In This Together – From Start to Finish – by Marcy Lytle

Marriage is like a puzzle. I'm sure you could come up with your own analogies of the pieces fitting together to make a pretty picture like two odd-shaped people fitting together to live happily ever after. But for the sake of this story for this month, I'm talking about the actual putting together of a puzzle. After all, over the past two years my husband and I have put together more puzzles than we have all of our long married life! I feel like we've learned so many new things about each other that really come to life while starting and finishing a jigsaw puzzle:

- We both agree on gathering the edge pieces out first and I want to make sure he helps me find them all before putting together the pieces. I feel a bit of competition from the moment we start. What's up with that?
- We next figured out that it's good to group the pieces by color, and make little piles. All of this is prep work (that isn't fun, by the way) before actually starting on the big picture.
- We do enjoy putting together a puzzle, but he likes it more than I do. I recall in our earlier years of married life that I didn't like doing puzzles with him because he obsessed over it. Maybe that's why we didn't do them for years…but he's matured now…and he quits when I quit (or we have this whole thing of me accusing him of trying to sneak in more pieces.)
- We listen to music while we work. I don't think there's anything else we do where we sit and have music playing in the background, and that's been nice. It provides ambience and calms my spirit, and it seems to have the same effect on him, as well. That's been fun to discover.
- We are territorial. We pick the sides and the scenes we want to each work on, and we leave the other one alone to work. If he reaches over to my side or I to his, there's this exchange of looks (and sometimes words.) Again, puzzles are like a game – competitive!
- We set a time limit. We actually communicate before we start about how long we're going to work on the puzzle, and we quit at that time. This makes me happy, and he likes it when I'm happy.
- We think puzzle working is stimulating and keeps our minds young. Who knows if that's true, but we feel like searching and fitting and organizing is all good for our brains. If we think it, it must be so!
- We don't squabble over placing the last piece, although I'm pretty sure we did back years ago. If he has it, then so be it. And if I have it, it's fine. And if there's a piece missing at the end (we recently were missing three pieces!), we both crawl on the floor to see if we can find it because…who wants to work all that time and not have a completed picture!
- We sigh a bit when we crumble up the pieces and place them back in the box, to be given away with the next donation. And we both wonder if it's worth all the time and effort to put together giant puzzles when we're just going to tear them apart.
- We both agree that it is.

So what does all of the above matter? It's been fun to find an activity to do when in quarantine, or a shut-down, or an ice event, or a cold evening, or when we need to unwind. It's a nice

escape to the garage where we have a table set up, and now have this cool puzzle board gifted to us by our kids, when we need to refocus, reset, and relax.

We've both matured over the years and I'm thankful and notice. Puzzle working isn't a source of friction now, but rather we've learned to compromise and give more than take…for the most part. There are the occasional remarks like, "That's my piece!" But that's when we both know it's time to quit and go to bed.

What have you found to do together that's challenging yet rewarding, fun and yet stimulating, and connecting and calming for the health of your marriage? It's worth searching for that missing piece and sitting down to work it all out into a picture you're both proud to say you worked on together.

And then it's even fun, in my opinion, to rip that puzzle apart and put it away. And maybe I'm weird for finding delight in that experience, but he knows I'm weird by now and he still loves me anyway.