

Transcript: Me and You: 69 Years with Pat and Hansine D'Ambrosio

Jacqueline Raposo – [Love Bites Radio](#) – July 2017

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Jacqueline: [00:00:00] How old are you now?

Poppa: [00:00:02] Ninety years old. I'll be 91 in November.

Jacqueline: [00:00:06] How many years have you been married?

Poppa: [00:00:09] This August will be 69.

Jacqueline: [00:00:12] Wow, Poppa. That's incredible.

Poppa: [00:00:16] God's been with us. He has been with us.

Jacqueline: [00:00:20] So think back. Think all the way back. What made you fall in love with Nana?

Poppa: [00:00:26] I was 17. She was 16. And a group of us boys used to go to the Keane Ice Creamery. And this is where I first saw her- she was a waitress there. And she was coming toward us. And I said that my friend Mickey, "That is nice. That is nice." She came and took our orders and he says, "You know, I know her. I went to school with her." He says, "I think I'll ask her for a date." I says, "Well if you don't, I'm going to." So he had asked her for a date and she started to date Mickey because they knew each other. They got me a date with Dottie, and we started to date, the four of us. And she used to put her left arm on the back seat and put her chin on it and we'd stare at each other. We'd stare at each other, trying to convey my thoughts. I didn't really know them then.

Jacqueline: [00:01:23] Poor Mickey.

Poppa: [00:01:25] I went into the service, Mickey went into the service. He was a good kid - a really good kid, I enjoyed him. For some reason they broke up, and I started to date her. We went dancing, and eventually I asked her to marry me. She wasn't ready.

Jacqueline: [00:01:40] I was told to ask you how many times you proposed to Nana before she said yes. I heard she didn't say yes on the first try...

Poppa: [00:01:48] ...No no no. She only said, only once or twice she said, she refused me anyway.

Jacqueline: [00:01:56] Wait, no, what do you mean she refused you? What happened?

Poppa: [00:01:59] She refused me so, she got mad at me and I says okay. I walked away. Maybe about two or three weeks she called me up and she says, How come you haven't called me and let me know? I says you got mad at me and sent me away! So...

Jacqueline: [00:02:15] So she got mad at you for proposing to her?

Poppa: [00:02:18] I don't know why. She got mad at me because...

Jacqueline: [00:02:20] I think you're being nice. I think there's more to this story and you're just being nice and not going to tell it.

Poppa: [00:02:25] That's the way it was. So we started a date and one time she says, "You still want to marry me?" And I says, "If you want to marry me!" So we got married.

Jacqueline: [00:02:37] What did you early on in the day why did you love most about her.

Poppa: [00:02:41] She had a nice smile and her eyes sparkled. And she went through a lot as a teenager, 13, 14, 15. She had to break her way through life because she didn't have it easy as a young girl, you know. She had to find a way to go to high school, ride her bike two or three miles from the farm to the school. So she struggled hard as a young girl. She struggled over a young girl. But she was beautiful. She was beautiful. What more can I say, Jack?

Jacqueline: [00:03:17] What was the hardest thing you've had to go through as a married couple together?

Poppa: [00:03:24] Well, since we were married we didn't, we had hard times, it was hard. But we've always had food on the table, you know? Money was always tight, it still is tight today as we get older.

Jacqueline: [00:03:37] Well, what about in your relationship as the years went on. What got harder?

Poppa: [00:03:41] As we got harder?

Jacqueline: [00:03:43] Between you.

Poppa: [00:03:45] Being alone. Once we saw Walter walk away, when he joined the Air Force, that was difficult. He walked away at 18, and we looked at each other, and I didn't want him to go, but I talked him out of staying out of the Army. I talked him out of staying out of the Marines or the Navy, because I had people in the Navy - my brother got killed in World War II and I had cousins killed in the infantry - I said, "You stay out." So he joined the Air Force. We figured he'd be a little bit safer. He went to electronic school and he made staff sergeant before three years, And he went to Vietnam, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, where he was. Thank God he came home. Well, I was always proud of him anyway. We have, we have times even now - we don't argue we have "strong debates." Since she fell down and broke her shoulder and had a hip replacement, she's going through a tough time of recovering with exercises and stuff. She has a difficult time to remember the proper sequence to get these exercises done. And I said, "Just do your occupational one day and your physical another day and get them out of the way because it's just simple exercises." But I can't stress that to her. And she's so independent. She says, "Don't tell me what to do." I says, "OK, then do them the way you want or don't do them at all."

Jacqueline: [00:05:21] What way are you and Nana the most different?

Poppa: [00:05:25] We're not different. I'm a sit down, take it easy guy. I don't want to argue, I don't fight. And she's very strong headed. She always has been, since she was 15. She had to

fight her way. She still is very strong headed, and she doesn't want to be told by me or anyone else what to do. She wants to do it her way, right or wrong, she wants to do it her way.

Jacqueline: [00:05:50] In what ways are you the most similar?

Poppa: [00:05:51] In faith I think, in faith. She's very strong faith and so am I. She doesn't go to church, but she watches it on TV and I go to church because I'm active with it. And I do what I can.

Jacqueline: [00:06:08] I don't know exactly how to put it: like, what would you credit to the success of your marriage, the fact that you've married almost 70 years?

Poppa: [00:06:14] Where she's strong I'm weak, and where I'm weak she is strong. So we have helped each other in our strength's and our weaknesses. And this is what holds us together. Because where she is weak, I'm strong - I do a lot of things that she don't do. And where I'm weak in business, business and bookkeeping and all that, she is very, very super - she's very good at that, she always has been and she's held us together that way. And she's trying to teach me and I have a hard time learning; I'm learning slow but... I'm learning so, that's all.

Jacqueline: [00:06:55] So you have three children...

Poppa: [00:06:57] ...Nine grandchildren, and nine great grandchildren.

Jacqueline: [00:07:02] What advice about marriage do you want to pass on to your children, and grandchildren, and great grandchildren?

Poppa: [00:07:09] Have patience with each other, help out with your weaknesses, because you're both weak and you're both strong. So when you're weak and you can't, you, you shouldn't argue - you should just discuss it and help each other. You shouldn't have to yell at each other. But once in a while, Nana and I yell at each other, mostly because she is getting a little on the deaf side. She keeps on saying her ears are plugged; the poor girl is getting deaf and she's too proud to admit it, and there's not much you can do and she doesn't want to go to an ear doctor. So I put up with it. And sometimes she says, "I can't hear you." I speak a little louder. She says,

"Don't yell!" So I'm in between a hard rock and a place or whatever! I wouldn't have it any other way. I couldn't live without her. And I dread the future. I really dread the future when one of us is gone.

Jacqueline: [00:08:09] I am so, so lucky in my grandparents. And I just want to say that on record before I keep going. When I asked them both about their personal struggles with their marriage - maybe a point in time where they weren't sure they could continue on in their marriage - I expected them to maybe talk about their inner turmoil because that's what we all do today, right? Instead, they both reference the leaner early years in their marriage where they took in other people, but how they had no regrets in doing so because they always had food on the table. Poppa referenced Nana's open heart, and Nana how Poppa was always there to help her. So that's this "we" mentality that just floors me. [COMMERCIAL BREAK]

Jacqueline: [00:10:29] Welcome back to Love Bites where I'm sitting for our ME AND YOU episode with my grandparents Pat and Hansine D'Ambrosio. So, from the many of my grandfather's stories I've heard over the years, I'd say my greatest inheritance from him has been this "we" mentality I spoke of before the break. Every friend who's met him has called him the "sweetest man ever." His contributions to family and community come from a teddy-bear like loyalty.

Jacqueline: [00:10:57] The kind of love I've inherited from my Nana is a fierce devotion. Life can be hard, as the Greatest Generation has taught us purely by their own survival. And if I were to trace my personal motto of "get back up" to someone, I'd have to be the tough farm girl my grandfather fell in love with. So here's their story in the words of my Nana, Hansine D'Ambrosio.

Nana: [00:11:25] Okay. What's going on?

Jacqueline: [00:11:26] How old are you now?

Nana: [00:11:28] Eighty nine. This is what, year 60.... 017? So it'll be 69 years?

Jacqueline: [00:11:31] 69 years!

Nana: [00:11:32] Sixty nine years! Oh Mama Mia! OK. Now what do you want to know now?

Jacqueline: [00:11:44] So think back 69 years: what did you fall in love with about Poppa when you were a wee young thing?

Nana: [00:11:51] That's a hard thing to answer because I was going with somebody else at the time. My mother knew it before I did.

Jacqueline: [00:12:00] She did?

Nana: [00:12:00] Yeah, she did.

Jacqueline: [00:12:00] Why, what did she say?

Nana: [00:12:00] Because when I came in the house after meeting him I said, "Ooh, I got a date with so-and-so but did you see that guy with him? He was nice." My mother laughed. She knew then that I had met my mate but she never said anything to me. And that is why I went on. Then he went into the service, the other one went into the service, and then they came home, and I broke up with the one that was in the service to start going with him and we ended up getting married. That's all I can tell you.

Poppa: [00:12:34] But I heard the first time he asked you to marry him and you said no.

Nana: [00:12:37] All one hour at 18! He wanted me to get married! No way. I wasn't ready to get married, not at 18.

Jacqueline: [00:12:45] What were you doing then?

Nana: [00:12:47] I was working, and giving my mother the money because my mother wasn't feeling well. Helping as best I could. I wasn't living at home because I had to live where I could go to work.

Poppa: [00:12:59] So what did you love about Poppa when you were younger. What did you fall in love with about him?

Nana: [00:13:04] He was kind. He was gentle. He was understanding. He's a good talker. Let me tell you that right now. Very good at convincing you. So, that's all I can say. But he was good. And he was good to my mother. He told me what he would do, and what he wouldn't do if I married him, and he lived up to everything he said.

Jacqueline: [00:13:28] What do you remember as some of the hardest struggles of your marriage?

Nana: [00:13:33] Well I think the biggest factor was the work part. I worked. He worked. But he, especially after the kids were here, I compensated for what he didn't. And I worked, and we put our money together, and we worked it out that way. But I never mind work, because I was brought up to work. I didn't know what it was like not to work - from a child up, I was up at 6:00 in the morning and to bed at 9:00 at night. And that was the way it was. I was trained for work and my life was different; I was from the country and he was from the city, and there's a big, big difference in the way people live in the city and the way people live in the country. The country is much quieter, you can relax, you can enjoy the breezes, you can listen to the trees. I believe you connect more with the earth and with nature, and you're used to that quietness. And then you get this hustle and bustle and no routine, no, no, no nothing. It's very, very difficult.

Jacqueline: [00:14:52] Was that a problem in your marriage or did it help balance you out?

Nana: [00:14:57] Well, as long as I was working it didn't interfere because I was too busy. But it was after I retired that... not immediately, because the first four or five years afterwards they kept myself busy. It was after that that the problems arose because I wasn't used to being still. That caused a problem because he still has his activities, and he's all gung-ho when he does something; he keeps himself very active and very busy and I'd just as soon stay home and not do nothing.

Nana: [00:15:34] But we we did OK. He helped me with my mother when she wasn't well, and he helped take care of her like he said he would do for me. So I mean, when we did have

understandings before we would discuss things. So before we were married, we had agreements as far as eating habits; like, green peppers. I could never stand peppers, but we made the agreement that when their children came, that no matter whether we liked it or not we would put a small piece on a plate so that they would see that we ate it, so they didn't say, "Well I don't like this and I don't like that." They had to eat and learn to eat. If they really didn't like something, we didn't force it. But they had to buy it.

Jacqueline: [00:16:28] So you were a team in that way.

Nana: [00:16:29] There were other discussions before. And if I disciplined him, he had to back me up not go against me. When we went into it, we went in with the idea, "this is for life." There is no divorce, no nothing. This is for life.

Jacqueline: [00:16:46] Was there ever a time where you worried about your marriage, where you were afraid of....

Nana: [00:16:51] Oh, well we went through the down times? And there are certain years the marriage, for some reason, that you will have problems arise. Like I'd say, we went over the mountains, down into the valleys, we walked on plain roads, soft roads, low roads, straight roads, but we also had a time of trouble where we had to work together to iron things out.

Jacqueline: [00:17:20] How do you iron things out? What advice do you give to iron those moments out?

Nana: [00:17:25] Remain quiet, think deep, and try to take and resolve things, and try to talk. If you can't, then just walk away.

Jacqueline: [00:17:33] Walk away from what?

Nana: [00:17:35] From whatever the problem is and let it rest. And pray. I prayed a lot. Let me tell you. Especially when the kids were sick, they were sick. And that was the biggest worry with kids, when they were sick. But you had to walk it. But we weathered the storm. Poppa took his time and in helping take care of them at night. If he was away... And they would always get

something when he was away with the National Guard for that two weeks, honest to God, those kids I swear would wait until he got into camp and then they'd come down with something. Boy. So we had our good times, we had our bad times. But we weathered the storm.

Jacqueline: [00:18:20] In what way would you say you and Poppa are the most different?

Nana: [00:18:26] The way we think. Because I believe in, well I always say two sides of the fence: you have to weigh things. You have to study them and look at the different ways. There's always two sides to everything: which is the right one, which is the wrong one, what one do you agree with, what don't you agree with? And I can fluctuate and pick out. Poppa makes up his mind? You don't change it. The kid used to call him the Army sergeant because if he said something, that was it. I could use the expression they used in the service it wouldn't sound very nice on the radio.

Jacqueline: [00:19:07] In what way are you the most the same?

Nana: [00:19:10] The one thing that we did have in common very close was our religion. We both believed in the church and we both prayed, I still do today. And prayers have taken us through many, many of hard times.

Jacqueline: [00:19:30] So what has sixty-nine years of marriage taught you about love?

Nana: [00:19:41] Caring. Deep caring. That's what it's taught. Sharing. Love is caring for someone else and not wanting to hurt them. To me, that's love.

Jacqueline: [00:19:59] So that's my Nana, my maternal grandmother. And if you listened to our Mother's Day episode where Ben and I close the show sharing what we most learned about love from our mothers, you might remember how I said MY mother taught me about unselfish, giving love. And as that show fades out, SHE says, "It's generational. I learned it from my mother." So there's the proof in the pudding I guess....