

# Couple puts family first in decisions

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

NAPLES — Ask Mark and Polly Halladay to define "family values" and their answers would be difficult for a politician to compress into a 30-second commercial.

"I think it means instilling qualities in our children that make them more caring people," Polly said. "Caring about other people, caring about the environment, the Earth, wanting to make it a better place."

"It's not making a political issue of it," Mark said. "That to me is not what family values is about."

"My family is more important to me than my job, than my career," he continued. "We have to look at things to see if they will pull us away from our family, take time away from our family. We make the family a priority."

In the case of the Halladays, "making the family a priority" means that Polly stays at home with the children while they are young — rather than working as a nurse to make extra money.

It also means that Mark avoids work-related activities that might help him climb the ranks at F.F. Thompson Hospital in Canandaigua — where he serves as an administrative assistant to the nursing home's administrator — but would take him away from his family.

Putting his loved ones first also means keeping evenings and weekends free for the family, eating meals together and taking part only in activities that involve the entire clan — Caitlin, 10; Matthew, 6; Kelsey, 4; and Erin, six months.

It also means the Naples family is active at its parish, St. Januarius, where Mark is completing a term as co-chairman of the parish council. In addition, Mark and Polly jointly taught the fourth-grade religious education class in which Caitlin was enrolled last year.

"People are jumping up and down talking about 'family values,'" Polly commented. "We're just quietly, lovingly, peacefully living together as a family."

The Halladays met in the 1970s when Polly and Mark were still students at Cortland High School. She was a Catholic, and he was the son of a Methodist minister.

The two began dating before going on to college. Soon afterward, Mark — who attended Cornell University in Ithaca — and Polly — then a student at Auburn's Cayuga County Community College — discovered that they



Members of the Halladay family gather for story time at the end of the day. Pictured in this photo are: (from left), Caitlin, 10; Erin 6 months; Mark; Kelsey, 4; and Matthew, 6.

missed each other too much to concentrate on studies. After dropping out of college, they were married at Our Lady of Angels Church in Endwell, N.Y. on Jan. 27, 1976.

"We didn't want to go through college and wait," Mark explained. "We loved each other. We wanted to be together."

Uncertain what they wanted to do with their lives other than just be together, the Halladays sold most of what they owned and left for Europe to camp and travel by railroad.

While shopping in Antwerp, Belgium, one day, they met the mayor's wife, who invited them home for breakfast.

During the meal, Mark recalled, the mayor asked them what they planned to do when they returned home. When they said they didn't know, "He said, 'There's such a shortage of nurses, did you ever consider doing that?'" Mark said.

After returning to the United States later that summer, the Halladays enrolled in nursing school. They also worked together nights in a nursing home. The two later became licensed practical nurses together.

Shortly after both became registered nurses, the Halladays began having children. That's when Polly opted to stay at home — an option, she acknowledged, that not all people can enjoy, and one which has meant living simply.

"I worked with people who were old and sick and at the end of their lives," Polly explained. "I listened to them as they talked about when they were little, and I realized how important it was to be there when the children are young."

Although her decision means that the family has less money, Polly noted, "We've always made it a point not to buy anything that we couldn't afford to buy. We don't live beyond our means."



Polly Halladay shares a moment together with her 6-year-old son Matthew before bedtime to discuss a missing library book. The Naples family attends St. Januarius Church.

The couple moved to Syracuse, where Mark worked while attending Syracuse University. After deciding he would like to get into nursing's administrative side, Mark pursued his bachelor's and master's degrees in business.

At the same time, the Halladays began attending a Catholic Church in Syracuse.

Mark acknowledged that they had drifted away from religion for a time, but, "I remembered when we got married, the priest asked that if we had children they be baptized Catholic. As you get to raising children, you get a tremendous sense of responsibility."

Belonging to a dynamic parish helped the couple become more active in the church, Polly said.

"There was a young priest who was around our age, and it just seemed like he understood us," she said. "Every time he got up to give a homily, it seemed like he'd been hiding in our

close, listening to what we were thinking."

Mark converted to Catholicism in 1987. And the couple continued to remain active in their parish when they became members of St. Januarius Church in 1989.

The Halladays would like to stay in Naples. Mark also enjoys working at Thompson Hospital, and is currently preparing to take his state licensing examination for nursing home administration.

But he has made it clear to his superiors that family comes first for him and Polly.

"Maybe I won't get ahead," Mark said, "but I don't care. I just have to remind myself what's important, what am I going to take with me when I leave the world. It's not my job."

"Our kids see that, and know that we care for them," he added, "and hopefully they'll do the same."

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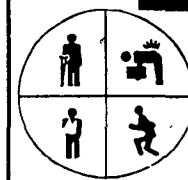
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