

# Today, tomorrow, forever... couples who marry for life

By Sherri Parrish

To withstand the storm, a house must rest on a strong foundation. To endure the test of time, the same premise holds true.

Like a structure built from the ground up, marriage requires initial support to survive the elements. Without that sturdy underpinning, it just might crumble. In fact, statistics show that divorce rates continue to rise nationwide, with the average marriage lasting only 7.2 years and with 43 percent of all unions likely to end in divorce. So couples who have chalked up decades are something of a phenomenon.

Married 45 years, Ruth and Barry Brown can attest that their relationship has worked because they've laid the groundwork. For them, trust has played a large part.

"We've had a strong foundation together; we trust each other and we're good friends," explains Ruth from the couple's Wilmington home. "(Trust) is not always easy -- there's those

(little voices) sometimes, but it's worth it. Trust is an interesting thing. You build it together and it takes so long but can be destroyed in an instant." The other secret to their lasting union is effective communication, she adds. And oh yes, LOVE is where it all starts.

"Talking it out is important," says Barry, who shares four children with Ruth. "If you don't talk it out, that's where you have problems." During their approaching half-century



Above: Newly married Ruth and Barry Brown pose for the camera on their wedding day in 1958.

together, the couple, who spent much of their married life in New York City, has practiced the age-old advice of never going to bed angry. Cliché as it might seem, the strategy obviously works for them.

Both also say their relationship has endured because they have always committed the time and effort to working through their occasional problems. Perhaps, they say, the idea that a marriage will take care of itself is one reason couples don't seem to stay for the long haul today. "Marriage is something you work on every day. Never take it for granted," Ruth says. "The older the marriage, the better it gets and each day is special."

"I think people took the time to know each other and understand each other better," Barry adds. "If there were little tiffs, people made up. Nowadays, it doesn't seem to be that way."

Celebrating 65 years of wedded bliss, Dora and Willard Ferrell of Kure Beach echo similar sentiments. They suggest

that the relative ease of divorce is one reason today's marriages don't last. "When I got married, I didn't have the thought, 'Well if it doesn't work, I'll just get a divorce,' as people seem to think today," Dora says. "I think (people) don't think about it as seriously before they tie the knot. There's always a lawyer right there."

Like the Browns, these parents of three children say the continuous effort to nurture their relationship has kept them a positive