

Together, And Loving It, After 65 Years

BY SUSAN USHER

William "Berl" and Mildred Powell Butler of Sea Village community recently celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary and, by all accounts, are still lovebirds.

They tease each other affectionately and usually can be found holding hands. It's obvious they adore each other and that each is the other's best friend.

"They're always kissing and holding hands," says an admiring neighbor and younger friend, Rita Russell. "It's wonderful."

The Butlers live in a comfortable mobile home at 207 Sea Village, off N.C. 904 near Seaside. Their living room is filled with photographs of their two sons, nine grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

After retiring in Washington, D.C., they moved back to Marion, Ill., for a number of years. But when their son Thomas retired and moved from Akron, Ohio, to Sea Village, he persuaded them to move nearby about four years ago.

Their other son, Robert, is "too far away," says Mrs. Butler. He recently retired from the U.S. Information Service and has leased a home in Thailand, where he plans to try writing a book.

The Butlers like being together and they do hold hands frequently.

"He does that every time I sit beside him," says Mrs. Butler. "We sit and watch the boob tube and hold hands."

Asked the basis for their longlasting marriage, the Butlers turn and smile at each other.

"Yes, ma'am," he tells a reporter, teasing Mildred. "That's what I always say."

There are only smiles of affection from both when Berl is asked whether he follows through on that "yes" every time or just goes on about his business.

As for Mildred, she says she always been one to listen, to her husband and others.

Berl Butler and Mildred Powell first met at a Labor Day celebration in her hometown of Centerville, Ill., about 10 miles from where he lived in Marion. After "grinning at her a bit," he says he finally got up nerve enough to ask for a date.

That night Mildred turned him down, but eventually they dated for three years, marrying Sept. 4, 1926, at the Christian Church in Centerville, Ill.



AFTER 65 YEARS OF MARRIAGE William and Mildred Butler of Sea Village still thrive on each other's company. STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

"He was kind of young," recalled Mrs. Butler, who celebrated her 87th birthday on Aug. 31. "I had to wait on him. There were 3½ years between us."

Butler, who was 85 on April 15, interjected, "She kidnapped me. She's a little older than me and I was always afraid of her. That's why I say 'Yes ma'am' so much."

His father dead, Berl had quit high school after two years and gone to work in the printing trade to help support his family. Mildred had attended the state university at

Carbondale for two years, until her father died.

During the Depression years the Butlers moved frequently, going wherever he could find work. They got ahead enough to go into business for themselves, back in Marion.

"We had an up and down business life," recalled Butler. But always they worked hard, and as a team.

"She worked right along with me," says Berl. "She's been my partner in most everything. She's been my life partner."

Eventually they owned a fine home and a building and several businesses, including a newspaper distribution service, paint and appliance store and bottled gas business.

In addition to caring for her home and family, Mrs. Butler worked as cashier, handled collections and kept the books for all the businesses. "Believe me, that was work," she said.

Butler's days weren't easy, either. He would rise at 4 a.m. to count up to 3,400 papers out for the paper boys, then open up

the store and start making bottled gas deliveries. Sometimes it would be long after dark before he returned home.

The Butlers say they married in a different era, an era of commitment—to each other, to their business, to their family.

"We were just country folks. We don't believe in divorce," said Butler. "Besides, I don't think I could ever have walked off. She's too much a part of my life."

"We've had very few big fights," he recalled. "We've had a good life and we're not broke yet."

When their sons grew older and chose military service over the family business, the Butlers got bit by "wanderlust again," said Butler. They sold out to Berl's older brother and moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, taking on a Ben Franklin variety store.

"But the timing was bad," recollected Butler. "Ben Franklin went out of business about then."

Butler then returned to the printing business, trying several partnerships, but he said, "They don't always work out like the should."

Finally, the Butlers moved to Washington, D.C., where Berl worked 11-hour night shifts checking proofs at the Government Printing Office for about seven years, quitting at age 65.

"Those were hard years for Mildred," he said. "I worked long enough to get a decent retirement. I haven't done a lick of work since then and I don't intend to."

"I'm just trying to keep Mama happy here."

After all these years together, Mildred and Berl are still a team, says their part-time chore provider and good friend, Helen Land.

"They're good to each other. They're each a caretaker to the other," says Mrs. Land.

Both have had increased medical problems associated with aging. A stroke left Mrs. Butler with some language recall loss. Her husband has recovered much better than his doctors expected from his stroke five months ago.

Neither drives any more and their activity is more limited than in the past, but they've got each other and are thankful to be here. Their attitude is upbeat and positive.

"Life is pretty much what you make it wherever you are," says Butler. "You never know...you need to make every day count."

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