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Marriage Is Like a Dance *by Bob and Laura Stein*

As you move to the rhythms of life, so, too, do you move as a couple to the music of the dance. Marriage, like a dance, is dynamic, playful, flirtatious, and sensual. It has its serious side also, of course.

Like marriage, dancing is a learned skill that improves with practice and experience. It takes time to learn the figures. After a while they become familiar to you and you recognize them when they reappear, even in a different context. As you learn, you should be patient with your own mistakes and the mistakes of your partner. A generous spirit toward yourself, your partner and the dancers around you helps you through the awkward moments and maintains the flow of the dance even after a stumble or fall.

Just as in a dance, in marriage both people retain their own identities. They must take responsibility for themselves, stand on their own two feet, while at the same time being able to call upon their partner's strengths to complement their own shortcomings. In dancing terminology we say, "Support your own weight and give weight to your partner to help complete the figure in time with the music." The essence of a successful dance is interacting with one's partner and the other dancers. Good partner interaction in a dance, as in life, is: Neither a wimp nor an autocrat be. Both members of the couple have to adapt somewhat to the movements and style of the other in order to move gracefully through the dance, or life. They must always be aware of and in tune with their partner's spoken and unspoken cues. They have to learn to compromise with each other and to strike a balance between assertiveness and compliance. Sometimes one takes the lead and sometimes the other. In marriage, as in a dance, a couple is not always together. Sometimes both move separately, sometimes they dance with other people. But, when they come back together they should be in synchrony with one another.

Not all dances are easy; nor is marriage always easy. When a couple joins the marriage dance they make a commitment to see the dance through. One should not expect that problems will not arise. There are times when one may get confused or out of step; one sometimes moves forward, sometimes backwards and sometimes in circles. Sometimes the individuals have different opinions as to the direction to go or how to do a figure, but the partners have made a pledge to each other to overcome the difficulties. One does not leave a dance in the middle. It takes patience and a willingness to work in order to solve problems and resolve conflicts. At times, new figures may be called for which you are not prepared. Then you have to pay particular attention.

Like dance, a marriage is part of a greater social happening. One must be aware of and respond not only to one's partner, but to the other dancers as well. It is one's responsibility as a dancer to make the dance better for everyone. Each of us has a similar responsibility to the world in which we live.

Marriage is like a dance.

Written by Bob and Laura Stein for the marriage of their daughter Mara Stein to David Benson in 1994, and displayed at Bob and Laura's fiftieth wedding anniversary dance, December 21, 2008, in East Lansing, Michigan.