

DECEMBER 22

Today is December 22, 2015. I suspect I make a big thing out of dates, both public and private. I love to celebrate Lincoln's and Washington's birthdays, St. Patrick's Day, July 4th, Labor Day, Columbus Day, Thanksgiving Day. And I love to celebrate the birthdays of all my family and friends, and their wedding anniversaries...Which brings me to today: The anniversary of my marriage to Sylvia on December 22, 1951, 64 years ago.

I look back on that day with mixed feelings. It was a pretty weird wedding. Where everybody else was having big weddings in synagogues with ushers in tuxedos and bridesmaids in gowns, followed by a party with a band, dancing and a wedding cake, Sylvia and I picked a Rabbi out of the phone book, went to his study with our friends and Sylvia's sister and brother-in-law as witnesses, said whatever the Rabbi said we should say, then he pronounced us man and wife. We returned to our apartment and had some champagne and cake, talked, took pictures, played some music, took time out to go over to Sylvia's parents three blocks up the street, and then everybody left, and we went to bed. And to the best of my memory we did not make love.

As I look back, I suspect that over the summer and fall of 1951, I simply wore Sylvia down until she agreed to marry me. I told her how much I loved her, over and over. I told her how happy we would be, over and over. We had been dating from the time I returned from Cleveland in April 1951. She went off to Camp Wellmet in July, and I went to work as a teacher at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, thinking it might keep me out of the Army. At the end of July, I visited Sylvia at camp. She mentioned that they were letting a counselor go and needed a replacement. I applied and got the job. I quit the Navy Yard to be with her. By October, Sylvia capitulated. We set the date for December 22. We shopped for wedding rings, a hi-fi set, dishes, silverware, a bed, and lots of other stuff including a dress for her and a suit for me. And a cabin near Kingston NY where we would spend our honeymoon. I was ecstatic. I thought Sylvia was, too.

The next couple years flew by. My mother's apartment, which became my apartment after my mother died in March 1951, became our apartment. In June 1954, I was drafted. In the fall of 1954, Sylvia joined me, and in October 1955, Carol was born. We returned to our apartment in March 1956, found another apartment in Brooklyn in 1957, Lewis was born in 1958 and Martha in 1962. We were the proud parents of three wonderful children. A happy family, so I thought. Sylvia found a therapist. We moved to Washington DC in 1965. She found another therapist. In 1966, we found a lovely house. I found a job with the US Civil Rights Commission. Sylvia found a job with the US Internal Revenue Service. We celebrated our 14th to 19th wedding anniversaries in DC.

We did not celebrate our 20th wedding anniversary. Sylvia wanted out. By December 22, 1971, we had decided to separate. I found an apartment in downtown Washington. I felt that my life, my world, had come to an end. I was a failure. I failed as a husband, perhaps even as a father. I also felt that at 44, I would not be able to find someone. Turns out that I was able to find someone. The pain with each passing December 22nd became less. Still, it does not pass without my thinking about a marriage of 20 years that began with that weird wedding.