

Love That Lasts

Interview with Geoff and Veronica Havelberg

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Love at first sight. It's not just something that happens in the movies.

'We barely said hello, barely acknowledged each other, but it was just something there.'

But building a strong relationship that lasts beyond that first brief encounter. Now that requires a little more than just one glance.

'We've learned over years to meet halfway and to ride the waves.'

Today on Messages of Hope, we are sharing Veronica and Geoff's story of love and commitment and how they continue to ride the road of life together.

Meet the Havelbergs

Jo: Hi, I am Jo Chamberlain from Messages of Hope. Today I have with me, Geoff and Veronica Havelberg, and they're gonna share with us a little bit about their relationship and what makes love last. Welcome, Geoff and Veronica.

Veronica: Thank you, Joanne.

Jo: Let's start from the beginning. How did you guys meet?

Veronica: Well, that's an easy question really. We were both at a Lutheran youth camp over at Tumby Bay and Geoff walked past and it was just like that, I knew that was the man that God sent into my life. So, yeah, we didn't even talk to each other properly. We didn't, sit together or touch each other or anything. It was just eyesight.

Jo: Wow. Instant love at first sight. It exists!

Veronica: It truly was. It is.

Jo: And Geoff, was that the same for you?

Geoff: I don't know if I'd call it love at first sight. I saw this gorgeous looking girl in a bikini And I thought, 'she's alright.' But that wasn't when we first started going out though. We barely said hello, barely acknowledged each other, but it was just something there.

Jo: So how did it evolve from there?

Veronica: Well about 18 months later, we were both living in Adelaide in the city, we'd come from our country areas and went to a convention, a youth convention at Eudunda, and we just happened to both be there and I was feeling cold, so I put my hands inside his jumper.

Jo: I love it.

Geoff: Yeah. I thought she was going for my wallet. But for me, it was a really last minute decision to go to that camp and, I still at the time had no idea why I was even going. But yeah, that was meant to be, I guess.

Jo: At the time, were you guys both active Christians?

Geoff: It'd be a fairly loose interpretation of it. I was brought up in a Christian home, but, I guess it's a bit cliché, but I went away from the church and all that, for a while. This, I think, was part of coming back process.

Jo: And did Veronica have a part in that?

Geoff: Oh, definitely. Yeah.

Jo: For you Veronica, you were grew up in the faith as well, didn't you?

Veronica: Yes, definitely. And when I moved to Adelaide to start nursing, a girlfriend and I went together and we always worshiped on a Sunday and had a faith, even though it may have been loose at times and we found other distractions. God was always part of our lives.

Early Adventures Together

Jo: Tell us a little bit more about those fun experiences that you've had, whether they be challenges or just even just adventures.

Geoff: Just different things, like our honeymoon was a motorbike ride up to Queensland and back. And we had floods through Moree. Veronica got off the back of the bike and walked through the flood water first so that I knew where the potholes were. If she disappeared, I knew don't ride the bike there. And there were trucks and cars all lined up waiting go through. And one truckie you know was calling out, 'she's keeper!' So just dumb things like that right from the word go.

We ran out of petrol on the Hay Plains coming home and Veronica had to get a lift with a truckie into Hay to get fuel and come back to the bike just so we could get into Hay, and just stuff that right from the word go. We've just had had, you know, little things that just made life interesting.

What they love most about each other

Jo: I'd love to know, what do you love most about each other?

Veronica: Lots of things, I guess. Geoff's a very strong character, very stable. And he's our backbone really. Very committed and dedicated to whatever he takes to, what he decides to do. A man of God. He's never wavering. He always follows that path. That's just so reassuring to be in a relationship with someone who has God as number one in their lives.

Geoff: With Veronica, you know where you stand, which I think is good 'cause I'm probably a bit opposite. Veronica's got a really giving nature. She's very compassionate. She's the person that I know I can share and just be vulnerable, just be who I am with and she's always gonna still be my partner.

Jo: I love how you talk about each other with such joy in your eyes, but also there's that intimacy there that I can see. For me, that's what I see in a lot of really solid relationships is just how much you know each other just that little bit deeper, and you still love each other as well.

How they manage challenges in their relationship

Jo: So, when you do run into challenges in your relationship, how have you learned to manage them and come out the other side still loving each other?

Veronica: I guess we've always given time and space to that. I think it's important not to dwell so much on the problem or difficult situation, but rather give it time, give God time to work in it.

I think life's about riding the wave, you know, we have ups and downs, whatever we do in life or whatever our relationships are. So, yeah, just leaving it like that for some time, coming back together and talking about those situations or whatever we are dealing with has been pretty much how we've dealt with most things.

But space, time is important in that whole situation.

Geoff: Think you've gotta also like each other and respect each other. And giving ourselves space, time, is part of that respect process.

And we pray about stuff. Just let it work out.

There's an old cliché, I think it's actually in the Bible somewhere, something about don't let the sun go down on your anger. Don't go to bed angry. Don't hold a thing until morning. 'Cause it's gonna just not work through night for you. So, yeah, we always try and sort stuff out.

Jo: And for you, Veronica, have you ever faced a, a particular struggle that might've even challenged the relationship?

Veronica: Well, just Geoff deciding to go into ministry was a difficult one to get our heads around originally. We were already married, come back from our honeymoon for a few months and he happens to say he thinks that God's calling him into ministry. It was very different to the life we were living. We were just living from day to day and enjoying times together. So, yeah, took a bit to get my head around that. But my thought at the time was, if you feel like you need to do something or if you're led to do something, you really need to give it a go and, see what comes from that. You can't just sit around 20 years later saying, 'I've missed out on an opportunity.'

Jo: Did you have much of a conversation about whether to do it or not? Or was it just a firm like, no, this is what we're doing?

Veronica: We just accepted that was a call that Geoff felt he had. And we just walked the walk just on the path.

Having a shared faith

Jo: So, what does it mean then for you guys as a couple to have a shared faith?

Geoff: Oh, heaps. For us, we couldn't do life together the way we have if it wasn't for our faith. Faith is sort of like the foundation. It's the bedrock, and everything else goes around

it, sits on that. It's been everything as far as living life together and living in some pretty different sorts of places and ways and experiences.

Veronica's Heart Surgery

Jo: So Veronica, you've had some significant health challenges recently. Can you share about how that has impacted your life and your relationship with Geoff?

Veronica: I think having something major, like a cardiac issue does have an impact on a relationship most definitely. This was just simply some AF I had one night and sought medical assistance with that. And from that it developed into I needed to have some surgery, and had a mitral valve repair.

It all went very smoothly, probably 'cause I was in denial and it was only afterwards you start looking and unpacking really what's happened and realise that, yeah, it was a pretty significant event.

Jo: How did you cope with that, Geoff?

Geoff: Well, when I first heard that Veronica needed heart surgery, that was a shock. And, yeah, that took a bit of processing.

Very few things bring a tear to my eye, but I must admit, when I saw Veronica after the surgery, tubes and wires and stuff everywhere, I stood there and I felt just completely helpless. I teared up 'cause I thought, 'wow, that's Veronica.' It was just really confronting, but underneath it all, knowing that, hey, God's got it. He knows what's going on. So just gotta leave it with him. I can't do anything about it.

Veronica: I think that's what we did. We gave it to God and yeah.

Geoff: I don't wanna sound cliché, but one of the first things we did was we prayed. And when we prayed, the sense of peace, a sense of, 'Hey, I don't wanna lose Veronica, but if something happened, at least I know she's gonna be in heaven.'

Veronica: We gave it to God and left it in his hands. I needed to have the surgery and, yeah, trusted him. What more can you do?

Geoff: It makes you stop and think too when you see the person you love like that. Then it also makes you stop and reassess the whole deal. It makes you realise, well, we've had fabulous life together. Let's make the rest of it fabulous as well.

Life after the surgery

Jo: So, has anything changed then since the health scare that, like you're talking about, you reassess and you reevaluate, but what's next for you guys?

Veronica: Well, that was the end of my working life, I became a lady of leisure.

What are we doing now? Enjoying retirement, enjoying family, just doing some things that we are always put in the background to do later. Traveling, I guess, is one of the big ones. We've just come back from our China tour and catching up with family over there. So that's been lovely. Having the freedom to do some things when we want to do them is nice.

Geoff: Just enjoying each day. Not planning too much too far ahead.

Jo: Do you appreciate things more, having realised that you could potentially lost Veronica at that time?

Geoff: I do. I've always prided myself on appreciating Veronica anyway, but it gives you a deeper sense of that appreciation. And knowing that God can take either of us whenever he chooses to, whenever it's right. And it challenged me to say, 'I've been preaching for years about trusting God. God's got it under control. He knows what's best.' Suddenly now when I'm faced with this, do I really believe that? Do I really trust it?

Jo: Has anything changed in your perspective, Veronica, after the illness?

Veronica: Not really, no. I just keep going and keep trusting God and doing the things that we like to do.

Jo: You mentioned about being in denial for a certain period of time, so what does that mean for you being in denial?

Veronica: When I came home from hospital, I had 12 days after my surgery, and I expected to just get back to normal life. That's probably my personality coming through. And I certainly learnt that I couldn't do everything straight away. And I had a lot of discomfort, a lot of pain. I had a lot of issues with my back following surgery and it was about six to eight months later when I sort of started asking some more questions about what really happened in surgery. And, yeah, like I said, I asked Geoff lots of things and sought some medical help to get through that and realised that I hadn't really faced what I'd been through. So yeah, just talking about that and getting my head around the fact that I had been in a pretty vulnerable situation.

Jo: Does that then impact on you, like mentally, emotionally?

Veronica: Yes it did. But just realising what truly happened, it was what that was about. And being able to move on

Advice for a Relationship that Lasts

Jo: So, for people desiring a relationship that lasts, what do they need to know?

Veronica: No one's perfect. We have to work through things. And respect's very important. We have to have respect and love for each other. Love's a bit of an open word. I think that's like the icing on the cake. Relationships are built on foundations and getting to know each other in a different way. Having similarities, having things that are in common – common threads are important. And I always just think that letting God breathe into our lives is what's important.

Geoff: And I think, I said it earlier, if you're gonna love someone, you've gotta like them. And if you don't like them, then have a think about what you're doing. I've spoken to a lot of couples as a marriage celebrant and one of the things I ask is, 'what is it about the person you're about to marry that you would change?' 'Cos if you think there's stuff that you want to change, maybe you better think about where you're at now because you if wanna change the person, well, do really like them? And I think, if there's any advice I would give it'd be that really have look, be honest about it. If you think you want to change that person, well, I wonder whether that's really person that you need be in a relationship with. I've definitely changed over the years. But it's not chang that Veronica's nagged me into, it's change that I've felt I'd like to make.

Involving God in their Life

Jo: When you talk about God being part of your life and being threaded in the very fibre of your relationship, are there some words of comfort that you receive from him or some words from the Bible that sort of hold you together sometimes?

Geoff: I know we've had some situations where we wondered 'what have we got ourselves into? How do get out of this?' And that scripture where God says, 'never will I leave you. I will never forsake you,' comes to mind often. As for holding us together as a couple, I don't know if I could say there's one particular scripture. There's a whole lot of promises that depending on the circumstance and the nature of whatever it is that you're facing, different things come to mind.

Veronica: God's definitely a part of our weave. Like you talked about him being involved in your life, woven through your life, and certainly he is in our relationship. It makes for an easier run.

Jo: Well, thank you so much Geoff and Veronica for sharing your love story and the fun adventure that's been your life so far.

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