

Everlasting Love



A few secrets to a long relationship

BY ALLISON CANDREVA

Putting on her party dress, 15-year-old Amy Von der Porten made her way to her girlfriend Elise's 16th birthday party. A student at an all-girls school, Amy had never danced with a boy. On this day, a curious stranger would change that.

The mystery man walked up and asked her to dance. Little did Amy know, the man could not dance. Joining him on the floor, smiling and smitten, she danced awkwardly.

Her bright blue eyes shot to the doorway. There, her father stood watching, pipe firm in his mouth.

Amy left that day not knowing her dancing partner's name. At school, her friends teased her, saying, "You're gunna marry that man."

And she did, eight years later.

On January 4, 1947, Amy and Arnold Paul Von der Porten married in a Presbyterian Church. It was a time of courting and young love, a time when couples faced years of separation because of military service - but some say time apart brought them closer.

What is the secret to a relationship that will last decades?

Showing respect for each other, Amy said.

"It's about learning to give and take," she said. "Share and be a helper to each other."

The couple has been married for 62 years.

After that first dance, Amy would not see Arnold again until many years

later when she was studying botany at the Institute of Jamaica. She was working in a science library she helped create, when he came in looking for a physics book. Amy, born in Kingston, Jamaica, and Arnold, born in Hamburg, Germany, faced much discrimination from her family members, but pursued the relationship anyway.

"We needed each other," Amy said, "and we wanted to be married to each other."

In 1953, they came to the United States and shortly after, started their family. They had four children, two boys and two girls, and now have 10 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

University of Florida associate professor Carolyn S. Wilken said there is a higher satisfaction in older women who have children. Wilken, who works in the college of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, extension Gerontologist, said children create a larger support system.

"Children provide a confidant for both older mothers and older fathers," she said. "As people age, they have children and each other to depend on, and [a large family] extends the support system."

Wilken opened an envelope of freshly printed family portraits. Holding a picture with four generations of her family, she said, "There's something to be said for sharing a family with someone."

It takes more than love to have a lasting relationship, Wilken said. Having similar interests and the same view on life is fairly important. Couples have to like each other, too, because they spend a lot of time together.

In the past, people married sooner, they were younger and the courtship was shorter, Wilken said. Romance is not gone in relationships today; there are just different expectations for the younger generations. Wilken said all marriages have problems, but there is something special about a long relationship.

After 64 plus years of marriage, Dwain and Isabel Gull still look at each other like it is their wedding day. They were both 18 years old when they went to a community dance in Salt Lake City and caught each other's eye.

Dwain was a military man, so their courtship was mainly by telephone. After he finished pilot school in Utah, the couple decided they did not want to be apart anymore. When 20-year-old Dwain went to South Carolina for combat training, they found a church official and were married in his home on June 5, 1944, with two friends by their sides.

"I was old enough to go overseas, but I had to get my parent's permission to get married," Dwain said. "If it hadn't been for the war, we would have waited until we were old enough."

Shortly after their wedding, the couple started having children. They were

Photos by Allison Candreva

Left: Arnold Paul and Amy Von der Porten came to America in 1953 and started their family, which now includes four children, 10 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Right: A church official in South Carolina married Dwain and Isabel Gull on June 5, 1944.

traveling, trying to get settled with the military, so their four children were born in different places.

"Family is very important," Dwain said. "They're everything."

In the beginning of the relationship, Dwain was sent overseas to Europe and Korea. Isabel said his absence made their relationship hard.

"I think we appreciate each other more," Isabel said, "because we were separated."

Several years later, after Dwain was discharged, the couple had a second church wedding in a sacred temple in Salt Lake City. He said the ceremony was for religious and personal reasons and is meant for time and eternity.

"It's past till death do us part," Dwain said.

Isabel looked at him and smiled. "It's a great feeling to know someone wants to be with you for eternity." §



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