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BALLET

Endless Love

Longtime couples share the secrets of their success

Well, once again, I've watched the fiery romance of two flammers go down in flames. After emerging from the wreckage of yet another torrid courtship, a friend recently asked, "How do you and Marc do it?"

My partner and I have been together for 19 years. That's two more than his parents and just a year less than mine (who were miserable for the last 10). With role models like these, it's a wonder we've lasted.

Truth be told, we've had rough patches along the way (I once broke a kitchen cabinet when I slammed it during an argument) and there were times when I didn't think we'd make it. For instance, as friends and relatives flew west to celebrate our 10th anniversary, we were divvying up our possessions. But, somehow we've stuck it out.

Since one of my mottoes is, "If you want what someone has, do what they do," I called six local couples who have been together for at least 15 years and asked, "What's the secret of your success?"

The participants in my highly unscientific study were Will Simonds and Robert North (17 years), Deborah Lewis and Karen Sweigert (19 years), Steph Crowell and Pat Garner (19 years), Cheryl McCaffrey and Beth Walton (24 years), David Stauffer and Tony Mix (25 years) and Eric Marcoux and Eugene Woodworth (52 years). This random sampling provided surprisingly uniform answers so, lonely hearts, take note.

**Out Going**
BY FLOYD SKLAVER

But, the most common answer concerned commitment. "Somewhere along the line, we made a decision that we just weren't going to give up," says Pat. Will agrees: "We made a commitment to each other and we're stubborn; we just won't quit." Perhaps Steph put it best: "It was a turning point to realize that what I wanted out of a relationship was a lifelong commitment, and that required being committed to being committed."

Every one of these couples recognizes and accepts that love is not all hearts and flowers. "We're not surprised that there are tough times," Eric says. "They go with the package." Or, as Robert reminds me, "Life ain't perfect."

Each, however, has a different way of coping with the rocky times (including ice cream). For many,

communication is key. "We never let anything stew," Deborah says. Eugene admits that, even after 52 years, "Sometimes we get mad and even holler at each other." But, David says, "We try not to go to bed mad" (which reminds me of the time Marc sat on my chest so I wouldn't pretend to sleep until we had finished an argument).

For others, laughter calms troubled waters. "When we're irritated," Beth says, "we blow in each other's faces and laugh until it smooths out." Karen agrees that "humor helps." But, of course, anyone who's spent time with Karen knows that hardly a minute goes by without hearing her cackle.

Finally, a number of couples say that compromise and tolerance of each other are important for maintaining their sanity. "I try not to always have to be the person who's correct,"

says Robert. Along those same lines, Beth says, "I'm not the greatest shakes in the universe, so I try to look at what I contributed to the problem." And Deborah attributes the length of her relationship to "the fact that Karen puts up with my shit."

As I reread the transcripts, I looked back on my relationship with Marc and how it's changed through the years. Like me, it's aged, mellowed and matured. But it's also grown and deepened to where I can't imagine being without him.

Happy anniversary, sweetheart. I love you. And thanks for showing me how to be Out Going. 10

FLOYD SKLAVER wants to know about your event.
E-mail him at floydsklaver@comcast.net.



Marc Acito and Floyd Sklaver celebrate their first anniversary all those years ago.

Many of the couples focused on shared values and shared interests. Beth puts it this way: "Our backgrounds are from different sides of the country, but they're equivalent." David adds, "We have the same taste in music and movies." And Karen concurs, "We like a lot of the same stuff—football excepted."

In some cases, however, not sharing was equally important. "We're kind of the yin to each other's yang," says Pat. As for Eric and Eugene, the latter told me, "In the '70s and '80s when everyone was having extramarital sex, we sent one of us out of town for [it]." In the case of Marc and me, we've influenced each other so much that we've practically switched roles. I'm now the galloping gadfly and he writes at home in solitude.