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Just Ask Mary

While working my way through the doctoral program at Florida State University, I waitressed one summer at the Pink House, a gloriously restored 200-year old mansion-turned-restaurant in Savannah, Georgia. One night during my shift something extraordinary happened. In strolled the most radiant couple, hand in hand, eyes locked. I say radiant because the love they obviously felt for one another on this particular evening was kinetic—converted into kilowatts of electricity, it could have easily powered Greater Savannah. I can't stress enough how readily these two were turning heads; *everyone* noticed them, drawn to the charismatic magnetism between the couple.

Once they were seated, I eagerly approached their table, thrilled at the chance to serve them and hopefully learn their secret to lasting love and romance. When I got to the table, the gentleman looked up at me, taking his eyes off his equally giddy companion for only a second, and proudly announced, "Tonight is our 50th anniversary." His wife immediately beamed. To merely share the immediate space of these two passionate people was practically dizzying. Inspired, I said, "Sir, it is an honor to serve you and your wife tonight and to be a part of this wonderful occasion. But before we begin, I have to ask, "What's your secret, because it's obvious that you two are still very much in love." His eyes flashed a dazzling blue and he replied, "I'm so glad that you asked, because I love to tell this story..."

He explained that during WWII he had been drafted into the Army. With this duty he was forced to leave Mary, with whom he had just recently fallen in love. "When I left for war there were many tears, but when I got to Germany, there were many letters... and with each one I fell more and more in love with her." One day, deciding that he would wed Mary upon returning home, the young soldier went to his Colonel for advice. You see the Colonel himself had a wonderful marriage, and this curious groom-to-be wanted to know his superior's secret to marital success.

"Instead of telling me the secret," he said, "the Colonel simply asked that I invite him to the wedding when we got back to States. He said that when he attended, the secret would be revealed in the form of a very special gift."

"Well the night of the wedding came, with the opening of the presents shortly thereafter. The Colonel's gift was wrapped in a small box. A flat, oblong square about four inches across, two and a half inches wide. Mary and I both wondered, "What could it be?" Inside was a fairly unassuming pocket watch and chain, the sort of gift one gets at retirement, but not what one typically receives as a wedding present. As I clicked it open to look at the face, I discovered an engraving on the inside cover... It read: *"Say Something Nice to Mary Today."*

He looked back at his wife, then again at me, and said, "And that's been the secret of our 50 wonderful years together. I make sure to say something nice to Mary every single day. This watch makes certain that I never forget...*and I never will.*"

During times of increased stress, it's a natural tendency for us to use our words and actions to pull apart from each other. But as this story reminds us, sometimes all it takes to improve the situation is to share a few kind words. By saying something nice to someone today, you can make a profoundly positive difference – Just ask Mary.

Susanne Gaddis, PhD, known as the Communications Doctor, is an acknowledged communications expert who has been speaking and teaching the art of effective and positive communication since 1989. Gaddis' workshops, seminars, and keynote presentations are packed with tips and techniques that can be immediately applied for successful results. Gaddis also provides quality training and executive coaching for organizations, corporations, and associations across the United States. For more information, call 919-933-3237 or visit www.CommunicationsDoctor.com.