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## Valentines Forever: After 73 years, couple prove love endures

Comments

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Had online computer dating services been around in those days, Reinald and Betty Werrenrath might never have been deemed a match.

After all, offered Betty during an interview at their Westminster Place retirement community in northwest Evanston, "we came from such different backgrounds. His father was a celebrity singer and I was a small-town minister's daughter. He came from the city; I came from a town."

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**Reinald and Betty Werrenrath, holding their wedding photograph. The Evanston couple have been married for 73 years.**

*| Joel Lerner-Sun-Times Media*

If opposites attract, then, this Valentine's Day, the Werrenrath's union ought to be exhibit No. 1. The couple have been married 73 years and have been together 77 years, if you count when they first met at a Wells College dance in upstate New York in 1933.

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Reinald had to put aside the advice of his sister, a member of the same Wells class as Betty, that she didn't see him getting along with a minister's daughter.

"I took her out that night," he said.

"Is that because ministers' daughters are off the wall?" asks Betty now, coyly testing him.

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**Reinald and Betty Werrenrath of Evanston have been married for 73 years.**

*| Joel Lerner-Sun-Times Media*

### Always a firework

"No, at the time I didn't know what ministers' daughters are like," Reinald says diplomatically. "Betty was a sparkler and always has been."

The couple has had their challenges. They waited four years before marrying, making sure they had sufficient finances.

Living in New York City at the time, Reinald was making \$18.95 a week as a lighting and special effects technician at NBC while Betty was pulling down \$17.95 in her job at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

"Living during the Depression gives you different values," Betty said.

The two were sitting on a beach in 1938 when Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia.

"That event killed the thought that life would be a breeze," said Betty, now 96, a year older than her husband.

The couple moved to Chicago in 1939 so Reinald could continue his work during television's early

years. The experimental station at State and Lake, where he did his work, later became ABC7-Chicago.

Their first child, Kirsten, was born 10 months before Pearl Harbor. In 1942, Reinald enlisted in the Navy and was gone three years.

## Relationship tested

"During this separation, we found we could go the distance," Betty told Presbyterian Homes' public relations manager Carolyn Staven, who discovered the couple's history. "But the experience matured him. He left a carefree 28-year-old and returned a man."

Their second child, Reinald Werrenrath III, was already 14 months old when Reinald saw him for the first time, "and he was very suspicious of me. I had to work to win him over," he said. "So I was determined to be a part of raising our three children."

Added Betty, "Having to take responsibility for children and having to agree how to nurture them and bring them up, I think that's the first thing that brings you together."

The couple, with lessons learned from the Great Depression, budget and prioritize their spending together.

"We were never interested in keeping up with the Joneses," said Betty. "We were more interested in each other."

## Helps around home

It helps that Reinald never walks past a sink full of dirty dishes without cleaning up.

The two also stay active. At Westminster Place, Betty does her yoga while Reinald goes to the community's fitness center and walks the campus, using Nordic ski poles. They also stay involved in political debate, which can start early in the morning, Betty admitted.

"He's a conservative and I'm more progressive," she said. "We try to understand the other's way of thinking, why they think that way, but we still challenge each other. We don't always come to an agreement, but we come to an understanding. If you always agreed with somebody, it would be dull."

"Never hold a grudge; get over it as soon as you can," offered Reinald. "Never go to bed angry, and try to help the other person get rid of any anger they have toward someone else, too."

The ultimate sacrifice?

Betty will watch conservative Fox news with Reinald. Then, "from 5 to 6 p.m., he'll watch something with me." she said.