



"I suppose I wouldn't ever have to write another book," says Sparks (at home), "but I will. I want my kids knowing you have to work."

Writing Through the Pain

Nicholas Sparks turns his family's loves and losses into wildly popular novels

His eight have-a-good-cry novels have collectively spent 156 weeks on *The New York Times* bestseller list. His book signings sometimes run 10 hours long as fans queue up for his autograph (which he offers happily)—and advice (which he doesn't). "I don't like to give marriage tips," says Nicholas Sparks, author of such heart-tugging fare as *Message in a Bottle*, *The Notebook* and *The Wedding*, its just published sequel. "There are people who are probably much better at marriage than I am—they've lasted a lot longer. I could probably learn from them."

Still, a visit to the New Bern, N.C., home Sparks, 38, shares with wife Cathy, 36, offers plenty of examples of how to keep romance alive—despite the passage of 14 years and five kids: Miles, 12, Ryan, 10, Landon, 3, and twins Marin and Lexie, 2. Nicholas would like six, but, says Cathy, "I'm done."

"We get up at 6 a.m., before any of the children, so we can eat breakfast together," says Sparks. They also work out side by side three times a week at the

local Gold's Gym. "For some part of the day," he says, "the marriage relationship has to be primary—it's one of the best things you can teach your children. So we don't feel guilty if we go for a walk, just the two of us."

Also helpful? Saying with-in earshot of Cathy, "The women in my stories tend to be like my wife—strong, confident, intelligent and putting family first."

Part of their compatibility, says Cathy, a former lending-company account



