

MARRYING MY BEST FRIEND

From Rev. John R. White – The First Congregational Church of Dudley, MA – United Church of Christ
(Webster Times reflection for May 26, 2017)

On May 26, 1986, thirty-one years ago, in the chapel of Rollstone Congregational Church (United Church of Christ) in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, sealed with the words “I do,” I made a commitment which set the course of my life as no other decision of my life has, the moment I married my best friend.

I met Sarah in the fourth grade, although to be honest, I can’t remember this. Sarah says the children in our elementary school in Lunenburg, Massachusetts were being paired for square dancing lessons. She was hoping to be matched with this other guy. She got me instead.

This I do remember. I remember “growing up” being difficult and this beautiful girl coming into my life around the seventh grade. We started attending Youth Fellowship together at the Lunenburg United Parish church. I found Sarah to be the easiest person to talk with of anyone I’d ever talked with. She lived within a couple miles of school so was a walker. I lived five or six miles from school so rode the bus. That didn’t matter. Often I’d walk her home before walking myself home. I was young, too intense, and sometimes made her cry on those walks because of that over-intensity, finding it difficult to just “lighten up.” Yet, somehow she put up with me. We’d often talk for hours on the phone, and phones had cords then, so you had to stay in one place, focused solely on the other. Occasionally she’d talk with me about some guy she was thinking about too. Ugh!

Did I mention we never dated in high school? I wanted to. She didn’t. Once I tried to kiss her in the basement of her home. We were standing by the furnace. How romantic! She slapped me. I got the point. Likely it was best as I look back on it. It was too soon. Sometimes the best parts of our lives really do need to develop slowly over time. Patience really is a virtue.

When I was younger I thought she was perfection in human form. Thirty-one years into our marriage I’ve seen her imperfections, likely more than anyone besides God and herself and I love her more than ever. Amazingly, she seems to feel the same way about me.

We consider “Danny’s Song” by Kenny Loggins “our song.” Here are the words to the chorus: “And even though we ain’t got money, I’m so in love with ya honey, And everything will bring a chain of love, And in the mornin’ when I rise, Bring a tear of joy to my eyes, And tell me everything is gonna be all right.”

When I entered seminary in New Jersey in 1992, Emily and Timothy had already been born. Peter and Benjamin would be born during those years spent studying and working multiple jobs and walking around half asleep all the time, yet those were exciting and deeply fulfilling years. I loved working as a chaplain at two local hospitals. On the day when our youngest son would later be born I was on-call and baptized a baby in a room on that same floor, a baby who didn't survive. Despite the enormity of that grief, I felt God's loving presence in both those rooms in ways I'm not able to adequately describe here.

By the time our journey reached Dudley in 1997 I thought our family was complete. Sarah knew otherwise. Frankly I was terrified to learn of another baby to come. Yet "even though we ain't got money, I'm so in love with ya honey, And everything will bring a chain of love..." In March of 1998 Michaela became one of the greatest unexpected blessings of my life.

Even though I dated other people before we were married, I tell you the truth when I tell you that I used to pray, when I was a teenager, and into my early twenties, almost every night, for three things. First I'd pray to find the way God wanted me to serve God in the world. I sensed there were gifts within me to share, yet I lacked focus and direction. I'd pray for God to show me, to give me a sign, something, anything, please. I'd pray for the strength and the courage to do whatever it was, to go wherever, to be whoever I was created to be. Second, I'd pray, if possible (trying not to sound like I was asking too much for myself) to be able, one day, to marry Sarah Ludwig, my best friend, who fueled my spirit and my soul like no one else ever had or ever has. Lastly I prayed (assuming number two worked out) to be a good father to any children we may have.

And so, in celebration of this article being printed on the day of our thirty-first wedding anniversary, I say to Sarah: "Thank you. Thank you for continuing to be the greatest joy in every one of my days. Thank you for encouraging me to be my best. I hope to give you, on my best days, half of what you give me every day. I'd rather spend an ordinary, uneventful day with you, than be anywhere else, doing anything else, without you."

To you dear reader I say: "Believe in the unlimited possibilities of you, which God has created for you to become. You can change the world by simply following love and seeking to become your own expression of love in the place where you live." Matthew 19:6 quotes Jesus as saying: "for God all things are possible." On May 26, 1986 I came to know it is true. On May 26, 2017 I'm reminded it is always true. Love, Pastor John