

The best of times... in love

Katy Zillmer staff writer Lillie News February 11, 1009

Valentine's Day carries many meanings - a day popular for weddings and engagements, kids to share cards with their classmates, or couples to celebrate their history together.

Some call it a "Hallmark Holiday" fueled by marketing of pink hearts, teddy bears and cheesy greeting cards, but others contend it's good to have a special day set aside to celebrate being in love.

Ed and Shirley Grabowski and Lois and Bernie Schaller are in the latter camp. They can attest to the importance of enduring love, have recently celebrated their 65th and 60th wedding anniversaries, respectively.

Both couples live at **Oak Meadows Senior Living** in Oakdale, and last week they shared their secrets to a happy marriage and how their romances bloomed so many years ago.

Both couples began as high-school sweethearts.

The Grabowskis met when Shirley was 15 and working at a root beer stand.

The "East Siders" went to rival high schools - Harding and Johnson - while they were dating. "That's not supposed to happen," Shirley says, chuckling. But their time outside of school led to their romance.

Ed's brother owned the root beer stand and Shirley says she was a "car hop" delivering beverages and "Coney Islands" to customers.

"What really got the romance going was I worked for 20 cents an hour, and he tipped me 10 cents," Shirley recalls with a laugh.

The couple dated throughout high school and then Ed was drafted into the military during World War II.

In 1943, Ed was able to come home on leave, and the lovebirds decided to get married at the courthouse. "We were together six days after we got married," Shirley says. "It was love," Ed adds in agreement.

It took three years for Ed to complete his tour of duty during the war and come home. The couple went on to buy a house on the East Side and raise four kids.

'Got the girl'

Lois and Bernie share a similar story, with their 60-year marriage also starting during the war era.

They were students at a high school in Winona and met their sophomore year at a basketball game, Bernie recalls.

At the time, Bernie says he was the "shy one" and had a crush on a girl, but didn't know her name.

One night a girl named Lois offered his friends a ride to the game and he tagged along. "She came walking out the screen door, and it was the girl!"

After they started dating, Bernie joined the Air Force, and while he was away Lois had other suitors.

But, as Bernie says, he "got the girl," and they were married after he was discharged from the military.

They had a small wedding since most of their family lived out of town, Lois says. They have two sons and lived in Woodbury for 18 years before moving to Oak Meadows three years ago.



Top, Ed and Shirley Grabowski. Just above, Bernie and Lois Schaller

Lessons in love

The Grabowskis and Schallers have become friends while living at Oak Meadows and agree on what it takes to make a marriage last - no matter what road bumps there might be along the way.

Shirley emphasizes, "You've got to put 100 percent into it." She and Ed say they "practice what they preach" and for 14 years even counseled engaged couples through their church.

"We would teach them things a couple would never think to discuss on their own, and that was good for our marriage," she says.

Lois and Bernie say humor is an important ingredient in a relationship, and it often helped them get through any rough patches.

"I always try to work it out so he thinks it is his idea and not mine," Lois says with a laugh. "And you've got to learn to say 'Yes dear,'" Bernie adds.

"There might be some downs, but the ups outweigh them," Lois says. "You go through them together."

The couples both agreed they are blessed to have been married for most of their lives and wouldn't change anything.

"We would do it all over again," Shirley says. "It's been a good marriage and I still love her, too," Ed adds.

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