

ONE

“WHY AREN’T YOU MARRIED YET?”

CAROL AND ED

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MARRIED: JUNE 5, 2004



As a single adult gets older, each year that goes by without a sign of marriage on the horizon stimulates an increased degree of pressure inside that slowly extinguishes the flame of hope. And it certainly doesn't help matters when your loved ones add to the pressure by bringing your "unmarriedness" to your attention. This could be devastating to the spirit if it were not for one important thing: Christ is the center and primary love of our lives. The story of Carol and Ed is a testimony to enduring the pressures of the desire to marry through focusing on Jesus Christ, and how everything follows from that, including (by God's design) whom and when you marry.

Above: Carol was 40 and Ed was 38 when they became engaged. They live in Colorado.

Carol: Perhaps the most important point to make about Ed and me is that we wouldn't have a story to tell if it weren't for his conversion and my reversion to the Catholic Church. That was what led each of us to seek a faithful Catholic spouse. But at a time when faithful Catholics seem to be a dying breed, each of us felt compelled to seek some help in that endeavor. And luckily for us in this age of technology, there was help available from the Internet and a Web site called Ave Maria Singles.

I'll start by saying that the most repeated—and most dreaded—phrase I heard throughout my entire adult life was: “Carol, I can't believe you've never been married!” That was followed closely by: “Why aren't you married?” This was the most frustrating of questions—frustrating because I never knew quite how to answer it, especially when posed so casually and callously at, say, a dinner party or holiday get-together, as so often was the setting. After all, I had asked myself the same question thousands, if not millions, of times as the years passed by with still no soul mate. If I couldn't answer that question for myself, how was I supposed to answer it for a stranger or, even worse, an insensitive relative?

It wasn't as if I hadn't dated. But I had dated the world's way: getting far too involved, far too quickly, only to have it all come crashing down around me each and every time. When I was younger, it was easier to rebound from the heartbreak. “After all,” I would rationalize, “I've got plenty of good years still left ahead of me. I'm attractive, intelligent, fun—I'm bound to meet that special someone yet.” But when I hit 35, 36, 37, 38—well, my confidence waned. And, at 38, after a particularly cruel and

unusual breakup from yet another “relationship,” I had to take stock in what I was doing wrong.

It took a few months to cry it all out, but something made it different this time. I knew it wasn't going to be enough just to “get over it”—not at 38. Things were going to have to be different. And, thank the Lord, they were. It was as if God took me by the scruff of my neck and pointed my face at what He wanted me to see—to finally, really see. He pointed me directly toward the Catholic Church, the faith I had been raised in but never really grabbed hold of long enough for it to make any difference in my destiny.

Growing up, I went to Mass every Sunday because my parents took us kids (I'm the youngest of seven), and I made my sacraments on schedule. But when I was old enough to decide for myself whether I would attend church, unfortunately I very often chose not to. Looking back from this vantage point, it's easy to see that there was a major “disconnect” between my faith and my life. I had no concept of what it meant to live my faith daily. And certainly I was in no position to discern the good guys from the bad guys. I began an unhealthy and unwise pattern of dating the bad guys.

When I was about 26, I stopped going to Mass altogether because I just didn't get why I was there. I didn't get Jesus' sacrifice. I didn't get why we had to keep reenacting it over and over. Why did we say the same prayers all the time? And pulling me even further away from the Church was my career in print journalism, where I soon learned that the Catholic Church was all the things we “enlightened” journalists were supposed to unquestionably loathe: it was misogynist, homophobic, elitist, and closed-minded.

It wasn't until well after age 30 that I took a long, hard look at my life in journalism: working nights, weekends,

and holidays, and never really feeling that I belonged anywhere except in the newsroom. And I was struck by the sheer volume of miserable and corrupt people in the profession: the thrice-divorced editors, the alcoholic reporters, the egomaniacal publishers. A picture of my future formed that frightened and repelled me. I guess I had what is called an early mid-life crisis, but I was a wreck. I cried all the time. I didn't know where to turn, but somehow, I ended up in church. I went to Mass on Easter Sunday in 1996 and, well, I fell in love—with the Mass!

I can't explain it to this day, and I have tried many times. All I can say is that, sitting there in that pew, I suddenly "got it." I completely understood why I was there: to worship God. I totally understood Jesus' sacrifice: to atone for our sins. It was obvious why we said those prayers: they're in the Bible. And why did we do it over and over? Because Jesus told us to. So I was a "revert" to the Catholic Church at 32. I threw myself into my faith wholeheartedly, going to Mass regularly, sometimes during the week; saying the rosary; singing in the choir; praying fervently; doing social outreach. I knew at that time that I could never, and would never, entertain the notion of marrying anyone who wasn't Catholic.

Then an odd thing happened: I didn't meet any potential mates who were Catholic.

The years went by—and by, and by, and I just wasn't meeting anyone. My faith started to waver, and I started dating outside the Church. I wish I could say that at least my reversion experience taught me to have higher standards in men, but I can't. I ended up drawing from the same pool of unchurched, morally compromised men I had drawn from before, and worse. I had never before considered getting involved with a man who was divorced or had kids, but as I said, by the time I was 38, I wasn't sure about anything anymore. I went against my better

judgment and got involved with a divorced man who had two teenage boys. It ended in disaster and I was devastated—again.

At that point, I knew I had to get back to where I was, spiritually, years before. I once again threw myself into the Church with the same vigor as before. I once again vowed I would never get involved with anyone who wasn't a faithful, committed Catholic. But two major things were different all these years later: the proliferation of the Internet and the existence of EWTN Catholic television and radio.

I soon became a Mother Angelica junkie, tuning in to her network by TV and radio whenever I could. One day on Catholic radio I heard mention of a Web site called Ave Maria Singles, where faithful Catholics could meet others like themselves. I thought about it, and prayed about it, for several months. Then I jumped in. Immediately, it was obvious that I was in an environment where I could actually meet men who were just like the men I vowed to only invest my time and heart into from now on.

It wasn't long before I came across Ed's profile on AMS and was intrigued. He reminded me of Marcus Grodi, a Catholic convert and host of EWTN's *The Journey Home*. Ed was a convert too. He literally read his way into the Church. I thought that was incredible. And he had all the qualifications I was looking for: never married, had no children from any previous relationship, was a non-smoker, believed all the Church's teachings, and wanted children—all the qualities I hadn't looked for in the past, but was determined not to overlook anymore.

So I e-mailed Ed a short "hello" and asked if he wanted to correspond. He replied that he would like to, and it took off from there.

Ed: The journey to find your husband or wife may be long or short, but it will be successful only if you seek Christ first in everything.

If there were anyone whom the odds were against entering into a Christ-like (sacramental) marriage, it would be me. My parents divorced when I was 14 due to some extremely painful events. If it were not for the Holy Spirit working on and in my heart, through the prayers and actions of my good Protestant friends, I probably would not be writing this story. But their prayers and good example helped me to question my own relationship with God and the relationships I had with family and friends.

A little self-doubt can be a healthy thing. When I was only a teen, I began using Scripture and Protestant tradition to perform an examination of conscience. In doing so, I resolved to obey God's will rather than conform to popular cultural trends. I'm glad I did so at a young age. As much as it may sound like a cliché, a good marriage is more about being a righteous person than finding the right person.

All of my close high-school and college friends married young by today's standards—either in college or just after. Not one of them is divorced. What's their secret? All of them sought to put Christ first in their personal lives and all of them were open to having children. It was good to have such a "cloud of witnesses" surrounding me, but also a little rough. Although I was happy for each of my friends, I couldn't help feeling a little jealous and a little left behind, since I had not yet found a wife.

During and after my college days, there was at least one good opportunity to marry, but I chose to pursue an advanced degree rather than marriage. If any of you are following the popular adage to establish your career before your marriage, let me tell you that it's not a good idea. Even the secular culture is beginning to recognize that ca-

reer before marriage is an inverted priority that brings with it a host of problems. Those of my friends who married young and put Christ first were able to walk the straight and narrow even amidst some hard trials. It soon became clear to me that marriage was a safeguard for salvation.

During my graduate school years I became discouraged as my marriage prospects became fewer and fewer. I was still a Protestant when I met a good Catholic lady whose answers to some of my questions led me to investigate the Catholic Church. I was content to be an evangelical Protestant, and there were several good single ladies in my Bible study. I began reading about the Catholic Church as a way to help Catholics become evangelical Christians. The Holy Spirit had other ideas. Two years later, at the Easter Vigil in 1994, I entered full communion with the Catholic Church.

I was excited about finding the fullness of the Christian faith in the Church, but discouragement soon set in. As a Protestant, I was serious about the faith and attended only churches whose pastors and congregations were just as committed to Christ. The materials that helped me become a Catholic convert were created by people who also were serious about their faith. It soon became clear that not many Catholics were very Catholic—or Christian. All the good fellowship I had known as an Evangelical Christian seemed to have largely dried up. Along with it, my marriage prospects seemed to dwindle, as there were very few eligible Catholic women my age who believed all the teachings of the Church.

It was around that time that I discovered Ave Maria Singles and subsequently joined. It was refreshing to see that there were eligible Catholic women who believed Christ's teachings. The only trouble was that most of them lived in other states or on the other side of the globe.

In chemistry, it is known that in order for a reaction to occur, two reactants must encounter each other. If the reactants are too dilute, they will never encounter each other and no reaction will occur. In a similar way, Ave Maria Singles puts good Catholic men and women in contact with each other. The number of faithful Catholics in this country is so dilute that some marriages would not have occurred if it weren't for the intervention of this ministry.

I was a member of Ave Maria Singles for nearly four years before Carol and I encountered each other. Carol lived in Detroit and I in Colorado. You can imagine how difficult a long-distance meeting can be, much less a relationship. God must have had His hand in the matter, because Carol and I were able to establish and continue our communication despite the many miles.

We began by asking each other three questions per e-mail, and answering the other's three questions. Some questions were deep and serious; others were lighthearted and somewhat trivial. We continued in this way for two weeks until we both felt we wanted to speak with one another over the phone. The initial conversation was a bit awkward, but it lasted two hours. We continued these conversations nightly for the next couple of months. I arranged to meet Carol in Detroit in late October, but was delighted when she scheduled a visit one month earlier. Upon meeting in person, I think we both were confident we had found "the one."

Because we were both older, a priest encouraged us to start marriage preparation even though there were no official plans for us to wed. Following a prayer to our Lord and a Hail Mary, I proposed to Carol on the day of our first marriage prep class, All Saints Day. As a signal grace, the cathedral ring I had purchased (without her knowledge) fit her perfectly.

Carol and I both experienced a kind of “preventive grace” in preparation for our marriage. I felt that my faith has been strengthened during our marriage preparation, and I’m sure Carol would say the same. It is our hope and prayer that our marriage will be pleasing to God, and that our children will grow up to be faithful to him, obeying all the teachings of His Church.

Final Thoughts

If there were any wisdom or advice we would give to those who are still searching for their spouse and thinking about using the Internet to find this person, it would be: “Seek first the Kingdom of God.” Seek first to become a truly good Catholic. However imperfect your attempts, God’s grace will be sufficient and you will find yourself doing His will. Next, be patient, but be solicitous about it. God can’t do anything for us if we are just standing around waiting. But be patient enough to give it God’s time. He knows when you are ready and when it will happen. Lastly, get into environments that offer you the opportunity to come into contact with other single Catholics like yourself. After all, it’s a busy world and people are all over the place. There is no telling where that person is whom you are seeking. But one thing is sure: that person is more likely in a place like Ave Maria Singles than in a bar or any other secular social place. Find the places where devout Catholics are and be a part of it, no matter what it takes.