

## **The Marriage Challenge Episode 6: The importance of humour in marriage**

**Host:** Tim Reynolds

**Guest couple:** Chick and Margaret Yuill

### **Tim**

Hello and welcome to this month's Marriage Challenge Podcast, brought to you by Care for the Family. I'm Tim Reynolds and I'm thrilled to be joined today by Chick and Margaret Yuill. They're going to be talking about the subject of having fun together as a couple, exploring the importance of humour in a marriage, and sharing some of their own experiences. Chick and Margaret have been married for 45 years and live in Manchester. Together, they've served in leadership positions within the Salvation Army for 35 years. Chick is a communicator, broadcaster and author. Margaret spends much of her time raising funds and awareness for the homeless charity Just Life. Chick and Margaret welcome, it's great to be with you today.

### **Chick**

Good to have you with us, thank you.

### **Tim**

Now to start off, why don't you both tell us a little bit about how you first met?

### **Margaret**

Well, that's easy. I was living in Bournemouth. We were fifteen at the time; it's fifty-two years ago this summer. We were in church on a Sunday morning. I was singing in the junior choir, Chick was in the congregation, and he spotted me across the crowded room.

### **Chick**

Yeah I did, I spotted her and I thought she's really nice and at the end of the service I asked her out and of course she was all over me like a cheap suit, as you can imagine! But it really was a, kind of, 'love at first sight' which all sounds kind of sentimental but it really was like that. And the rest, as they say, is history. Eventually Margaret came up to live in Scotland and we got married 6 years later. If I'm right Marg?

### **Margaret**

You are absolutely right. Married September 28<sup>th</sup>, 1968 and so far it's going quite well!

### **Chick**

It's been very good!

### **Tim**

Excellent. Well let's look at today's topic: the idea of having fun together as a couple. So you've been married 45 years: how has humour and having fun together played a part in your relationship during those years?

### **Chick**

Well the thing is, I think it's crucial, because we often tell people that marriage is hard work - it isn't a bed of roses so you've got to work at it. But if you just emphasise that it can make it worse. Like the guy who say marriage is an institution - who wants to live in an institution?! If there's no humour and fun in a marriage, it's just hard plodding work and that kind of joy, and fun and lot of laughter is what makes a marriage, it's a kind of lubricant that makes it all work much better.

### **Margaret**

Yeah, I think I'm very fortunate, because Chick is one of the funniest men that I've ever met and his daughter described him just yesterday, on Facebook, in her Father's Day tribute, she said 'he's the silliest dad ever.' There's a lot of fun in him, and I think I'm very fortunate for that reason because he makes me laugh a lot. I mean, we do have a lot of fun together. Over the years, we've been known to play hide-and-seek; he's been known to leap out of the wardrobe to surprise me, and bang his head on the ceiling in the process on one occasion! We have a lot of fun.

### **Tim**

So what kind of things do you do together to have a lot of fun? Has it always been the same over the years, or has it changed as the years have gone by?

### **Chick**

Well it's changed over the years. I'm going to say it's not just about doing things together, because there are times when you've got to be getting on with the business of life. I think it's about an attitude to life, the pleasure in each other's company. Conversation for us is always a mixture of serious stuff and just silly stuff. But we also do a lot of stuff together: I think we've run the marathon together, five times, right?

**Margaret**

Possibly...

**Chick**

I think it's five times. We actually celebrated our 43<sup>rd</sup> wedding anniversary by running the Dublin marathon together. The last ten miles was torrential rain!

**Margaret**

Yes, freezing cold at the end!

**Tim**

And that was fun?!

**Margaret**

Yeah I was just going to say - *that was fun?! And when we moved into this house seven years ago, we had huge fun choosing things to put in the house and just the pleasure of putting them where they are and everyday we wake up in this house, thankful for the fact this is our home. We get a lot of fun out of that.*

**Chick**

I think gratitude is really important and not just a kind of contentment, that's fine, but a deep kind of gratitude everyday that life is a gift, and marriage is a gift. It's a joyful thing. I think that kind of changes your attitude and your outlook, so yeah that's very important for us.

**Tim**

Have there been times, in your married life, where you've had to be more intentional than other times, in terms of having fun together and making that time for yourselves?

**Margaret**

Oh yes. I can remember when we'd just had Katrina and she didn't sleep very well. You wouldn't describe life as fun at that time particularly.

**Chick**

That was a *hard* year!

### **Margaret**

We got quite angry with each other at times then, because we were tired basically. And then of course, similarly when we ended up having two quite young. I honestly cannot remember back that far, but I think there's been a thread of fun running through. I think there has to have been, because you are who you are and there's such a lot of fun in you.

### **Chick**

We always had fun with the girls.

### **Margaret**

Oh yeah.

### **Chick**

In those days we didn't have a lot of money and so you couldn't always be doing things, but we always tried to make home a bit of a fun-filled place with lots of jokes and playing tricks on each other. Just that kind of general atmosphere with lots of fun and joy and laughter.

### **Tim**

So some couples will find it very easy to have fun together and enjoy doing things together, they'll have a similar sense of humour. Other people, not so much. They might be thinking well actually my partner has a different sense of humour, likes to have fun in different ways. What would you say to those people?

### **Margaret**

Well we do spend a lot of time doing different things these days. We spent a lot of years working very close together, working every day together and suddenly we're doing things separately. And so we do still have lots of things that we do separately and although we have a similar sense of humour, our likes and dislikes are different in many ways. I have friends I meet up with regularly on my own, and Chick does so similarly. I'm quite content to sit, to work on my art stuff, quietly getting along with that.

### **Chick**

I love football. One of the joys of living in Manchester is to be five or six miles from Old Trafford. Margaret has only come with me twice, and the last time she came was when United played Aston Villa in the game that gave them enough points to win the league. This is not last season, you'll understand! There were three things I

remembered from that game. They're playing Aston Villa and twenty minutes into the game Margaret says 'I think Stoke are doing quite well.' I said 'well they might be, but they're not down there!' Another thing was Van Persie scored a great goal, but Margaret had no idea how good a goal it was. But the best bit of all was in the second half, after 10 minutes her face brightened up and she suddenly says 'oh they're going in the opposite direction then!' So she doesn't normally come to football with me. And you know when I come home and watch it and she's got no idea why you'd want to watch the same football match twice.

**Margaret**

*Twice!*

**Chick**

But the differences like that become sources of fun because you pick gently on each other's different characteristics.

**Margaret**

A source of fun but also a source of... - well our relationship was very rocky for a while because I accidently deleted the Arsenal-Manchester United game when United won 8-2! I thought he'd finished watching and he hadn't.

**Tim**

Not a good day?!

**Margaret**

He'd seen it at least 100 times. But yes – a bad day!

**Tim**

And for couples who maybe find themselves, at the moment, in a period where they're just not having a lot of fun together and just need something to kick-start that, what advice would you give them?

**Chick**

Well I think all behaviours need to be practised and sometimes when you don't feel very fun-filled, you got to try and do something. It's a little bit like when I often say to couples to tell each other 'I love you' even when you don't, especially when you don't feel like that, because in the saying of it, you're reinforcing it. And I think sometimes you're going to kind of get yourself out of a hole like that. I also say to

couples if you're really in a difficult period where, you know, there isn't a lot of fun and joy in your marriage, don't be too proud to get help. Talk to somebody outside. That's not a failure. To let something fester is failure, but I think like everything else you just have to practise it; behaviours have to be learned and sometimes you have to take yourself out and have an evening out together when you didn't especially feel like it. Sometimes by the end of the evening you think 'I'm so glad we did that.' You know, like as a runner, half the time I don't feel like running but when I get out there it feels a whole lot better.

### **Tim**

So probably the most difficult times for couples to have fun together is when they're going through tough times or challenging times. What's your experience of that?

### **Margaret**

Yes. Well we did. It was a couple of years ago now. Chick was diagnosed with prostate cancer. So we faced all the uncertainty of that and all the fear of that. However, we had excellent advice and we live in Manchester, and the Christie Hospital is five miles away from where we live. And so eventually Chick was there having radiotherapy and he had to go on a daily basis for four weeks and so he had the first appointment in the morning which meant he never had to wait. There was such a lot of good about that. When the treatment was over he phoned to tell me he was on his way home. But instead of saying, you know, 'my treatments over I'm on my way home pop the coffee on' he sang a song! To find humour in the middle of a difficult time, I recognised that there is a lot of humour in this man.

### **Chick**

I think you can find humour in most situations. Now that's not to say they're not sad but one of the great learning things in our life has been: it's possible to be very sad about something without allowing it to make you unhappy. That's a really profound thing to discover. So when you discover - I mean my cancer diagnosis was pretty serious, they said to me the burden of my disease was very heavy and if they didn't deal with it I had 3 years left - now that's kind of a dark place. But even in the midst of the tears, and there were some uncertain times and you look at the possibility of death, even in that there is, you know, the humour. If you've made that practice of joy and happiness and fun, it bubbles up even in situations like that. Now I also want to recognise I was very fortunate - I wasn't in a lot of pain and I wasn't feeling

desperately ill even though I had a potentially serious condition. But I do think that practice of gratitude, joy and laughter pays dividends, especially at times like that.

**Tim**

They sometimes talk about having an attitude of gratitude, don't they? That can really help.

**Margaret**

Definitely.

**Tim**

So every episode we ask our guest couple to give us a marriage challenge. What challenge would you like to give our listeners for the month ahead?

**Chick**

Something very simple. One of the things we've discovered is that often couples project so much onto the future: 'when that holiday comes, that's when we'll relax and have fun', 'when that special evening comes...' and so on. And those are all great but I've got a little maxim: 'DIVERT DAILY'. Every day find a space in the day where you do something nice together. Now it might just be a cup of coffee, it might be watching a favourite programme, it might be having a walk but every day intentionally and deliberately take 15 minutes, it doesn't have to be longer than that, just to do something really nice with each other, say something nice to each other and enjoy something nice together.

**Margaret**

The 'divert daily' is so important. Actually, thinking about it, our cup of coffee together is one of the things that give us the most pleasure. It's a little ritual, we have an espresso coffee maker and we take time to make the coffee together, and then we'll sit down and enjoy it together. It's not just a case of putting instant coffee in a cup; it's a little routine. And another thing, especially this time of the year, that really gives us pleasure actually, is watering our plants and hanging baskets. We've got this little row of pots outside and, well, the pleasure that gives us. Simple pleasures!

**Tim**

Well we hope those of you who are listening will join us in this month's challenge. Drop by our Facebook page and let us know how you got on. If you have any

helpful tips or comments around this topic then please do share them with us. Well that's the end of this edition of *The Marriage Challenge*. My thanks to Chick and Margaret for joining us and sharing some real wisdom with us today. Do join us next month for another Marriage Challenge. See you soon.