

Young at heart

Grandparents' marriage reflects their attitude, lifestyle

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Ideal marriages don't always begin with young couples.

One of the happier marriages I've seen is my grandparents'. Well, actually it's my father's mother and stepfather, who were married six years ago.

Both are in their 80s now. But their marriage – or lifestyle – doesn't show it.

My grandmother, the former Fern Wulf, had known my new grandpa, Clarence Bopp, for more than 50 years before they married. The Wulfs lived on a farm near Scribner not far from the Bopps. The Wulfs even stayed with the Bopps during the flood of 1944.

Clarence had been alone for about two years and my grandmother for four years when they arranged their first date back in 1978. The date was made at that most romantic of places: the meat counter at the Safeway store in Fremont.

Clarence had asked her if she'd been to the Dodge County Fair in Scribner yet that summer. No, she replied, she didn't like to go during the day and she didn't want to drive at night. So he offered to take her.

Clarence asked her out again. "We got along good the first time, or some dern thing," he explained.

The next week they went to the Nebraska State Fair. And the 50 years of friendship began to blossom into love.

About Thanksgiving time, they decided to get married. "Naturally, I had to bring up the idea," Clarence joked. His proposal went something like: "Are you ready to get married?"

Why get married again when you're in your late 70s?

"I wasn't too old yet," Fern said. "I was looking forward to having companionship, too."

She wasn't just looking for a friend. "We fell in love, too," she added. "I wouldn't marry anyone if I didn't love him."



Fern and Clarence Bopp

Like any just-engaged couple, there were things to think about before tying the knot. Like children – but not new ones.

"We already had a family, so there was no use looking for that," Clarence said, laughing. However, both he and Fern wanted to see what their children thought about the idea.

Fortunately, they received approval all around. But if they wouldn't have had that approval, Fern said they would have married anyway.

"We were old enough and our own bosses," she pointed out. "We can decide what's good for us."

There also were financial considerations. When they went to the Social Security office to find out how the marriage would affect their benefits, one worker advised them to wait until after the first of the year. At that time, regulations would change and both would be allowed to keep their current payments. Otherwise, Fern would have lost \$140 a month.

So the date was set for Jan. 6, 1979. Engagement and wedding rings were purchased. Family and friends met the new future spouses. A wedding was planned, complete with a new dress and attendants and flowers and a family dinner befitting the occasion.

Another celebration was planned for after the dinner to welcome all family members. We gathered at my aunt's house and feted the new couple with silly songs, poems and remembrances in a short program.

It was a marriage – not only of two people, but of two families. All are getting along just fine.

Like I said before, although my grandparents are in their 80s, they

or their lifestyles don't show it. They go out all the time. My grandfather still sits in the middle of the mall and watches the pretty girls go by.

We all look forward to family gatherings when Clarence tells his latest "stories." On Mother's Day last year, my 4-year-old niece coaxed him into doing somersaults with her on the lawn.

My grandmother still keeps house and grows all kinds of flowers. The only time her age shows is in the wisdom of the advice she's given me on everything from my job to home to men. This is one lady who has not fallen behind the times.

The families have melded into one. We've attended their weddings and funerals, as they have ours. I think of them as cousins and aunts and uncles.

This feeling has been helped along at the three anniversary celebrations my grandparents have had. They aren't planning any more soon.

"But if we make it to 10 (years) we'll have a big party," Clarence said. "But I don't know if we'll find room enough, the way things are going."

When they were married six years ago, Clarence had three children, 14 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Fern had two children and nine grandchildren.

The family has grown since their marriage; now there are 16 great-grandchildren between the two of them, and another is on the way.

With their years of experience, both had advice for those contemplating marriage. "You should stop and think and not rush into it," Fern said.

Even though she and Clarence were engaged only six weeks, she pointed out that they had known each other more than 50 years before marrying.

Admitting that knowing someone that well before marriage isn't always feasible, Clarence advised his 23-year-old granddaughter, "Don't you wait that long."

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