

Understanding is the key for anniversary couples

By Tom Petronio
Freelance writer

Marriage is a big step. Ask anyone. But for Charles and Delores Mitchell, that step was also a little embarrassing.

The two had met for the first time at a wedding in Pennsylvania, then didn't see each other again for several years. In 1926, Charlie, who worked for an insurance company in Olean, called Delores and arranged to visit her at her parents' home in Ridgeway, Pa.

Two years later, they were married.

In order to catch a train to Buffalo for their honeymoon — "There were no buses then," Delores points out — the couple were to be wed at 6:30 on a cold Dec. 31 morning. Maybe it was the cold, maybe it was just too early in the morning, but for some reason the bride and groom just weren't in sync that day.

"I tripped him at the altar," Delores says with a laugh. "I genuflected, he didn't, and he fell."

That was the only instance in which it could rightly be said that the Mitchells' marriage got off on the wrong foot. Bill, 86, and Delores, 87, celebrated their 60th anniversary last year.

Medical problems the couple recently experienced precluded big festivities on the occasion, but they had celebrated with style on their golden anniversary, when their son, Charlie, Jr., and daughter, Nellie Mull, threw them a party at the Elks Club in

Seneca Falls.

Charlie and Delores have done a good deal of traveling in their six decades together. Charlie's job with an electric company has taken them to Ohio and California, and the couple called both states home at different times. They have remained residents of Seneca Falls since Charlie's retirement in 1968.

These days they attend St. Patrick's Church, and enjoy shopping, reading the newspaper and just being together.

Kathleen, one of the Mitchells' four grandchildren, got married recently and received some simple advice from grandma, who is well-qualified as a counselor after 60 years of happy marriage.

"I told them just to get along, to understand each other, and to love each other," Delores says.

The Mitchells' attribute the longevity of their own marriage to heeding that very ordinary philosophy.

"If we have an argument, we settle it," Charlie says.

"We both like to do the same things," adds Delores. "And he enjoys my cooking."

Besides, she hasn't tripped him in 60 years.

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Like their Seneca Falls neighbors, the Mitchells, Louis and Patty Matro don't feel they've done anything exceptional to maintain a strong marriage for 50 years.

"We just get along like everyone else, living from day to day," Patty

says. "When we have a quarrel, we talk it over."

With that philosophy in mind, it's easy to understand why Louis and Patty, who both serve as lunch monitors at St. Patrick's School in Seneca Falls, thought December 31, 1988, would be just another day at school.

Louis Matro had been watching the children of St. Patrick's during their lunch periods every day for eight years. His wife Patty had been doing the same thing once a week for four years. So when a group of students asked them to go and watch a concert in the school auditorium that day, the Matros thought nothing of it. Nothing, that is, until the students broke into the adapted refrain of a familiar song.

"They started singing, 'Happy Anniversary,'" Patty recalls. "We were totally surprised. I didn't expect it."

The concert was the students' way of wishing the Matros a happy 50th anniversary. Students and faculty at St. Patrick's also gave the two volunteers a couple of gifts and planned an upcoming Mass in their honor, bringing them full circle to the 10 a.m. Mass on Dec. 31, 1938, when Father Charles Sullivan united them in marriage at St. Patrick's Church.

The parish has been important to the Matros ever since their wedding day. When he retired from the construction business 22 years later, Louis took the job as school lunch monitor. So both husband and wife were touched by the special honor

they received from the children they have been looking after ever since their own children — Lucille, Patricia and Thomas, who also gave their parents an anniversary party — had grown.

Enduring commitment — like the Matros' dedication to St. Patrick's and to each other — is a rare quality in today's society. But after 50 years of marriage, Patty Matro urges young couples to hang on despite the difficulties.

"These days when couples have a little spat, they're ready to leave. But if you love each other, you stick together. Because you're going to have bad times and good times," she says.

Sweethearts

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underlying the poem that brought her and Bill together. If anything, her belief in that philosophy has been enhanced by their marriage.

In her poem, "Side By Side," Mary Lou describes a dream in which two people walk together through a beautiful landscape, feeling nothing but happiness and contentment. At the poem's end the dream is over, but the beauty lives on:

*My dreams had vanished
You were there with me
Two people who love each other
Two people side by side.*



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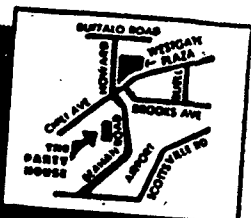
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