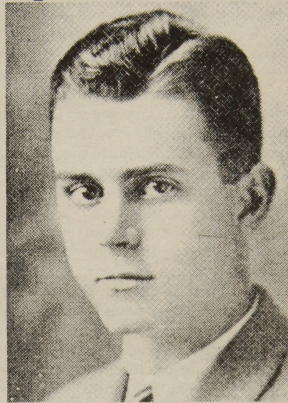


IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

Seventy years of marriage — to the same person



My parents will have been married 70 years on Friday, August 23rd. They were married at my grandmother's home at 1527 N. Cherry St. in Galesburg. My parents are both 94 years old now and live in a beautiful spot called Plymouth Harbor in Sarasota, Fla. My father, in particular, planned ahead so that he and my mother could live independently for years in their condominium, but have had home care and a health care facility at their disposal. Currently, my father is in the health care unit, permanently, I'm afraid, and my mother, still living in their apartment, visits him twice a day.

Mother uses a walker with wheels, thank you, and has nearly gotten a speeding ticket a time or two. There were times she used to do a little impromptu jig for one reason or another, and she still manages that while hanging onto the walker.

My parents met while students at Knox College. Mother says the romance really began when Daddy was appointed editor of the Student newspaper and he appointed her assistant editor. Mother was a "townie" who lived at home in Galesburg. Because her father had been a Knox College professor who died when she was 12, she attended Knox tuition free. My grandmother, who never remarried, worked at the Knox College library until she was 70 years old.

Daddy was from Kewanee, and his father was a political activist and also a graduate of Knox College in 1895. Grandpa Andrews was known for publishing an "underground" newspaper at Knox — starting his activism and political activity early. He was a newspaper publisher, attorney and mayor of Kewanee for 16 years.

It's no surprise then, that before my father arrived in Galesburg for his four o'clock wedding 70 years ago, he and his father attended a political luncheon and rally in Kewanee for Democrat Henry Horner, who was running for Governor of Illinois. My mother still gets a bit huffy thinking about that.

After college my father headed for Harvard Law School and mother moved away from home for the first time and became a reporter for the Jacksonville, Ill. daily newspaper. In those days, women weren't allowed to write "real" news, so she was a society reporter. She lived in a boarding house. She remembers being teased mercilessly by the men about her red hair and accompanying temper but learned to handle it and made some very close friends. Both my parents have amusing stories about dating others during this period of time. Mother really grew up

when she found out a man she was dating was married and much to her fury, told her his wife's name was Alice too, so it was really handy.

My parents lived in Kewanee after they were married. My recollections as a child of my parent's relationship are that they were always kind and respectful and affectionate towards each other. My father is quiet and reserved while mother is the talkative and tempestuous partner. Mother never worked outside the home again. As a homemaker, she always put on fresh make-up and combed her hair before my father came home from work. They talked about politics and world affairs at the dinner table and Daddy complained about the Henry County Republican judges and other Republican politicians of the day. He used to call silver-tongued Senator Everett Dirksen, "The Wizard of Ooze."

In those days, the "children should be seen and not heard," philosophy was popular, which was a real struggle for me.

My maternal grandmother lived with our family for 17 years and my parents had to have made many adjustments during those years. I know they went to bed at a late hour until a few years ago because for years the only time they had alone together was after 10pm.

My mother eventually became an activist with the League of Women Voters, appointed to President Kennedy's Commission on the Status of Women and the Illinois Human Relations Commission. My father was so supportive and proud of her, during a time when this kind of female activity was rare, especially in Kewanee. And my father's support of her was unheard of.

What a wonderful sense of humor they still have. My father has no memory of recent events, but reacts to the names of Galesburg and Kewanee. Not too many years ago he and I were discussing politics and he described beautiful Sarasota as "just a bunch of Republicans in a swamp." My mother is horrified that the woman running for Congress in her district is Kathleen Harris, notorious Florida Secretary of State during the 2000 election fiasco.

Mother says what she misses the most is that she and Daddy can't talk about politics and other issues of the day any more. They were avid readers and had many interests — the least of which was themselves. As a result, their lives have been full and rewarding. Their long, loving marriage has certainly been a precious gift to my brother and me.

Caroline Porter is a freelance writer from Galesburg who can be reached at cporter@galesburg.net.