



June 22, 2024

Marion & Delilah Knight



75th Wedding Anniversary

Their story: Marion & Delilah

Some statistical experts believe there are less than 1,000 U.S. couples who reach 75 years of marriage. That's .0016 percent of couples.

That's close to your odds of winning the Powerball lottery.

I'm sure Marion and Delilah would agree they both hit the jackpot when they met back in 1948.

Delilah was just 14 and working in a soda shop in Burlington, North Carolina when the doorbell in the shop jingled and in walked Marion. Dressed in a Marine olive-green uniform, he exuded a confidence that was borderline cocky. Slim and muscular, pop had a contagious smile. And he wore his service hat tilted to one side.

My grandmother was immediately flushed. For her, it was love at first sight. So, she was crushed when the first words they spoke were of pop inquiring of the whereabouts of his girlfriend, who was working there.

"I heard his voice, and I was just smitten," said Delilah.
"The uniform and that smile just hooked me."

Beginnings

Mom and pop were both residents of Burlington but had arrived there through different paths.

Delilah was born there, the oldest of four children to Ruth and Robert Johnson. Her siblings were Barbara, Robert and Mary. The family lived in a three-bedroom home on Gilmore Street near an extended family of aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Their family was solidly middle class. Robert, affable and well liked, was a truck driver and Ruth, a devoted mother who was also quick-tempered, worked odd jobs while raising the children. The couple split in 1942, when my grandmother was nine years old.

Outside of church, schooling, and work, there was little

On this day, we are gathered to celebrate a loving marriage that has lasted an incredible 75 years. More incredible than this milestone, though, is their giving spirit and the affection they have for one another. I have never heard a cross word between them.

A person's life should not be judged by the wealth they accumulate or the toys they have but by the people they touch and the compassion they extend. Thiers has been a selfless marriage that has been devoted to helping others. We need to celebrate that, too.

Over the years, I have spent some nights in the bedroom across the hall from their master bedroom and have experienced the loving affection my grandparents have for one another.

Each night my grandmother tucks my grandfather in bed before retiring to the living room couch.

For many years, my grandfather's final words each day have been: I love you.

And my grandmother's:
I love you, too.

Since Rudy moved in, the nightly refrain has changed.

Pop says: I love you.

Mom: I love you, too.

Pop: Tell Rudy I said goodnight.



*Remarks authored by John Roberts and delivered
June 22, 2024 by John, Marion, and Shane Roberts*

net for relatives who were down on their luck or needed a place to stay.

In 1963, they began taking care of a nephew, Michael, when he was just six weeks old. He remained with them until he was six. Around that time, my grandmother's youngest sister, Mary, then a high school student, moved in and stayed with the couple until she graduated from the University of Central Florida and launched a successful career.



In the mid-1960s, Marion and Delilah moved back to Burlington to be closer to Susan, who was married and had three boys: John, Marion, and Shane. My grandfather purchased two trailers where both families lived for several years.

The Knights moved to Charlotte in 1973 and remained there until moving to Spartanburg in 1975 where Pop took a job as a construction supervisor. They took up residence at 15 Iris Court and later purchased the home. In 1977, Susan, who was divorced, moved into the home with her three boys. When she died tragically in 1982, my grandparents took on the herculean task of raising three boys.



After the boys graduated and moved on, my grandparents continued to open their home to family who were in need. They never charged rent and provided financial support when they could. They even adopted a family dog, Rudy, who remains with them today and provides comfort and unconditional love.

After six decades of rising each morning at 5 a.m. and working 12-hour days, my grandfather retired from construction work in his 80s. Until recently, the couple enjoyed taking trips to see family members and short junkets to Cherokee. And they have delighted in their growing brood. Mom and Pop have eight great-grandchildren. And their first great-great grandchild is due in November.

room for recreation in the Johnson household. At nights, Ruth worked as a looper, sewing socks together sometimes until 2 a.m. with her oldest child assisting her.

Like the Johnsons, the Knight family also worked in textiles and moved to Burlington in 1941 when pop was 12 years old. But their roots were rural.

Pop was born in Lancaster, South Carolina, the middle child of Lula and George Knight. Their other children were Ovetta, Conway, George and Betty. George was a manager at Springs Industries and Lula was a stay-at-home mother.



By my grandfather's account, his father was direct and suffered no fools. He was task-oriented and hard working. Lula was a devoted mother who had a playful side.

Growing up, the Knight family lived several years on a farm where they raised pigs, chickens, and cows. Pop's job was to milk the cows each morning. The family also tended to a large garden. George rode a horse or walked five miles to work during the week. The children attended a one-room schoolhouse that educated students from first to 12th grade. They also helped out in the textile mill.

On Saturdays, George gave each of the children a quarter, enough for a movie ticket and popcorn in Lancaster. Every Sunday they attended a Baptist Church.

In 1941, George moved his family to Burlington where he took a manager's job at Glenn Raven Mills. Betty, the youngest child, enrolled at Broad Street High School where she was Delilah's classmate. My grandfather began working at the mill when he was 16 and joined the Marines soon after his 18th birthday. Pop received basic training at Paris Island and was stationed at Camp Lejune.

When Marion joined the marines, the War in Europe and the Pacific was over. The Japanese surrendered on September 2, 1945, after atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A little-

known fact is that one of my grandmother's uncles, Frank Edwards, helped to pilot one of those planes. It's reasonable to assume that had those weapons of destruction never been deployed, my grandfather would have served in a Pacific campaign to invade Japan.

Courtship

When they first met in 1948, my grandmother – polite but determined – pursued my grandfather. She would tag along with pop and his friends when he returned to Burlington on leave.

Later that year, Delilah penned a letter to Marion – then serving in Newfoundland – expressing a romantic interest. Pop wrote the 14-year-old back and said he had affection for her, but as a little sister, not a girlfriend. This crushed my grandmother. But she remained dogged.

Back at Camp Lejune and on a leave in Burlington, Marion hatched a simple plan to dissuade Delilah. He set her up with one of his in-town Army buddies, Eddie Wright. The ploy nearly worked. Very quickly, Eddie fell for Delilah. And he relayed his serious intentions to Marion.

In a clairvoyant moment, Pop realized that he could not let go of Delilah. He told my grandmother “You get rid of him by the end of the day, or I will.” She did and he later proposed. Gleeful, mom accepted, and together they launched a love affair that continues today.

Says Delilah: “I kept chasing him until he caught me.” Today, she still jokes. “I could have been a Wright instead of a Knight.”

Very quickly the couple set a wedding date: Sunday, June 24, just a week or so after the proposal. Why the short engagement? Delilah was terrified that her mother would learn of the nuptials and scuttle the marriage. And they wanted to have the ceremony before Robert, my grandmother's father, could attend. He was scheduled to leave the next day on a truck driving route.

So, it was all planned. My grandfather returned to base but would hitchhike 87 miles back to Burlington the following Sunday in time to make the 3 p.m. ceremony. He didn't have enough money for bus fare. As fate would have it, traffic that Sunday was light. And those rides were scarce.

So, he walked, thumbed and was running desperately late.

By 3 p.m. my grandmother was standing alone at the altar with her father. At 4 p.m. they released the small wedding party with plans to reassemble once my grandfather arrived. “I wasn't concerned that he got cold feet,” says Delilah. “I was worried if he was alright.”

Shortly after my 10 p.m. Marion arrived. The wedding party reassembled, and Betty, pop's sister, picked some Gardena flowers and penned them to mom's gown. The preacher married them at 10:35 p.m. There was no wedding reception. Instead, the bride, bridegroom, Lula and Robert drove to a tiny café in Hillsborough that was still open.

They had coffee.

Life together

The newlyweds spent some time apart while my grandfather was in the Marines. After receiving an honorable discharge in 1950, they moved into a one-bedroom home on Willowbrook Drive. Their daughter, Susan, was born that year.

It was a difficult delivery. After hearing Delilah scream during childbirth, my grandfather said Susan would be their only child.

“No more,” he said.

Today, it's hard to imagine the tireless work ethic of this couple.

Marion worked in textile mills until his shift ended and then labored in construction until sunset. My grandmother kept kids during the day and worked at the U.S. Rubber plant. They both worked 15-hours a day, six days a week.

In 1959, the couple moved to Melbourne, Florida where a housing boom was centered near Cape Canaveral.

In addition to their work ethic, my grandparents' marriage is defined by their compassion and charity. Their home has always served as a safety

