



Evanston

## Family

From the community

# Couple Married 73 Years Shares Insights To Their Successful Union

Evanston, IL (February 14, 2011) –On Valentine’s Day love is in the air. February is the second most popular month for couples to become engaged, according to The 2010 Knot Real Wedding Survey by TheKnot.com. But a less romantic fact from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is that the current divorce rate remains at about 50 percent. What does it take to go the distance?

Perhaps some insights can be learned from Reinald and Betty Werrenrath, who have been married 73 years, but like to say 77, since they dated first for four years. She’s a minister’s daughter, and he’s the son of a celebrated baritone with the Metropolitan Opera. Betty’s pragmatic, an organizer, a scheduler, and progressive in her politics. Reinald’s a conservative and a creative person who tends to go with the flow. So what makes their relationship work to this day?

“I think you need to appreciate and accept the differences of your spouse,” says Betty,

age 96. “At the same time, we always had shared values, especially about money and family.”

## In The Beginning

Reinald met Betty at a dance at Wells College and they had their first date was in 1933. “Betty was a sparkling girl with a vivacious personality. She was fun to be with.” They married in 1937 when their combined incomes totaled \$37 a week.

While living in New York City, Reinald worked as a lighting and special effects technician at NBC when television was still experimental. Betty worked at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1938, they were sitting on the beach when Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia. “That event killed the thought that life would be a breeze,” says Betty.

## From New York to Chicago

The Werrenraths moved to Chicago in 1939 so Reinald could help develop the earliest full-fledged television operation in Chicago in 1941. He scouted and chose the State-Lake building, and the experimental station known as W9XBK later became ABC7-Chicago.

In 1942 Reinald enlisted in the Navy and was gone for three years during World War II. “During this separation, we found we could go the distance,” shared Betty. “But the experience matured him. He left a carefree 28-year-old and returned a man.” Her concern during his absence, the uncertainty of their future, and the relief and joy of being together again made them value their relationship even more.

## **Sharing Home and Family Roles**

While he was away, their second child was born. “He was already 14 months old before I saw him for the first time, and he was very suspicious of me,” said Reinald. “I had to work to win him over. This made me determined to be a part of raising our three children.”

Having lived through The Depression and World War II, they learned to budget and prioritize their spending. “It helped that we were never interested in keeping up with the Joneses,” says Betty. “We were more interested in each other.”

## **Duty Calls Again**

By 1948, Reinald had moved over to NBC where he produced and directed “Marlin Perkins Zooparade,” filmed at Lincoln Park Zoo. But he was recalled to active duty for two years during the Korean War and was away from home again for 18 months. When he returned he went back to NBC as a producer and director of special events. One of those events included the 1952 Republican and Democratic National Conventions at the International Amphitheater nominating Eisenhower and Stevenson. Reinald later produced and directed "Ding Dong School with Miss Frances," a popular show for young children in Chicago.

## **Empty Nest Leads to Second Honeymoon**

Eventually, their kids were grown and out of the house. Reinald left network television and decided to make educational films with Betty’s help. Over the next 20 years they made more than 125 films about science, social studies, math and reading to reinforce classroom teaching. For Betty, it was like a second honeymoon. “We were on our own

again, working together for the first time to make a living and meeting all sorts of people.” She would take her first trips abroad to seven countries.

## **The Retirement Years**

In their retirement years Reinald wanted to be sure that Betty would always be taken care of, and relieve their children of any concern for them in the future. So they moved to Westminster Place of Presbyterian Homes in Evanston in 1998.

“The process of aging is one of the most difficult times in a relationship,” confides Betty. “You have no schedule, and you’re both at home. Moving to Westminster Place was the best thing we ever did. It’s allowed us to pursue new interests and frankly, as you get older, you lose a lot of friends. Here, friends abound. We meet new people and learn new things every day.”

At Westminster Place, Reinald began to experiment with making jewelry. He learned to sculpt and created a statue that stands in the Centennial Garden at Westminster Place. He headed up the men’s photography club and started a new men’s luncheon group. Betty did the same for new women residents to help make people feel comfortable and welcomed. She continued her interest in interfaith dialogue.

Today Betty does yoga, and Reinald uses the fitness center, attends a balance class and walks regularly with Nordic ski poles. During the holidays, they entertained in their home seven times.

## **Wisdom To Share**

Reinald offered some simple practices he has maintained over their long marriage. “I never walk past a sink full of dirty dishes,”

says Reinald. “Betty’s a great cook. I can’t cook, but I can surely help clean up.”

“Never hold a grudge,” he continued. “Don’t waste time feeling sorry for yourself. Let things roll off as easily as you can. The other person probably didn’t mean it anyway. Never go to bed angry, and try to help the other person get rid of any anger they have toward someone else, too.”

Betty offers this advice: “Try to understand where your partner is coming from. And most especially, listen. Learn to disagree agreeably and be open to the possibility of still learning from each other. Don’t think you know everything.”

She continued “Have some separate interests and share some activities. Have fun, see a movie, get some exercise and keep a sense of humor. Have friends of all ages. Remain interesting and interested in each other.”