

Q: Where did it all begin?

Chi Hong: I met Marie on a trip to Batam with the church. When we came back, I asked her out. After that, we went out a few times. Marie said I made her wait for very long, but I didn't feel like God was saying yes yet, so I kept her waiting.

Marie: We dated for a year – a very long year – before we actually went steady. I felt ready, so I was waiting for him to ask me to be his girlfriend, but it felt like a really long wait, like he was taking his time. When he finally asked, I felt an about-turn on his part; he was so in love, and effusive in expressing his love and affection... that really blew me away.

Q: What was memorable about the wedding?

Chi Hong: Marie decided that on the day of the wedding, we would meet directly in church; she didn't want me to meet her at her place as she was afraid I would get angry if her friends tried anything funny. On her way to church, it was raining... or there was a jam. She always remembers that the first thing I said to her when she walked down the aisle was, why so late? Things your wife never forgets.

Marie: The funniest thing was when I walked down the aisle smiling, Chi Hong asked me, why so late? We wish we had dinner with our friends after the wedding since our wedding dinner was on the next night. It was tense, not knowing what to do with each other.

Q: Your favourite thing about each other?

Chi Hong: I think Marie is a very capable woman. She is able to take care of everyone in the family. She is decisive, independent and intelligent. We have common interests and when we talk, we can connect on such a deep level, which is precious and hard to find. I also

have to remember to say that I think she's beautiful, if not she will never forgive me.

Marie: He's really kind to me. He helps me, and is patient with me even when I am very crabby, even when I am unreasonable. He gives me space to be crabby (laughs). He fights for our marriage even when I don't feel like trying very hard.

Q: How would you describe the roles and dynamics between you and your partner?

Chi Hong: The first few years were rough, and we argued a lot. We had different love languages, and high expectations of each other. My love language is through acts of service so when Marie lost her car key, for example, I would find it for her, which is big for me, but not for her. Whereas when I lost mine, she would not help.

Marie: Nowadays I will help Chi Hong find his things.

Chi Hong: But she won't help the boys, because she says they're responsible for their things. We used to argue for the sake of saying who's right and who's wrong. But one day when we were arguing, I had an epiphany that we were both trying our best. After that, our approach became different: it was a matter of trying to understand what the other person was trying to do. Marie's love language is gifts. I needed to learn that she likes to be given flowers. But she doesn't do anything with the flowers – she just puts them in a vase! I don't understand it! The act of giving, that I went to find and buy a bouquet for her, is important to her to feel loved, though. So while my typical man-understanding says I'm like, wasting 50 to 60 dollars on something that just sits there and doesn't do anything, I try to understand her love language and do it 'cause it makes her feel loved.

Q: What do you do daily to express your love for your spouse?

Chi Hong: I guess to remember to have physical contact, to hug or kiss each other. Even looking at the other person when we talk, paying attention is very important. One way to show how much I love her is publicly on social media. It's 肉麻 (mushy), but that's one way of showing love and affection. I will repost some poems I find on Tumblr for Marie, 'cause she says I never write love letters for her. In this new age, social media is the way to go.

Marie: I wish we did more. I really love when Chi Hong gives me a call in the day. I like that when he doesn't call, I miss it.

Q: Anything you wish someone told you before marriage?

Chi Hong: Don't be surprised if you argue in your marriage, especially in the first few years. That's something we wish someone had told us. Even then, we'd have thought we wouldn't [argue] 'cause we love each other, and that we're different. In truth, everybody knows marriage takes work. When you argue, don't use it as an instrument to inflict pain on one another, use it as an instrument to understand one another. Each argument is good opportunity to talk about fundamental issues like money use.

Marie: Minimise expectations, or at least lower your expectations because the other person cannot read your mind.

18 years of marriage

Marie Tan
Homemaker, 45

"We love to go out for dinners. We always read the dessert menu first. Then we try to work [our menu] backwards."
—Marie Tan

Hwang Chi Hong
Doctor, 47



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