

Childhood sweethearts start married life anew

By Tom Petronio
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Like classic lovers in Shakespearean literature, Bill and Mary Lou Sponn of Rochester were brought together by the simple beauty of a poem.

And like those classic lovers, Bill and Mary Lou have had their share of heartbreak and pain, sorrow and tragedy.

Yet in the Sponns' case, life reached a happier conclusion than art, as the diocesan couple's love story ends not on a tragic note but on one of joy.

The story began back in the 1940s, when Bill and Mary Lou were both teenagers working at Sibley's department store. Bill, an Aquinas graduate, worked in display, and Mary Lou, a student at West High, worked part time in housewares on the fourth floor.

"It seemed like every time Bill was working on the fourth floor, he managed to route his way through my department," Mary Lou recalls.

It was at a Valentine's Day dance for Sibley's employees that Bill finally found the chance to let his co-worker know of his affection for her. He asked Mary Lou out to lunch, and then to accompany him on a double date with a friend and his date.

"That night I got a scolding for coming home late," Mary Lou remembers. "I had to promise my mother that I wouldn't go out again with either one of them (Bill or his friend).

The promise successfully ended any hope Bill may have had about further romance.

"Our lives' paths separated after that," Bill notes.

Bill's friend, on the other hand, survived the parent-daughter pact far better, succeeding not only to date Mary Lou but also to marry her in September of 1948, the year she graduated from high school.

Even after he and Mary Lou parted ways, Bill didn't give up hope on the

romantic possibilities of Valentine's Day parties. In fact it was at just such a party that he met a girl named Kay with whom he fell in love and married in 1952.

The partnership was a successful one. The couple had six children, and following Bill's retirement from Kodak in 1984, even started their own business together, Sponn Exhibit Planning Services.

"We had a great relationship," Bill says, "but it was cut short."

Kay died suddenly in March of 1986 following a cerebral hemorrhage, bringing to an end a happy marriage of 34 years. Bill's only consolation was that his wife had passed away quickly without suffering.

"My mother was an invalid for many years, and was very sick. I'm just thankful Kay didn't have to go through the same thing," he says. "I trusted God, and knew that what had to be, had to be."

The following year, Bill's attention was drawn to a poem incorporated in an article in the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle. The poem, entitled "The Good Life," pointed out the importance of being content with what one has instead of constantly struggling for something better. Bill found that sentiment to be a meaningful philosophy.

Most striking to him, however, were the name and photograph of the poem's author. It was Mary Lou.

Bill called her to congratulate her on the poem's publication. The two then filled each other in on where their lives had taken them since their date some 40 years ago.

Bill told her of his wife's death and, to his surprise, learned that Mary Lou's marriage to his old friend had ended with a separation and church annulment in 1980.

After that telephone call, Bill and Mary Lou stayed in touch. They soon became reacquainted with one another, and found that they had a lot in common. Both had children: Bill six boys, Mary Lou four girls and one boy. Both had been involved in the world of display advertising: Bill at

Kodak and with his own company, Mary Lou through her ex-husband, who had been in a similar line of work. And most importantly, both were again "available," as Mary Lou put it.

On Nov. 11, 1988, their "available" status was changed. Bill and Mary Lou were married that day at St. Helen's Church, and have since been enjoying the fact that their lives' paths have once again crossed — this time for good.

"We had mutual interests, and mutual family situations, so it seemed a natural thing to get together and make it a permanent arrangement," says Bill. "I felt fortunate when we met. We understood each other because of our common background."

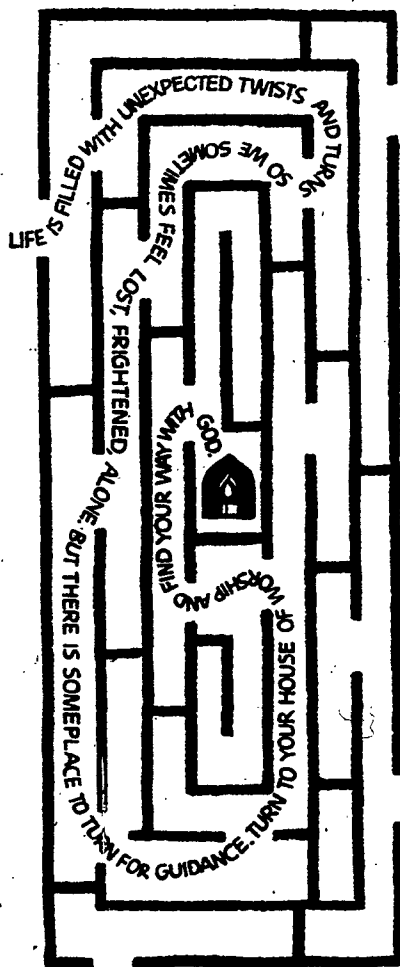
"Because I already knew Bill, I

didn't have to sift through everything he said, like you do with a stranger before you determine if you can believe or trust them," says Mary Lou. "We established our relationship a lot sooner than if we'd been strangers."

Today, Bill still runs Sponn Exhibit Planning Services, and Mary Lou works as a secretary and receptionist for a subsidiary of Rochester Telephone. Both attend St. Helen's, the church in which they were married, and serve as representatives to the Diocesan Pastoral Council.

Mary Lou continues to write poetry, and has since been published in the American Anthology of Poetry. Most of her writing still centers on the idea that we should be thankful for what we have, the philosophy

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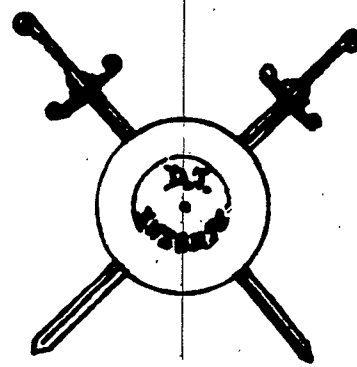
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