

KEEPING LOVE ALIVE

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARILYN AND MELVIN WARREN

*By Sheryl Thornberg
& Jamie Maddeaux
Photos by David Sherman
and Tom Majewski*

Marilyn & Mel Warren have been married for 63 years. Together with their dog, Brandy, they now reside at Bentson Assisted Living on the Shaller Family Campus at Sholom East.

In the spirit of Sholom, we wanted to know more about this couple who have been married for so many years. We sat down with them in their apartment and asked them to tell us their story.

One day in 1949, a friend called up young Marilyn Fox, needing to “fix up this fella for Saturday night.” It was to be a blind date and Marilyn was reluctant. After her friend’s persistence, Marilyn finally conceded, “Okay, if you can’t find anybody by ten minutes to eight Saturday night, I’ll help you out.” Her friend couldn’t find anybody, so they arrived at the well-known Criterion restaurant in St. Paul, which featured a beautiful lobster tank from which diners could select their own crustaceans.

As Marilyn waited nervously with her friend, she inquired about when this “fella” would be coming. “Well, if you look at the door. He just walked in. His name is Mel Warren,” she said. Marilyn turned her head and her jaw dropped.

“Oh, my G-d! Be still my heart!” she exclaimed. She was smitten immediately. “He was handsome, well-groomed, dressed beautifully, and here we are, sixty some years later.”

As for Melvin, he was smitten too. “Right away, I knew she was the one. I was from St. Paul. She was from Minneapolis and all the guys went to Minneapolis to find their brides.”

They were married in a garden wedding on August 16, 1949. He, the handsome “older” man at 30, and she, a beautiful young lady of 22.

Today, they sit on a cozy blue sofa with a framed Howard Behrens painting on the wall behind them. Their “absolutely-no-more-dogs” dog, Brandy, a poodle, nestles comfortably

on the end table beside the couch. Red when she was a puppy, her fur has now softened into a lovely apricot color.

Melvin, a WWII veteran was in the grocery business when he met Marilyn. His generous parents had helped him get established and Marilyn, naturally good with numbers, was brought in to pay the bills and occasionally run the cash register. Their store, Warren’s Supermarket, was progressive and known for having two checkout counters, virtually unheard of in those times of traditional “mom and pop” grocery stores.

“One day,” Marilyn remembers, “I was working behind the meat counter serving a customer who wanted Limburger cheese—sliced. So I “borrowed” the meat cutter and sliced the cheese up nicely and sent the happy customer on her way. A little while later, Melvin comes behind the counter,



sniffing the air suspiciously and wants to know, ‘who sliced cheese on the meat slicer?’ I did,’ I answered, ‘why?’

“You don’t slice Limburger cheese on the meat slicer!” Mel exclaims.”

Mel sent her back to a sudsy wash sink to clean the meat cutter. “I had to take it apart (lots of little parts), wash it, and put it all back together again. No one ever got Limburger sliced again!”

They continued working together as they raised their family and eventually bought a successful liquor store in St. Paul. Marilyn again kept the books and, according to Mel, kept tight purse strings. “She was very efficient and she could handle money well...too well! She doesn’t give me any! She’d say, ‘What do you need it for?’”

“Oh, now, Melvin, that’s not my statement!” Marilyn protests.

Melvin continues, “She’d tell me, ‘you have everything you need right here.’ And I’d reply, ‘I’d feel better with a few bucks in my pocket!’ She’d say, ‘If you need it, you can ask me.’” Melvin silently mouths the words, “I never did...” Laughter erupts.

Marilyn nudges him and scolds,



“Melvin! That’s not nice!” He grins broadly, obviously proud of her, and teases, “That’s what I’m telling you!”

Marilyn said, “I had five dollars a week to pay for the beauty shop and the newspaper. And he couldn’t believe I had money left over! So that’s when he entrusted me with the banking and the bills.”

“After the war,” Melvin recalls, “My mother got us together in the checkout of the grocery store and said, ‘The war’s over, you’re home now. What do you want to do?’”

“My mother said, ‘We will give you half of what the store earns because we don’t need it. We’re old.’”

“Half was plenty. That was very generous of them.” Then, pointing at Marilyn, he mouths the words, “I gave it to her. She still has it.”

They are obviously a good team. They talk about their son, Richard, and daughter, Janie, and their grandchildren whom they adore. “They’re wonderful,” says Marilyn. “Spoil them when they’re little, love them all the time.”

“Melvin taught the kids how to work,” she continues. “That’s important. We took them with us. Very early on,

“THROUGH THE YEARS, I’VE FALLEN IN LOVE WITH HIM A COUPLE TIMES.”

—MARILYN WARREN

we started them learning to sit nice, eat right. Times were different then. There was a Rainbow Cafe we used to go to for dinner. And when Richard was through eating, he had a lot of energy. So I’d tell him he could go hang out in front of the store. You can’t do that today. You’d have no kid!”

When we ask them what advice they would give to newly-married couples, Marilyn says, “Be honest. If you’re honest with somebody, you never have to back away or correct anything. You can’t remember a lie, but you can remember the truth.”

What sort of things do they like to do together?

“We like everything together,” says Marilyn. “He taught me how to fish and to hunt, he bought me a gun—a small shotgun—and we went hunting for pheasant. We do everything together.”

“We had a house on the Mississippi river. We enjoyed the summers there. Many of our friends came to visit there—the Bentsons, the Perlman, and the Shallers.”

For at least fifty years, Marilyn has volunteered at Sholom making knishes. Mel volunteers too. They helped sell knishes at the State Fair. “No one did it alone. We were

all together and we still are. There are about 14 or 15 of us downstairs on Wednesday mornings. It’s been a labor of love for many years.”

What was the best invention?

“The computer,” says Marilyn.

And the worst invention? Twitter and Facebook.

The secret of their long marriage? Marilyn puts it this way: “Through the years, I’ve fallen in love with him a couple times. You don’t stay that ‘wonderful’ love feeling. Life interferes with that. There are things that come up and distractions. You have children and are concerned about them. You have illnesses and things that take away some of the pleasantness, but you find it again.”

“As the years go by, you’re more mature. And you never really know the person you’re married to. If they haven’t surprised you, you haven’t been married long enough.”

Brandy gets up and walks across their laps. She cuddles down between them on the couch and they both stroke her fur affectionately. “I love her,” Mel says of Brandy. It appears the feeling is mutual.

We look through their wedding album that holds priceless black and white photos of their big day. Their beautifully illustrated ketubah, a decree of marriage, sits on the coffee table. And they gush over pictures of their family whom they love unabashedly. Our videographer, Tom Majewski, has just become a new father himself and says he’s struggling to get into a routine.

“Oh, there’s no routine after you have kids—until they leave home!” Marilyn laughs. 

