

BECCA GROVES



LOVE
— THY —
CHOICE

Five Years of After-Dinner Walks

Love Thy Choice: Five Years of After-Dinner Walks

**This article was originally published in the Winter 2025 edition of Plain Values. If you'd like to read more of the Groves' articles, visit plainvalues.com and subscribe today!*

Our first walk after dinner was a stunning Minnesota night in late fall. We had just finished supper at our picnic table when Rory said to the kids, “Your mom and I are going for a walk. You kids clean up dinner when we’re gone.” This was new territory for us. For a decade we had had little kids, but now the oldest was old enough for us to take a walk within shouting distance. The kids were thrilled at the thought of manning the home alone, and we took off down the lane.

Our farm is in the middle of 10 houses on a dead-end gravel road. So we walked to the dead end, and then, passing our house, back down to the stop sign at the other end, then back up to our lane, three driveways on the left. A 20-minute commitment. Obviously, we had walked the road many times, but never just to the two of us. That first walk was glorious. We talked about the day, held hands, and as we neared our lane, I mentioned that we should do this every night. Rory agreed.

The next night, as we finished eating our dinner inside, Rory said, “Your mom and I are going for a walk. You kids clean up dinner when we’re gone.”

I looked at him wide eyed. “It’s raining!”

The kids erupted in laughter, looking to their dad, back to their mom, and back to their dad as he said, “You said every night!” So, we grabbed an umbrella and listened to the kids joyously laughing and watching us walk down the lane, huddled close to the umbrella stick.

In true Minnesota style, the next night was the first snow of the season. I looked at Rory. “I’m in.” And he nodded. We put on our snow boots, bundled up with winter hats and mittens, and took to the road.

Those first weeks had a charge about them as we wondered how long we might keep this up. But I think we both knew from the start that these walks were meeting a need. We were reconnecting in so many ways. Thus, we kept up our streak, feeling the gift of consistent time spent with the other.

The fact that we began our walks at the beginning of winter meant that the sky grew darker every night. We began to notice the stars. Over the course of that first winter, we

felt like Orion was a new friend as we watched him move across the dome of the sky in the span of many months. We saw shooting stars, and, one night, a comet.

The comet is actually a funny story because I saw it first gliding over our farm. I began babbling incoherently but very excitedly. I could not get any words out, and Rory later said he thought I had seen a bear. But thankfully I pointed, and he saw the ball of fire split apart while I watched the colorful tail. I still don't think I'd believe it myself if I had seen it alone, but Rory saw it too—low and huge, a shared wonder on a cold, dark night.

I bought special grips for my boots to help me on the ice. And evening by evening, we made it through the whole winter. And then spring, which moved into summer, and then back into fall. No matter the weather, our moods, or schedule, we were committed. There were nights when we took our “after dinner walk” at 10 p.m. because a meeting had gone late at church. The other would wait up until we could walk the road.

That first year we missed three walks total, once because I had the flu, and two nights because Rory was out of town. But other than those nights, we were fully committed.

November 8 arrived, one full year of after dinner walks, and I remember taking that walk and discussing if we'd keep this up. We both couldn't fathom not taking our walk. We agreed this was the best thing we had done for our marriage. The fresh air was a gift to this stay-at-home mom who might not get outside in a day, busy with small kids and the tasks of the home. And now I am happy to report, we have been walking our road nearly every night for five years.

Metaphors Everywhere

Half of our road is sheltered in towering trees, a real gift on a biting, windy night. But it also means that once the road gets icy, it stays icy until the April thaw. Rory and I have both taken turns slipping. But because we are holding hands, the other always catches us, and neither of us have hit the ground yet. It's an obvious truth that we are stronger together.

And some nights, it's not the road that is icy, but our hearts. Something happened during the day and an offense was taken. But I'll tell you, 20 minutes is a long time to stay icy. And words eventually do tumble out, apologies are made, and forgiveness is given. No offense can fester when these walks come around every 24 hours. Our marriage has greatly steadied itself because there isn't time for a misunderstanding to grow into anything greater.

We walked through the entire pregnancy of our youngest, Abel. And totally worth noting, it was my only pregnancy where I had no back or sciatica pain. I credit our walks. We also had two miscarriages, and our walks allowed us both to talk and grieve and tell the same sorrows and disappointments to the other, again and again, until healing was found.

The truth is these walks have become a symbol of our vow to each other. In a daily way, as we climb into our snowpants, lace up our tall winter boots, and wrap a scarf around our heads, leaving only our eyes showing, we say to each other, “I’m with you. I’m for you. No matter what.”

That first year we took pictures of ourselves on the most extreme weather days: a blizzard, the hottest heat index, a polar vortex. Now we barely mention the weather. It has become normal—a part of the vow. What we signed up for.

What Love Looks Like

I know many reading this can’t duplicate this practice. Your kids are too young to leave at home, injury prevents such a walk, or maybe your spouse would never go for this sort of thing. But I wanted to share our daily walk because I think it adds another image of love often missed by the way the world defines romance.

My favorite memories of our marriage have nothing to do with tropical beaches or exotic destination vacations. Fancy restaurants don’t make the list either, or even big surprises. Instead, when I think of the times I have loved Rory the most, I think of the moments when we were yoked up, completely for the other.

I think immediately of a freezing spring morning when Rory and I began the day with the stars, trying to help an ewe deliver triplets in the barn. She was in great distress, and we could not help her, so we called the vet. The vet was able to figure out what hoof went with what lamb, did some serious shoving, maneuvering, then pulling, and finally the triplets came out. The vet left, we watched to make sure all three latched on, and then the two of us wearily walked back to the house, the sky still dark as night.

Rory started the coffee, and I fried four eggs. The house was still, no kids were awake, and we sat at the kitchen table, enjoying our breakfast as the sun slowly illuminated the world around us. I remember thinking I could not be any happier because I knew we were in this together. I imagined my own grandparents, knowing they would have lived this sort of morning many times. We ate our eggs and drank our coffee, and I felt like we had entered into the fold of so many farmers before us, the marriages that functioned as a team, truly dependent on the other.

To me, that is romance.

Another time, we had a sheep shearer scheduled to come on a Monday, but the forecast that weekend was going to unexpectedly hit the upper 90's and our three ewes were round balls of thick winter wool. In our great innocence, not knowing what we didn't know, we got a pair of hand shears. And together we worked—one of us holding the great ewe on the ground while the other gingerly snip, snip, snipped. I laugh now, but we were so united those nights! We had no power in the barn, so we only worked until the sun went down. The first night, we left all three with mohawks, having gotten their sides, but didn't have enough light to finish their tops. The next night we came back, finished our work, and stood proudly by our ewes when the shearer finally came to clean up our hack job.

And loading pigs. I could not sleep the night before we loaded up our three pigs for the very first time. I was very aware that we had nothing on those 300-pound behemoths. While fretting in the middle of the night, I baked a chocolate cake. And then I frosted it. It was the best I could come up with. Surely those pigs would hop right up into the trailer once they smelled my chocolate cake!

Rory woke in the morning trying to follow my logic, but in the end, two of the pigs did hop up for my cake. The third was wiser and required a bucket on the head and some good old-fashioned farmer wrestling. But when that trailer door slammed shut and the latch was pulled down, we tipped our heads back and laughed with relief. We had done it. Together.

Tell me that isn't romantic!

The world will tell you that you must get out of your normal routine to connect with your spouse, and sometimes that might be a good idea. But I think a whole lot is missed right in our daily routines, the times when we really partner up and show the other that we are one flesh. Sometimes those moments present themselves, and other times, you make the moment.

I think of our after dinner walks. They are not anything super special unto themselves, other than the daily commitment that we have made to each other. But the same can go for our words. Just like the many steps that make up our walks, there are many words that make up our days. And it is important to take note of those words. Do your words speak of your commitment to the other? Are you building each other up, encouraging each other, letting them know that you see how hard they are working for you and for your family?

My Grandma and Grandpa Harrington were married 65 years before they passed away. I remember calling my grandma for her wisdom on marriage as I was to give a devotional at my sister's bridal shower, but I was not yet married. So I interviewed my grandma and eventually asked, "What is the secret? How do you make it 65 years?"

And she said, "Well, I will tell you the truth. That day we got married, we knelt at the altar, and we made our vows to each other and to God. And I always remembered that. I made a promise to God that I would love your grandpa in every season. When we said in sickness and in health, we meant it. And we had many healthy days and now are living through the sickness part of that vow."

I recently came home from a thrift store with a little cross-stitched item depicting a man and a wife, and the writing says, "Choose thy Love. Love thy Choice." I bought it because I thought those words were so true. The world loves the romance of that first line: Choose thy Love. Every movie and novel and bestseller is based on that first part. But that love hasn't shown its strength yet! The vow that we made, and the high calling of a Christian marriage is the next line: Love thy Choice. Love them in every step, every word, every act of service, kindness, and grace.

Some nights when we take our walk, we walk quietly, each processing our day until a conversation bubbles up. Other times, one of us comes to the walk ready with a topic to be hammered through. Most of the time one of us begins, "Well, what stories do you have from your day?" And stories are told, one talking, the other listening, and the conversation continues. We continue to Love thy Choice.

~ Becca Groves

HOMESTEAD
LIVING