

The Wealthiest Couple I know

By Shauna Peterson nee Nelson



Stop by Jim & Darleen's for dinner Thursday, Oct. 26, and you'll find the menu will include potato soup. That's because today is their 60th Wedding Anniversary and potato soup - pepper soup as Dad calls it - is what they had for their first meal as a married couple. According to Dad the recipe was simple: equal parts potatoes, pepper and milk. They started their marriage with a single dollar and potato soup was all they could afford for dinner. Despite those humble beginnings, in my mind they are now one of the wealthiest couples in town. As Thoreau said, "Wealth is the ability to fully experience life." Mom and Dad have a wealth of experiences, friends and family. Five kids, 20 grandkids, 14 great-grandkids and innumerable friends that consider themselves part of the extended family.

They met on a blind date in northern Minnesota in 1956, arranged by Dad's sister Beverly and Mom's brother Freddie (who were dating at the time). They had a dubious beginning - Dad wore an awful pink sweater on their first date and later there was a date harvesting wild rice in a wool bathing suit. Despite that, Mom followed Dad in September 1957 when he returned to Biloxi, MS where he was serving in the U.S. Air Force. It was there that they married on Oct. 26, 1957 and started their adventures with that single silver dollar. Even then, their wealth of friends afforded them a police escort, courtesy of the officers Mom served on a regular basis, from the Air Force base to the café where Mom worked. It was there that friends and her co-workers surprised them with a beautiful wedding cake and coffee to celebrate their wedding.

Mom & Dad were bit by the travel bug early on and have never let the dust settle for long. Through the years they've travelled through all 50 states as well as Canada, Europe and Cameroon. They've gone from the cold of northern Minnesota to the heat of the southern U.S. Trips from sunny Southern California to mosquito-infested northern Minnesota with no overnight stops, no air-conditioning and two kids in the back seat were common early on. We've lost count of the times they've driven from Moab to a variety of destinations along the East Coast from Maine to Florida and back again. Along the way they've attended two world fairs, repaired and replaced vehicles, and shopped in countless quilt shops, visiting family and making friends wherever they go.

Dad's gone from getting suspended from the one-room schoolhouse of his youth in northern Minnesota to teaching electronics in the Air Force, then working as an aeronautical engineer with ballistic missiles. He transitioned to the computer age and automated the instrumentation at both Atlas and Moab Salt. Upon retirement, Dad set his engineering mind to woodworking, creating all kinds of beautiful furniture which has made its way all across the states.

Mom was compelled to drop out of high school at 16, but went back and took night classes (while raising four kids no less) and graduated from GCHS in 1972. She's gone from dreaming of becoming a home-economics teacher to achieving the much more difficult task of teaching people a love of learning. She teaches sewing, knitting, quilting and cake decorating, among other things, to young and old, wherever she goes, even as far away as Cameroon. Her sewing skills have even led to sewing costumes for Gene Hackman in the movie "Geronimo" as well as costumes in "Thelma and Louise."

Along the way they've made oodles of friends and acquaintances who still visit when they travel near Moab. They've shown us that doing our best and doing for others is the way to achieve real happiness. They may be driving vehicles that were new 20 years ago, still using "dumb" phones and having potato soup for dinner, but their wealth in friends and family is beyond measure.

Please join us in celebrating their marriage on Saturday, Oct. 28, 2017 from 1 to 4 pm at Jim & Darleen's house: 571 East 200 South. Light refreshments will be served.