

# How Long Is Time?

By James Bardot

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Early one morning, I was driving up the mountains to take my two young sons, seven and five, skiing. As we crested the top of a hill, the sun popped over the horizon and flooded the car with a radiant burst of light. "Look guys," I said, "The sun's up!"

Through sleep-laden eyes, my boys peered out at the rising sun and smiled. But as we headed down the hill, the sun once more dipped behind the mountains and the inside of the car grew dark again. "Wow," I said, "That was a short day!" curious to see their response.

The younger one, Nicolas, shrugged it off and went back to sleep. But Eric, the older son, seemed to be struggling with the strange event he'd just witnessed. "Dad," he said, with a perplexed look on his face, "When does Daylight Saving Time start?"

A child's understanding of time can amaze adults. Five years isn't much different than five hundred, and more than one parent has been asked if people lived in caves when he or she was little. When I was young, my mother convinced me that she sailed to America with Christopher Columbus and shook hands with the first Indian.

As humorous as these situations may appear to us as adults, we shouldn't be too quick to excuse ourselves from these kings of misunderstandings.

Take, for example, divorce. Couples often separate giving little thought to the future consequences. Sure, it might help solve our immediate problems, but at what price? In other words, what are the chances of divorce making us happier, not just now, but over that long expanse of time called the rest of our lives? Not good, apparently, when you consider some recent research:

- In 1998, the South Carolina Marital Health Index reported that over half of the divorced couples polled regretted their decision to end their marriage. Sixty-two percent said they wished they had tried harder to keep their marriage together, and 76% believed that divorce simply traded one set of problems for another.
- Another study conducted by Professor of Sociology Constance Ahrons, and highlighted in her book, *The Good Divorce*, found that only one out of eight couples were able to create a friendly, low-conflict relationship after divorce. Half of the middle-class divorced couples surveyed engaged in bitter conflicts that she described as "Angry Associates," or worse, "Fiery Foes." Even more disturbing was the fact that even after five years, most of the angry divorcés

remained hostile towards each other, while a third of the “friendly” divorces had degenerated into open conflict.

- By contrast, a large-scale study conducted by the University of Chicago under the direction of sociologist Linda Waite found that couples who weathered their marital storms and stayed together ended up happier as a group than those who divorced. Even more surprising, those who described their marriages as extremely unhappy initially had the greatest turnarounds.

This may be why marriage vows have traditionally included language like, “Till death do us part.” Generations of wisdom and painful lesson have shaped this wording to remind couples to hang in there when times get tough, because most who’ve made the journey know that over the course of time, the dark brooding clouds of discontent will pass and make the returning sunlight that much more enjoyable.

There seems to be a great psychic reward when we triumph over adversity, and for good reason: without challenges and the opportunity to grow, life would be a depressing affair.

This is never truer than in marriage, which often takes us to the greatest heights and lowest lows, but in the end it makes us emotionally richer, wiser and happier for the experience. Happiness in marriage is not made of fleeting moments, like days spent at amusement parks, but rather the deep, soul-nourishing kind of happiness that only comes from weathering the difficult times together and coming out on top.

A successful marriage, in the end, is its own reward, and most would agree stands singularly as the best example of a life well-lived.