

# Inger and Tom / Tom and Inger

Basics – at Our 40 Year Anniversary

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## **Mile Stone**

I recall my mother commenting that her 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary was missed by a couple of months with Dad's fatal heart attack intervening. Odd that my major heart attack six months ago, which involved three fibrillation events of the kind that no doubt killed my father, occurred so close to the time of our 40<sup>th</sup>. All of this reminds me that such occasions invite reflection, and, happily, I am alive to see this event and to share, feel, and reflect upon it.

## **Put It in Writing**

Some things that we take for granted deserve to be housed in "formal" statement. So, here is what you know, but may never have seen "in writing." Above all else: "I love you." Yes, muchly, deeply, fully, utterly, and however else one can commit beyond the fact itself. You are simply put, the most important thing in my life, and an essential part of my joy in life. Over the years you have moved into the core of who I am to become a fundamental part of my self-identity. In essence, I do not think of myself without you, not just you at my side, but you as an essential part of me. You are the great lifetime gift that the stars have placed in my path and that I had the great good fortune to feel the grace of at our first meeting and to pursue and "win" for the all-time portion in sharing. It has been a tremendous privilege to share OUR love with you. Simply "finstipular," our unique composite of all the superlatives. That is the way it has been from the Beginning, is into the NOW, and, hopefully, will be through our Future.

## **Feeling/Emotion**

The depth of feeling I have for you and that we share cannot be carried by language, even language of the most poetic/metaphoric variety. The best language can do is offer a superficial gloss of the fundamental mystery that is present Below. The Below that I know for you curls in on itself so tightly that it gathers all else to it and becomes one thing and everything at the same time. It is truly as if our love is the start of existence itself, the beginning and end of all else. Everything of any significance only emerges and has meaning from this incredibly dense center. If there is an IT, you are IT for Me.

## **Reflection**

Love is the way we talk about commitment and connection in a relationship when we want to emphasize its strength. Love is what I have for you and what we share as your love for me matches and returns my own. To live for 40 years plus in this state of loving one another is a stupendous privilege. Many live together for this length of time, but the love between the partners wanes and is replaced by companionship – at best. No Thanks! I'll take what comes of sustaining the real thing! I celebrate you for helping us to maintain such a high standard of love between us.

Why? Why this privilege of sustained Love for US? Love is always a mystery, just as the source of the vibration of feeling on our first meeting – utterly confirmed in our second – is unknown. Why is it RIGHT to begin with, and why is one couple able to sustain it and another NOT? We just do not know; we have only “reasonable” suggestions: realistic expectations; lack of intervening catastrophic events – whether social, psychological, physical, or economic; good communication; growing together; sufficient self-esteem to support confidence; honesty and integrity in dealing with one another; respect; sharing fundamental values; flexibility, etc. Certainly, in the main we have enjoyed all of these qualities and conditions throughout our marriage. But these, and however many more we might list, are not really sufficient. Other options are FATE and GOD, neither of which I accept as basic causes in our personal lives. To attribute good fortune to these agencies, is just to raise the immediately following question: why does FATE or GOD select to benefit some and hinder others? Since there is no way to answer this follow up question, I take it that that alone is an indication that the FATE/GOD assumption is not a valid answer to the first question.

Existentially, we have to accept responsibility for what happens in our lives, but we do this with the recognition that we only control our surrounding conditions to a point; beyond that, anything can happen. At best, we actively guide our mutual ship along the course of its journey, easing through the dips and jolts that outside existence brings to us, and hopefully not encountering storms that cast us overboard or sink our vessel entirely. We have been lucky in our lives and in our marriage that we have not experienced these storms, and we must freely admit that we have no good explanation for why our path has not taken us into their center. Certainly others, who are at least equally deserving, have had to face these torrents and struggle to survive, frequently emerging as tattered shadows of their former selves. In the end, I give 50% to the contribution WE have made to our success, and 50% to circumstances: even odds. And we have been inexplicably on the 90% side of favorable circumstances: our

country, culture, race, genetics, parents, siblings, friends, historical events, etc. Luck of the draw has been decidedly in our favor!!

Still, millions of couples in our same “super favorable” circumstances, do not make it, or make it to 40 years under a faded flag of LOVE. So, we can take substantial credit, if with the proper humility. Here is where the nature of our relationship dynamic enters the picture. Most couples are complementary in talents and personalities, and in a sense they make up a whole between the two partners. The nature of our dynamic and how we have managed it has WORKED. Why? No doubt many reasons, only some of which we may be aware. Two stand out to me: Respect and Sharing/Caring.

Respect has been my short suit, but fortunately my experience and research have trimmed my arrogance and forced me to give proper credit to your more intuitive and emotive mode of being. And you have persisted through my shortcomings in this regard, showing the greater strength of character. We might not have sustained without the restraint you have shown in response to my limitations in this regard. In this you certainly wear the crown.

Sharing and caring are at root about empathy, and empathy is all about getting beyond one’s self to appreciate and adopt, in part, the perspective of others. This we both have from family, personality, and experience. The professional paths of community service and community benefit that we have both followed signal the centrality of sharing and caring in our lives. And my profession formalizes the importance of understanding how the world is viewed from the perspective of very different others. Sharing and caring brought into marriage supports communication and keeps us from venturing too far on our own without bringing the other up to speed and getting a read on where we are and where we are headed. Without caring and sharing and the communication it engenders, there can be no growing together. And, the more lines along which a couple permit themselves to grow apart into “separate” lives, the less common ground exists for them and the more likely it is that a modern marriage will not survive. So, caring/sharing is at the root of a successful marriage, and we have had this, start to finish.

Circumstances in our lives have curtailed the development of separate paths and encouraged sharing and respect across the zones of our different interests. Career never fully developed for me, halting what could have tempted me into celebrating and pursuing my own self-importance. I was humbled by this situation, and that likely for the good. We shifted positions, and you became the major breadwinner and I the primary caretaker in the home. We shared across our reversed roles, you gained in self-confidence, and you deserved my

respect, professionally as well as personally. Respect grew to a position of equity, and caring and sharing remained central. Love dwelled in the midst of this fertile condition, while fortunately our surrounding circumstances remained consistently favorable.

I treasure our mutual caring and sharing – for one another and the social and natural world around us! I believe it is at the center of who we are and why our love sustains. I still struggle to display the respect that I DO have for you. Maybe I am just that much the alpha male, or maybe I am that much more insecure as compared to you, or maybe it is my inability to properly separate myself from the greater value our culture places on the talents I find so ready at hand, and the lesser value it lodges with your capabilities. Maybe, it is all of these, fused with my embarrassment over my temperamental outbursts and my tendency to condescension. This is my bundle of continuing weakness, the challenge I bring to sustaining our love. I know of only much lesser weaknesses that you pose in this regard. Here again, you wear the crown.

### **Finale'**

So, as I reflect on our 42 year love affair at the time of our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I see our spectacular success as a matter of inexplicably and mysteriously deep feeling, extraordinary good fortune, constancy in caring and sharing, and events in our lives that have fostered equality of respect. And, truth be known, in everything that counts, you have always been ahead of me, even while offering me the lead and overlooking my limitations.

Ours is a spectacular past. I look forward to exploring the yet deeper love that is hopefully before us.

In Love with YOU,

Tom