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“Good Marriages Aren’t Easy”

While whirlwind romances are not always a success, for my neighbors Bill and Cindy Walker, a seven month time span from meeting to marriage has proven a success—a 24 year old success. After only dating for five months, Bill Walker proposed to Cindy and the rest is history.

Bill proposed on October 20, 1984, on the balcony of his apartment at 2 a.m. He had planned a big proposal scene at the Vestavia Hill Band Festival the day before Cindy disappeared. And he has been trying to keep up with her since. They waited six weeks before they were married on December 14, 1984 at the Hunter Hills Church of Christ.

After such a fast start to the marriage, Bill and Cindy waited twelve years before their first child was born. During that time they moved from Alabama to Texas, traveled to various states including Virginia, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Missouri. They each earned Ph.D.s. Bill has a Ph.D. in Counseling and Cindy has a Ph.D. in Composition and Rhetoric.

When their first child, Matthew, was born, they moved back to Alabama when he was a week old. Fourteen months later their second child, Hannah, was born and life started on a new roller coaster.

“Teamwork has been a key in our family,” said Cindy. “We have had much adversity over the past eight years and it has taken all of us working together to keep our strong bond.” Bill lost his hearing on December 18, 1999. He woke up one morning, and his hearing was gone. He as a professor at Faulkner University, and he was no longer able to teach classes. In 2007, he was diagnosed with cancer and spent a year taking chemotherapy treatments. Doctors have given a clean bill of health and the family is grateful.

But during the times of his illness, the family had to learn to be patient when Bill was not feeling well and was in a bad mood. Bill had to learn how to control his moods, even when he didn’t feel like it. “The weekly steroids would make Bill really grouchy,” Cindy said. “Lots of days I wanted to snap at him when he would get in his little moods. But that would not have accomplished anything. So, I just bit my tongue and responded kindly even when I wanted to give a sharp retort.” The kids also learned patience during this time.

“Some days I would get really mad that my dad was sick and we couldn’t go fishing or he couldn’t come outside and play ball with me,” said Matthew. “My mom tried to do lots of stuff with us when my dad was so sick. She would also remind us that his grouchiness wasn’t our fault that it was really the medicine. “Learning to deal with people in all kinds of moods was a lesson I learned from this family. You can’t always respond to people’s moods. You need to see if you can figure out why the person is in a bad mood. Members of a strong family don’t respond to specific moods but try to help each other even when the other person is having a bad day.

Watching them as they struggled has taught me that families work together. There were days when Bill was too sick to get out of bed, and Cindy would come home from work tired and stressed, but she always took time to make sure that Bill was taken care of and that the kids had their homework done and were fed. Bill and Cindy don't have "men's chores" and "women's chores". If the dishes need to be done and Bill is home, he will do them. On the days he was too sick to do them, Cindy would do them. If the yard needed mowed, whoever was free would start on the yard and the other would help.

The family has several traditions that they believe holds them together. "We talk," said Bill, "about everything." Anyone can voice their opinion and we all listen." In addition, the family eats at least one meal a day together. My brother and I like to eat dinner with them because everyone talks and we have a lot of fun.

In addition, the family celebrates holidays with special traditions such as going to Lowe's to get a Christmas tree each year. "When I was growing up," Cindy said, "my family always went together to buy a tree, so I feel it is special to carry on this tradition with my family."

Marriage isn't always easy for the Walkers. They have had their ups and downs. "It's about our religious faith and the commitment that we have to the relationship that keeps us together," said Bill. "Yes," Cindy agreed. "We don't always agree. We even have our 'discussions', as the kids like to call them, but at the end of the day we know that we love one another and that we are committed to making the relationship work, no matter what."

My parents are divorced, but by watching this family I've learned what a strong marriage looks like. It isn't always pretty. Families fight (or as the Walkers say, "have colorful discussions") but fighting isn't always bad. Sometimes everyone needs to have a chance to voice their opinion and then good families, like the Walkers, listen to each other and work out a solution to the problem. The Walkers have taught me to stay with the one person I choose to marry and to keep my faith in God strong so that I will have a good life. I won't always feel love for the person but I will love the person because love means making the decision everyday to stay together and work through your problems.