

James L. Holly, M.D.

James L. and Carolyn Bellue Holly - Fifty Years of Marriage and Counting

August 7, 1965 -- August 7, 2015

James L. and Carolyn
Bellue Holly Fifty Years of
Marriage and Counting

Ten years ago, I commented, “40 years doesn’t seem so long but 50 years seems like a long time,” and so it is. I wish that I could replay the video which runs in my head of the three years Carolyn and I knew each other before our wedding and of the fifty years since. That video would include the births of our daughter and son and of each of our eight grandchildren. In vivid color and emotional detail, I remember each event which has marked these years.

As I recollect our life together, I have affirmed in my mind the things I would say about me which might surprise others. I have often told people that I am lazy and they look surprised. Carolyn and I had been married for two months when my parents came to visit for the first time. I heard the lawnmower crank and I thought, “Isn’t that nice, my dad is going to mow the lawn.” We left an hour later to take my parents to lunch and I saw that the grass was not cut. OK, I thought, it was only three feet tall – it wasn’t ready for bailing hay. As we left the drive, I could then see my father’s handiwork. With the mower he had spelled a word out in the grass. It said, “L A Z Y.” Affirmation! That night, we almost had to take my father to the hospital. After lights out, Carolyn and my bed, supplied in our rented house, collapsed. When we hit the floor my father’s laughter could be heard to the Bayou and I thought he would die laughing.

Carolyn and I were teaching school in Golden Meadow, Louisiana, which is only 15 miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico. We went through Hurricane Betsy and were out of school for two weeks. Bayou Lafourche which ran only 30 feet from our front lawn was covered with a carpet of snakes which fortunately could not climb out of the bayou.

I taught language arts at the Junior High and Carolyn taught 4th Grade at the elementary school. I picked her up at school one day and she said, “What’s going at the Junior High? We were told today that a teacher made a student stand up in front of the class and discuss the changes she was experiencing at 13 years of age.” I said, “I know who that teacher is and it’s me!” I explained. A student came to my desk and asked to take a pill. We had a rule that no one could take a pill unless they had a note from their parent or doctor.

(Remember, I did not have a sister and had only had a wife for a couple of months.) I asked what kind of pill. Another student slapped a pill bottle in front of my face. I began to read, “Midol...” When I got to the important part, I did not avert my eyes, I just

said, "Go take your pill." (I remember each child's name and face but omit them for confidentiality.)

After telling this to Carolyn, I rushed to the High School. I ran up to the principal's office and collapsed in his chair; thankful he was still there. I told him my sad story and that I feared being run out of town on a rail. He started to laugh and I said, "What's so funny?" He answered, "Larry, everyone is having a good time, go home, it's no big deal. Let me tell you what happened to me, my first year here. I expelled a boy one day for fighting. The next day his father stood at the bottom of the stairs outside my office. He pulled a hunting knife out of his back pocket and said, 'I'm coming up there to cut you.'" I exclaimed, "What did you do?" He continued, "I pulled my 38 out of my back pocket and said, 'Take a step and I'll drop you where you stand.'" I was shocked that he carried a gun but that was 1935. A car horn blew and the principal said, "That's my best friend. We're going fishing, and by the way, he's the man who threatened me with the knife."

Before you object, this was a different time and a different place but it is an exciting and memorable part of our history although today no such thing would be allowed. The principle was right, nothing else was ever said.

On our first anniversary, I gave Carolyn a large climbing ivy plant with a note which stated, "As this plant grows and prospers, may it reflect the beauty and health of our marriage." One week later, the plant, afflicted by a cut worm, was grave-yard dead! An inauspicious beginning, no doubt.

Marriage Vows and Anniversaries

50 years! On this special day, I wish I had been kinder, gentler, more compassionate toward my wife and family. I wish I had demonstrated to her in ways, which she could have understood better, the esteem, honor, admiration and affection in which I hold her. But the only way my "I-wish-I-hads" become anything more than sad reminiscences of past failures is to turn them into "I wills" for the present and future.

Why do we invest so much significance in the remembrances of anniversaries? The main reason is that annual observances of special occasions declare the worth and value of the one upon which we focus. They reaffirm the decision we made to get married. Birthdays are our celebration of someone's life, and they essentially say, "I'm really glad you were born." Anniversaries declare, I am glad that we are one.

In marriage, long after life has settled into a pleasant "sameness" with the passing of the years, remembering is important. In the novel, *Chesapeake*, James Michener put the following words into the mouth of a Quaker woman, who gives advice to a young couple reciting their marriage vows; she said: "The cold winter nights of your old age will be warmed by the memories of the passions of your youth." One of the enduring qualities and values of life is that youthful passions, well directed and well spent, provide staying power for life-long relationships.

The richness of our present life is dependent, often, upon the vividness and the excellence of our memories. It is not that we live in the past or that we obsess on the “good old days,” but the past gives significance to the present, as the present gives possibility for the future. When the pressures of the present squeeze out the memories, which preserve the past, those pressures diminish the value of the past, and often are judged to invalidate the decisions of the past. When a man forgets his wedding anniversary, his wife does not lament his neglect of a calendar date, she associates his forgetting with the low esteem in which he holds his relationship with her. And, though this lamentation may not be cognitive, it is nonetheless real and important.

Women often provide families with continuity between the past, present and future. They often treasure the important things in life, seemingly more than men, and are uniquely designed by God to serve in this function. Picture albums are more often the bailiwick of women than men. These repositories of images of the past provide concrete evidence of the realities, which have aided us in becoming what we now are. Women prepare and execute celebrations, which instill self-esteem and value in individuals, as they schedule and carry out birthday parties, baby showers, engagement parties and the other social events which, being far from trivial, are the fabric out of which a whole life is embroidered. When you reduce life to its essence, stocks and bonds, ledgers and balance sheets are not nearly as important as the seminal social events, which define who we are and what we hold dear.

Men need to learn from women. Fathers need to create memories for the family, and when the events contained in those memories are repeated often enough, those memories become traditions, whose observation provide anchors from the past, which bring stability and significance to life in the present and in the future. A word of advice to you fathers, “If your children can’t name three family traditions in just a moment of thought, you need to work on this aspect of your family life.”

In *Fiddler on the Roof*, the wonderful Broadway musical, which became a great movie, Teviah, the patriarch of his wife and five daughters, examined the issue of traditions. His traditions were religious and had been passed down for centuries, but his observations tell us of the importance of traditions.

Commenting that life is as tenuous as a “fiddler playing on a high-pitched roof,” Tevia asks the question, “How do we stay up there, without breaking our neck?” The answer, “TRADITION!” After relating a number of traditions, Tevia asked a question, which he intended to answer, “Why do we have these traditions?” Quickly, he answered, “Because they teach us who we are and what God expects of us!”

Gentiles have never quite discovered the power and the value of traditions, but women intuitively have known this seemingly from the beginning of time. Whether your traditions are ancient religious ones or a tradition which you started last year, they provide opportunities to invest life and individuals with value and virtue. Special occasions such as wedding anniversaries and birthdays are logical and important occasions on which to make affirmative statements about the value of relationships.

With unbridled delight, with unmeasured joy and with absolute truthfulness, I declare that my

life is richer, more meaningful and more significant because of the words I said on August 7, 1965, when at 11:14 AM in First Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, I said, "I do." And as I have counseled my children and others when I said, "I do," I did, and I will.