

Temporary Pain, Eternal Gain

By Maurice Carter in The Covington News – July 8, 2012

A guitar, a bicycle, a marriage... What do they have in common? The punch line isn't a "ha ha," but it was an "aha" for me.

Two weeks ago, I surrendered to an urge building over many months and bought myself an acoustic guitar. I played in high school and into my early 20s, but somewhere along the way my destiny as rock star, band leader, and songwriter gave way to marriage, a career, home ownership, and all that adult stuff that just kept popping up. When the band broke up, I dabbled for a while as a singer/songwriter, but the instruments soon found their way to attic of the house, and all the chords, riffs, and songs were eventually lost in the attic of my mind.

Thirty years later, I've been feeling a call to pick it back up again, but none of my old guitars are really in playing shape. After joining friends for a recent Saturday evening "Farm Jam" at Noring Farms on Floyd, I was bitten once more by the bug. I determined then and there to buy an instrument before the next jam. And, I did.

I expected to take a while for the skills to come back. But, I had forgotten how badly my fingers would hurt after playing the guitar the first few times. Until you build up calluses, steel strings cause some serious pain in fingertips that press the fret board. I'm feeling better already, but that first week felt like I had burned the tips of my fingers, they were so sensitive to touch. With time, the skin will callus over and it will soon be something I forget completely again.

Last Sunday morning, I dropped by for a guest appearance on the "Ali Bug Hour" radio program on WGFS in Covington, to promote the monthly Covington Community Bike Ride. Show host Alisa Brown asked me to advise listeners about selecting and buying a bicycle, as well as how to get started riding again. As we talked, the conversation came around to the inevitable discomfort everyone goes through "down there" when first sitting on what seems like a too-tiny bike seat. I assured listeners the tender tush is only temporary, and regular riding eventually leads to greater comfort than one might ever imagine while sitting on a bike for hours at a time. It's important, I stressed, to buy from someone who will fit you properly and ensure you get the right bike for you. But, after that, you just have to tough it out until your body adjusts.

While speaking, I realized the connection to the guitar and the painful fingers. In both cases, you should choose carefully the right guitar or bike for you, but then you have to stick with it through some initial discomfort as you adapt.

This, as you've probably guessed, brings us to marriage. On Tuesday, Kim and I will celebrate another wedding anniversary – the 30th such occasion since that July evening we danced hand-in-hand out of Covington FUMC and headfirst into an unpredictable, but wonderful lifelong adventure together.

I could lie and say it's been three decades of perpetual daily bliss. But, truth be told, stinging fingers and a tender rump are nothing compared to the seismic adjustments required when you merge two distinct individuals and separate lives onto one shared path. A guitar string irritates your fingers, a bike seat presses on your bottom, but a committed relationship with another person presses against every facet of your heart, your mind, your soul, and your sense of identity in ways you can never anticipate. Yet, I am grateful beyond words none of that deterred either of us from putting our whole selves into forging a shared life that is so much greater than what either of us could have experienced on our own.

At the root of it all -- be it a guitar, a bike, or a life-long relationship with someone you love – the path to happiness is the same. Choose wisely, expect to endure painful adjustments, never stop visualizing the end result you were after in the first place, and resist the temptation to give up easily when the going gets tough. Whether out to make beautiful music, to fly effortlessly across the landscape with the wind at your back, or to share your life with your best friend and soul mate, the magic is on the other side of the effort. The pain is temporary, but the gains are eternal.

©2012 L. Maurice Carter Jr.