

Idiom by Lon Yan

同甘共苦

tong2 gan1 gong4 ku3

The classic marriage vow contains the promise to stand by one's partner "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part." But clearly, this is a vow many couples are not keeping, particularly in the US, where marriages have a 50 percent chance of ending in divorce.

But there is hope yet. An Oklahoma couple recently showed the world that "through thick and thin" can start even before marriage.

CNN reported that Brandon Thompson, 35, asked the police as they handcuffed him at his Muskogee home if he could propose to his girlfriend before they take him away. And despite the grim prospect of marrying a jail-bound man, the woman said "yes."

The couple will set a date for their

wedding once Thompson's legal troubles are resolved. But it looks like it's not going to be any time soon, as the "legal trouble" involved several alleged felonies.

So what the girlfriend showed was a will to "同甘共苦" (*tong2 gan1 gong4 ku3*).

"同" (*tong2*) is "together," "甘" (*gan1*) is "sweet," "共" (*gong4*) "to share," and "苦" (*ku3*) "bitter," "pains," "sufferings." "同甘共苦" (*tong2 gan1 gong4 ku3*), literally, is "share sweetness and pain," "to share delights and hardships."

It means "to stick together through thick and thin," "to share joys and sorrows of life." It is the meaning of "for better or for worse."

The willingness to "同甘共苦" (*tong2 gan1 gong4 ku3*) is not only a necessary quality for lasting marriage, it is an essential element for any lasting relationship.

Terms containing the character "苦" (*ku3*) include:

苦心 (*ku3 xin1*) – painstaking effort

苦惱 (*ku3 nao3*) – vexed; distressed; troubled

辛苦 (*xin1 ku3*) – hard; toilsome; painstaking

苦瓜 (*ku3 gua1*) – bitter melon