffee, and certain songs of ours always make me cry, like “If Ever I Would Leave You,” “What I Did For Love” and Hoagy Carmichael’s “Stardust.” But I have his ashes on top of my armoire and have so many wonderful friends these days. I’m as happy as I would be any place. When you lose your spouse, the key is to get out and stay busy. You can’t stay home and brood.



Forever Together



TUYET & DIEP LE
Edison

THEIR BACKSTORY: These two natives of Vietnam, Tuyet, a chemist, and Diep, an IT architect, met as students at the University of Saigon, where they shared the same class and bus ride each day. Seeing Tuyet crying one day over fear that she would fail the class, Diep offered to tutor her. Tuyet passed the class and they were married in 1984.

TUYET: We come from the same culture and religion, know each other from school, escaped to the U.S. together in 1984, and built a life here together. We’ve come through so much together, understand one another and have the same interests and

approach to life. It’s made our relationship stronger.

DIEP: Life has its ups and downs, but we’ve always understood that we have to work through difficulties together, make a commitment to each other, and

together find common ground in raising a family. We accept that there will be some compromise. Our extended family and circle of best friends are also important. They help make the bond stronger and keep us close to our culture and values.



TEN TIPS FOR NEWLYWEDS

Rosalind Dorlen, a clinical psychologist and member of the staff at Overlook Medical Center in Summit, has been counseling couples for more than 35 years.

During that time, she has learned that there are practices couples can use to improve their relationship.

“We get so excited about weddings, but more than 50 percent of American marriages end in divorce,” she says. “What goes into making a marriage thrive involves skills couples can learn.”

So, here are Dorlen’s “Top 10 Do’s” for a lasting union.

1. The most important question

“Spouses often blame each other for everything, but instead should ask themselves: ‘What is it like being married to me?’ This will help each partner better understand the role they play and that maybe it’s not always the other person’s fault. Acceptance of the fact that you may need to change, not your partner, often can improve a marriage.”

2. Electronics-free zone

“Take the TV, computer and other electronic devices out of the bedroom — which is a place for sleep or sex — and create a space for a digital sabbatical.”

3. The power of positive

“Continue the romance by talking to each other and sharing feelings to foster a positive, optimistic environment. Don’t infect each other with negative statements.”

4. Leave off labels

“Don’t label each other. Calling him your ‘workaholic husband’ or her your ‘not-sexy wife’ creates animosity and forces partners into a box.

5. Figure out finances

“Rather than identify each other as either the ‘spender’ or the ‘saver,’ talk about finances and consult with a financial advisor. Otherwise, those labels may become a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

6. Exciting sex

“You have no idea how little sex people are having in New Jersey! In any relationship, one partner wants sex more than the other, but try not to engage in a power struggle with sex. Value the intimacy and fun that comes with a sexy life.”

7. Early intervention

“If your relationship is in trouble, talk to each other or seek help from friends, relatives or a licensed professional. Don’t wait until so much animosity has built up that there’s no way to get past it.”

8. Edit yourself

“Don’t spew all critical thoughts you have about your partner when the iron is hot. Strike while the iron is cold, and don’t use a moment of rage to dump on your partner.”

9. The strength of sorry

“Apologize when you’re wrong. It’s a simple tool for helping to heal a relationship.”

10. Forgive and forget

“Practice the art of forgiveness, both of yourself and your partner.” — S.B.



An Unlimited Partnership



MARY & CHARLIE BOWMAN
Westfield

THEIR BACKSTORY: This Long Island-born couple — she a court reporter and he a website/graphic designer — met through mutual friends and married in 1991.

MARY: I came from a divorced family and saw how complicated things can get. Love changes over time. It starts out romantic, but it can become deeper and stronger the longer you’re married. At the end of the day, you have to work things out with your partner and be open and give a little to them. Marriage definitely has its ups and downs and its good and bad times, but it’s the best commitment you can make.

CHARLIE: We approach our marriage as a partnership where we work together and have each other’s back. There are no traditional roles — whatever it takes to run the marriage, family and household, we’re interchangeable and do whatever has to be done. Walking away isn’t an option or anything we’d ever want to do. It also helps that I was lucky enough to find the perfect girl.



A Family Affair



BETTE & PETE NAPOLITANO
Oakland

THEIR BACKSTORY: Pete (aka fruit and vegetable guru “Produce Pete” on NBC’s “Weekend Today” in New York every Saturday morning) and Bette met in a bowling alley near his family’s produce store when she was 14 and he was 16. He recalls telling a friend, “I’m going to marry her someday.” They wed five years later, in 1967.

BETTE: He’s my best friend and soul mate. We get along very well and truly like each other. We may not agree all the time, but we’re always on the same page when it comes to family. We worked together

for years in his family business, which was hard. I eventually started a job in a different company, which made our marriage stronger. I’m always there to help Pete, but it’s healthy to have your own space, too. Looking back, I would never change a moment in my life with Pete. I have no regrets. It’s been a wonderful 46 years and I hope we have 46 more!

PETE: Friendship is the most important thing, and if you have nothing in common, there’s no marriage. You have to love the person and you have to give and take. Bette and I had an instant connection when we met and we still have fun together after 46 years. If it wasn’t for her, I wouldn’t be doing television. She helped me make the right choice at the right time.