

2008 Weeks

February 2006

Today marks the end of the two thousand and eighth week of my marriage – our 40th Wedding Anniversary. Is it possible that 40 years have come and gone so quickly? 1966 – 2006, apparently so.

Bonnie and I – well Bonnie, really, because she is creative about such things – decided to celebrate the whole year, not just set aside one special anniversary day. Personal bias aside, I thought it was a splendid idea.

We started our celebration on the north shore of Kauai, a paradise we had never visited. Tragedy was averted when I was rescued by Bonnie and some hiking New Yorkers after I had stumbled, couldn't right myself, and fell over the side of the Napali Coast trail, clinging to the steep mountainside for dear life – a very close call.

We followed this adventure by casting in with three other couples to rent an apartment on the Embarcadero in San Francisco, the place from which I write this essay. One week a month, Friday to Friday, Bonnie and I live in San Francisco. What a difference a week makes!

On the magic day of the anniversary itself, our only planned event was to return to Bonnie's parish church in the San Francisco neighborhood where we had been married. The church was half-full this Sunday morning, a sign of

the change that has taken place in the American Catholic Church during these intervening 40 years. The makeup of the congregation had also changed: gone were the Irish, replaced by the Asians. And still another change: we were overdressed for this modern-day San Francisco Sunday worship service in St. Cecilia's.

After the Mass, we caught the next bus on 19th Ave without even knowing where it went. We could have gotten off at the Golden Gate Bridge but neither of us have the stomach for the high wire heights associated with a walk over the bridge, so we stayed put until the end of the line, Fort Mason. A half-mile walk and we were celebrating with our first drink of the day at Ghirardelli Square overlooking San Francisco Bay and Alcatraz Island. San Francisco can be splendid on a beautiful day, and this was certainly one of those days. On to the Ferry Building for a light seafood lunch, this time overlooking the Bay and Treasure Island, and then it was home to South Beach for the afternoon. In the early evening, we walked to North Beach Restaurant for a 1995 Pommard, sweet breads (she), and veal scallopini (he) – a bit pricey perhaps, but a well-deserved and delicious anniversary dinner. (Our wedding night dinner was at Swiss Louis in North Beach, a favorite of ours, but it has long since decamped to join the other nondescript tourist restaurants at Pier 39) After dinner, we walked up Nob Hill to Top of the Mark to enjoy the traditional Irish Coffee and the panoramic San Francisco views. Finally, calling it an evening and a day well-spent, we made our way home by way of the N-Judah street car.

Our next point of celebration will be in Maine at the end of July to vacation with our East Coast daughter and her family. On to Florence and Venice in October and return again to Hawaii for Christmas and New Year's on the south shore of Kauai with our five daughters, their four husbands, and our nine grandchildren, ranging from age 11 to 3. This Hawaii-close of our 40th year anniversary celebration will be the public, family event of our celebratory year.

It might be expected of someone who has practiced the art of marriage for 2008 weeks to impart some words of wisdom, or least a few tips, for those who may wonder how we managed to escape the 50+ percent divorce rate of our era. Sad to report, I have no such words of wisdom to impart. What I can say with great emphasis is that I was Grade B marriage material and I have arrived at this point in my life only because of the long suffering and steadfastness of my wife. She guided, or more honestly stated, prodded and pulled me along, as I careened from career to career, abruptly ending some as quickly as I had made the snap decision to undertake it. She saved me from myself more times than I care to remember. A career person herself, she was the marriage partner who organized the family and kept everyone together and on track. Until you have met Bonnie, you have not met Superwoman.

You too, have attended wedding ceremonies of the children of your friends and colleagues, and have heard ministers wax on about partnership, compromise, two-way street, mutual commitment, each one giving 100% and so forth, but the reality is this: if a marriage can be successful, it is because one

partner – yes, generally the woman – shoulders the burden of making it work, even when the wheels come off. For my part, I have been the beneficiary of Bonnie’s determination to keep our marriage and family together. This year of celebration especially belongs to her, and I’m most grateful she has included me.