
*You're Still
the One...*



*A Journey Through
50 Years of Marriage*

If we knew then what this journey through marriage and life held for both of us...would we have been so anxious to take our vows?

1. From This Day Forward:

June 17, 1967—our wedding day.

I was the youngest and the last child to leave home.

Gary and I were married at Trinity Lutheran Church on Stewart in Wausau. My beautiful bridesmaids were Trudy (Conklin) Gajewski, my sister, Sally (Bentz) Johnson, and my sister-in-law, Judi (Bergklint) Bentz. Gary's groomsmen were his friend, Barry Haack, and his brother-in-laws, Tom Bentz, and Clarence "Ole" Johnson. My colors were pink and white. It was sunny and 80 degrees. We invited over 300 guests.

There were a few glitches to the beginning of what otherwise was a perfect day. Gary came to help decorate cars at my sister's house feeling the affects of a bachelor party the night before. The flowers were delivered late to the wedding, and my veil caught on fire from a candle at the wedding dinner, while we were cutting the cake. But other than that, the Big Day was sunny and beautiful. A good start to a life-time ahead.

My dad served "special" alcohol from the trunk of his car for relatives and friends. We had a polka band and partied until late in a non-air conditioned dance hall at Marathon Park. Ole (my brother-in-law) planted a note in the gas tank cover that read: "Congratulate the bride and groom, but don't tell them how you know." That was when gas station attendants still filled your tank for you...but Gary filled ours and found the note.

And, we spent our wedding night in a small motel in Lake Tomahawk on our way to the Rainbow Flowage for our honeymoon. Nuff said!



2. Protestors and Riots:

A short few months after we were married, Gary was called up by the Army National Guard to go to Madison, WI to manage rioting among the “protestors” of the Viet Nam War. Many of the protestors were classmates of ours and students on the UW-Madison campus.

It was the same year I made a lasting impression on Gary’s fellow National Guard buddies. On his arrival home from 2 weeks of summer camp training, I arrived to pick him up at the Armory. We had a 1965 Olds Holiday, bright red. Gary always wanted “baby moon” hub caps on his car, so I bought them as a surprise...and installed them! I drove the classic Oldsmobile into the parking lot to pick up Gary and his gear. When I stopped the car, all 4 hub caps went rolling across the parking lot—a sight to behold! What an impression his new bride made!



3. Farm for Sale

In 1969, during a leisurely Sunday afternoon drive in the country, Gary and I saw a man pounding a FOR SALE sign on a tree in an orchard on a farm in the Town of Stettin. Gary always wanted a “hobby farm” so he made an offer to purchase and before we knew it, we owned it: 80 acres of rolling hills, a run down barn and a machine shed. The 3-room home was a converted garage with no running water and a pot-belly stove for heat. That was the first time I said, “no”. I wouldn’t live in that house. That should have been my first clue that the honeymoon was over and there was lots of hard work ahead.



4. Our First Home

In 1969, we built our first home, a stick built, raised-ranch where we would raise our children and live for the next 17 years. Home-sweet-home, a place we added onto 3 times, and remodeled at least twice. We raised baby pheasants in the basement and wild turkeys and chickens in a pen outside, at one point. And, of course, cattle. We raised 3 different Samoyed dogs—even though we never wanted pets. A place where fond memories were made, the kids grew strong, and we enjoyed the fruits of our labors. And there was plenty of labor!

5. Speaking of Labor:

On January 8, 1970, our first child was born after a difficult pregnancy. We named her Jalane Katherine after my mother (Katherine) who died on January 1, 1970. She was born premature, 6 pounds, and with Down's Syndrome. Little did we understand how this tiny gift in our life would teach us about challenges, disappointments, opportunities, patience, and unconditional love.



6. (1970) Newnan, Georgia

Gary spent a little time in Newnan Georgia in his work with Weston Homes—a division of Schuette Home Builders. On one trip there he took me along. We lived in a hotel for a couple months only after we found we couldn't stay in a trailer reserved for us that was infested with cockroaches! This was a time when segregation was still strong and so were the customs of the black folk.

One day when there was an eclipse, the town nearly shut down. On one trip, Gary (and Ron) were invited to the back of a restaurant where the black folk partied and whites entered by "invitation only".

Newnan is where doctors confirmed that Jalane was born Down's Syndrome. When she became ill, we took her to a local doctor in Newnan who was least concerned about her colic—and more concerned that we didn't know she was Downs. That trip ended quickly and we returned to Wausau to question the pediatrician for his omission after her birth.

Gary made a few more trips to Georgia.

7. Advice Not Taken

It was suggested that we take Jalane to the University of Wisconsin Hospital in Madison for genetic testing. After two days testing, a room full of doctors advised us that we should adopt rather than conceive a second child. Their diagnosis was rather abrupt and basically, less than hopeful.

So we started plans to adopt. At least, that was the plan. However, on an unexpected return trip home from Georgia, I got pregnant with our second child. I guess we didn't listen to the doctors too well—just like when they told us "Jalane will unlikely walk, talk, or be able to live an independent life. We suggest you place her in an institution."

Sometimes, ignorance is bliss.



8. Welcome Chad!

On December 4, 1971, our son, Chad Eric, was born. He was so anxious to enter the world that I delivered one month early. When the gynecologist didn't show up, our general practitioner, Thomas Peterson, M.D. delivered Chad at 12:04 a.m.

I don't remember much of the happy time though. The medical staff was considering the possibility of complications or another child with problems so they instructed me not to push. Every time I did, they gave me gas. I came out of delivery happy and giggling. Chad had dark, curly hair and was an 8 pound boy that the doc said looked like a "hippy." It was probably a slip of the tongue when he saw that Chad's mother was "happy."

9. A Hobby Farm

Rolling Hills—a beautiful vista on the top of a hill. That's what we named our farm. The 80 acres soon were turned into a home for a herd of Polled Herford beef cattle. Along with that, came making crops, feeding animals, and delivering calves. A city-boy's dream of country living.

Then, Gary decided to take classes at NTC to learn how to be a farmer and raise dairy cattle. Yep, that's what I said—milking machines and all. Before I knew it, our herd of beef Herfords disappeared and was replaced with 40 milking wonders. I wonder why the word "hobby" took on a whole new meaning.

We also tried our luck at raising ginseng. Lots of hardwork! This was a popular get-rich commodity at the time – but you had to know the secret to success.



10. Farming Fiascos

You can put the city boy/girl into the country...but it's not like being raised there! We had our challenges. I liked to help bale hay on the warm summer days (for the benefit of the tan, of course!) so I'd drive the tractor and Gary and gramps piled the bales on the wagon. One day I circled the field unaware that the wagon had disengaged a ways back. Above the roar of the tractor motor, I never heard the livid yells to "STOP"! But, hay (pun—hey) my wages were cheap... so the guys gave me a second chance. Buying machinery at auctions was a must...some of it pretty old!

One time, Gary asked me to go down to the barn when the veterinarian came. One of the cows needed a shot because she had ketosis. Gary didn't tell me the shot was a needle at least 12" long and it went in the juggler vein! When that bossy reared up and yelled, I was out of there faster than you can imagine.

Another time when Vander Geest Livestock was coming to pick up a Herford bull, the driver put a rope around the bull's head to lead it to the truck. The bull took off across the field, and over the manure pile dragging the man behind. All I could do was yell, "Let go of the rope!" What a ride!

11. Always Selling Something

During the years that I was home with the kids and after, I was always selling something. It started with Sarah Coventry Jewelry, then Amway, Nutrimetics, and even Avon Products. It was pocket change...what I failed to recognize is I probably spent more than I gained from my entrepreneurship.

Gary has just smiled, over the years...never surprised at “what next!”

His comment: “I don’t even want to know.” I still have a little of that “selling” fever in me!



12. Pre-School Days (1970's)

Every memory, looking back, includes some of the good old school days. I enrolled Jalane in special education at the age of 18 months at North Central Health Care Center. She was swimming by the age of 2, before she could walk.

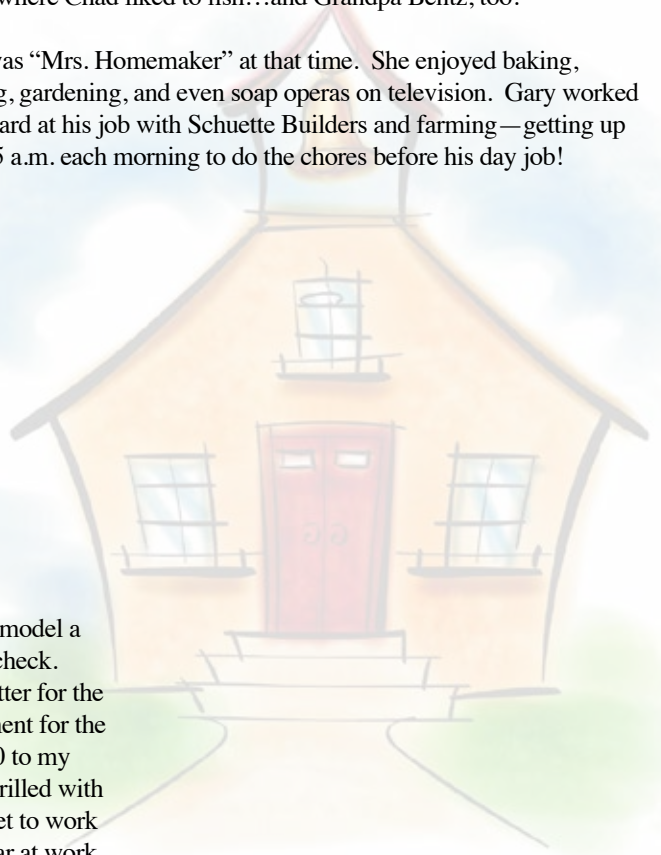
The next few years involved lots of chasing to a head-start (life skills) program for Jalane. And, this created a time for me to bond with Chad.

Chad, my sister Sally, and I took up ceramic painting classes while Jalane was in school. I still have some of those little ornaments he made. A mother's treasure. I taught special needs children swimming for a couple years. There were a lot of trips up north to Sally & Ole's cabin where Chad liked to fish...and Grandpa Bentz, too!

Nan was “Mrs. Homemaker” at that time. She enjoyed baking, sewing, gardening, and even soap operas on television. Gary worked very hard at his job with Schuette Builders and farming—getting up at 3:45 a.m. each morning to do the chores before his day job!

13. Mom Lands a Job!

In 1976, it was time for Mom to go to work. I decided I wanted to remodel a room or two and it could only be done if I was bringing home a paycheck. So I returned to work at First American Bank. After finding a babysitter for the days when Chad and Jalane weren't in school, paying my loan payment for the remodeling, and paying for gas, parking, and lunches....I paid in \$40 to my checking account to cover the expenses of working out. But I was thrilled with being a working mom, except for the time I was in such a hurry to get to work that I left Chad sleeping in the back seat. As I drove up to park my car at work, he woke up and said, “Mom, are we there!” I cried that day... “What the heck was I doing?” Good mothers don't work! (Tell someone that nowadays!). During this time, Gary was putting in long days at Weston Homes, Inc.



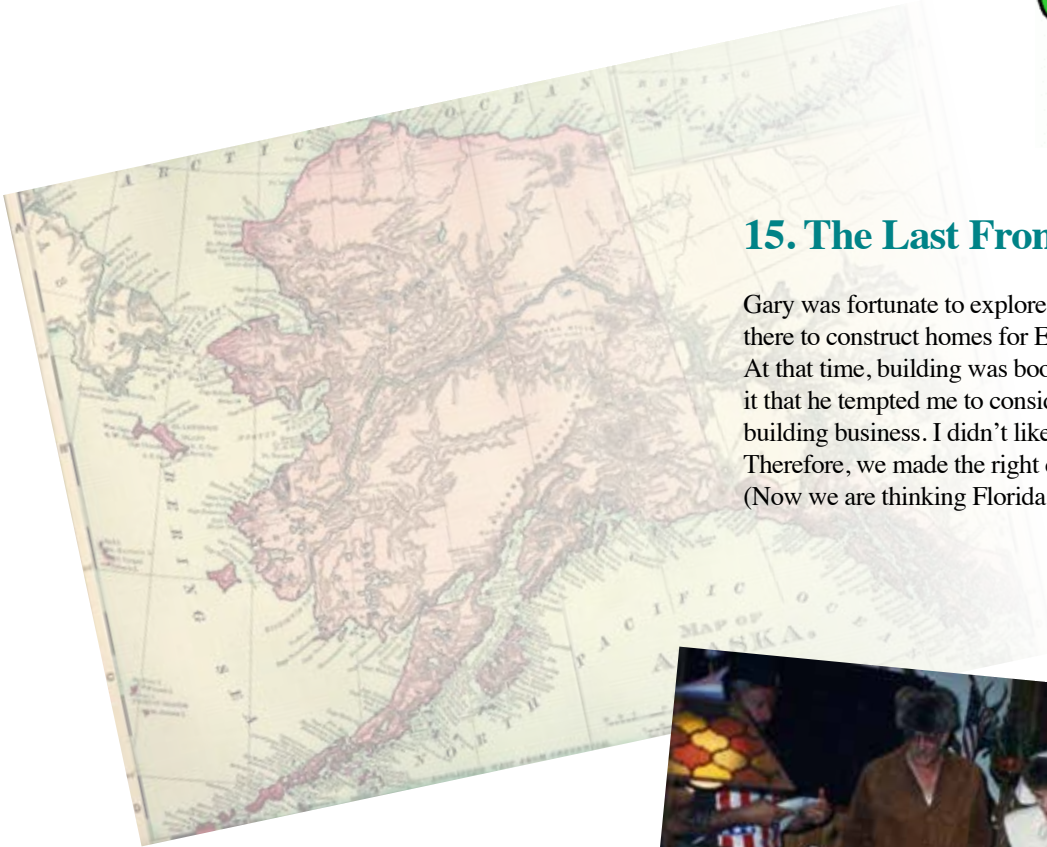
14. Banks and Robbers

Yep! In my early banking days, I was a part-time teller and I was the one that got robbed. He, the robber, appeared at my window with a note to put all the cash in his bag. I did it—what else was I to do? During the situation, I pushed the hidden alarm and the “robber” went on his way. Dumb as it might be...he took the escalator to the second floor where he could go across a tram to the parking lot. The police nabbed him before he ever got out of the ramp. And the even bigger joke was on me...the gun was a toy!



15. The Last Frontier

Gary was fortunate to explore the wonders of Alaska when he went there to construct homes for Earl Schuette (Schuette Builders). At that time, building was booming there. Gary was so excited about it that he tempted me to consider moving there and go into the home building business. I didn't like cold and snow then, and I still don't. Therefore, we made the right choice to stay in central Wisconsin. (Now we are thinking Florida might even be better!)



16. Entertainment – Theme Parties

Getting together with friends wasn't just about talking. It was about having loads of fun. Over the years, I created many theme parties to entertain. I enjoy writing scripts and organizing the events around a theme. (Bet you'd never guess that!)

One time we transformed the barn into a haunted house. We had a pumpkin carving party. We also did a Western theme, a Pajama Party, a 60's Party, an America Votes Party, a Murder Mystery Party, a Witch Hunt, Las Vega Nights, and my latest ventures have been a unique version of Scavenger Hunts.



17. Putting Out Fires

On my very first day of work, Chad accidentally started a fire in the broom closet, as I was getting ready to leave for work. He was going to help Mom in the kitchen and accidentally singed a hot pad on the burner. He threw it in the waste basket in the broom closet. In minutes the entire closet was ablaze. I sprayed a container of fire extinguisher all over the room, put out the fire, called Gary and rushed to my first day of work! This was just the beginning of juggling time, work and “fires.”

My working career since the late 1970's progressed and offered many opportunities. I worked for Wausau Insurance Companies for a total of 18 years, not counting 6 years in between at CyCare Systems. I was down-sized, reorganized, dismissed, and rehired another 4 times for WIC. I moved through the ranks from claim processing to helping design an online, real-time claim processing system. Other jobs included managing a work flow process, trainer in educational services, computer aided instructional design, system soft-skills education trainer, and finally a consultant for corporate education and training. A good career and a great place to work.



18. From Toddlers....

School days carried with it all the makings of a pretty normal American family. There was PTA, fund-raising events, basketball, baseball, and football games. Boy scouting, confirmation, dating and all the good stuff that went with it. Jalane was (and still is) involved in Special Olympics. Those years flew by. Chad excelled in sports, went on a high adventure to the Florida keys and became an Eagle Scout.



It was a time when our lives revolved around their lives, and we wore many hats so our kids didn't miss out on any chance to do something that either we did or would have liked to do. We live vicariously through our kids' challenges, disappointments, achievements, relationships, and struggles. Jalane didn't have the opportunities other girls might have, but she had ones appropriate to her. Chad graduated from Trinity grade school and went on to Wausau West. He graduated in 1990.

...To Teens

Gary and Chad survived the teenage years together. They camped during a 20 below winter night for Boy Scouts. They hunted together. They built a dune buggy and renovated an old truck. I'm not sure which kid got the most pleasure out of it. I know my dune buggy ride through the corn field with Chad driving was more frightening than the roller coaster at Great America.



And who could forget the summer Chad begged to go with a neighbor who was a truck driver to California. Mother protested...Dad said, "Let him go. It will be good for him. He won't want to be a truck driver after that." He came home sporting a quart size cup of coffee (and wanted the same, fresh-brewed every morning). He visited the casinos of Las Vegas, and probably that's where he smoked his first cigarette. Okay...that parenting trick backfired.

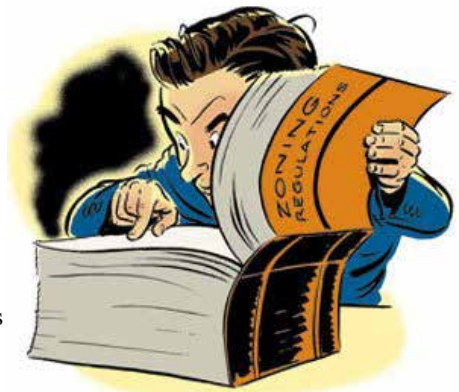
19. Downsizing Numero Uno

In 1984, when Wausau Insurance began it's one of many-to-come downsizings, I lost my job for the first time. MSWI (a division of Wausau Insurance) was purchased by CyCare Systems, Inc. whose home office was located in Dubuque, Iowa. In a management position I was asked to travel there frequently and then offered a position requiring relocation. Although many good friends took similar opportunities, our roots were in Wausau, and we chose to stay. After 5 years working for CyCare Systems (in Wausau), they relocated and I was hired back at Wausau Insurance. Some of our life-time friends were people we worked with at these two companies.

20. Career Bumps and Beginnings

Gary's career took a couple of turns too. At one point when Schuette Builders on Cherry Street closed, he decided to try something else. He was hired as a foreman at a local company. He would come home from work with his clothes caked with fiberglass and his boots a pound or two heavier than when he left. It only took a couple months to figure out that this wasn't the job he wanted. One day, he came home in the middle of the day and said he quit his job.

During the same period of time, Gary was the Zoning Inspector for the Town of Stettin. The stories that surfaced from this job are many...stories such as chickens being raised in a basement, to fist fights over lot lines, and more. He thought doing his "civic" duty was a good thing, but was happy to hang up his zoning inspector hat about 17 years later.



21. Lighting-Up

Gary started his next enlightening experience as a sales consultant for commercial lighting with Crescent Electric Supply where he worked for almost 17 years spending lots of hours on the road.

Late in the 1990's when a new regional boss came in, he hinted that he "liked young, hungry salesmen that didn't mind working 50 hours a week." The underlying message that Gary got—was "I'd rather leave on my own, than have someone tell me it's time to leave". You might say that was an enlightening conversation and the motivator in 2001 for becoming his own boss.

Nan lost her job at Wausau Insurance in 2000 and began working for Aspirus Wausau Hospital.

22. Adversity ALaCarte

Both Gary and I faced some medical challenges during the 1980's, but we are still managing to hang in there. With the wonders of medicine and a will to keep going, we continue to move forward. Thankfully, God wasn't finished with us yet.





23. (1989) Following in His Footsteps

Chad enlisted in the Army National Guard in his junior year of high school. Like his dad and his Uncle Ole, he wanted to serve. The football coach was enthusiastic because when he returned from boot camp he was a lean, mean, fighting machine—and putting him on the defense was perfect. The year he graduated from high school (1990) ...he drove a military Jeep to homecoming and wore Army fatigues bloused over his boots. He was a hit!

24. (1989) Farming Finale

While Chad was gone to Advanced Training for the military after his senior year of high school, we sold the farm. He didn't like that very much, and it was difficult for all of us. We left behind a period of hard work, good times, and country life.

We went through the 80's with 18% interest at the bank, dumping milk, buying hay during drought, and barely keeping ahead of the wolf at the door. It was time to sell the farm and put that chapter of life behind us. We packed up 17 years of accumulated stuff and moved. This began a circuit of building and moving into new homes.



*The farmhouse in 2007.
Hard to see!*



25. Bonding with Sis

Once you leave home after marriage, you wonder if you can ever live with your sibling again. You can!

We moved in with Sally & Ole for just a couple months after selling the farm until we could finish building our new home on Sunnyvale Lane near the Little Rib River. It turned out to be six months through all the holidays and winter. It was also a time for Chad and Jalane to bond with Grandma & Gramps Zastrow, where they stayed.

This experience brought a whole new meaning to “family” and was a “growing” time for all of us.



Sally and Ole – 1988



26. (1994) Popcorn With or Without Butter

Entrepreneur. Somehow that word kept coming up in Gary's career ambitions. That's when we decided to go into the vending machine business selling flavored popcorn. We planned to place the magnificent machines all over Wausau. But, before we ever accepted delivery of the machines, the franchise folded. We fell for the buttering up...but saved ourselves from a big time cash-out investment in plain time. Anybody want to invest in a never used popcorn machine in some warehouse...somewhere?

27. Grandpa Bentz

While working on our new home one evening in February of 1990, we received a phone call that Grandpa Bentz was at the hospital. We rushed there, but he died shortly after. He went out in a “blaze of glory” just like he would have wanted it. An unfortunate accident claimed his life. He died 20 years after our mom.

At his funeral, we heard the best stories about a man we realized we never got to know very well. Still water runs deep. Dad had lots of loyal friends who shared their fond memories. I even found out that a co-worker used to shoot pool with dad... “Wibby Bentz,” she said, “Your dad is Wibby Bentz!” That was a surprise.



28. Losses and Living

The losses in life are the hardest things to accept and sometimes they just don't seem fair. My brother's wife, Judi, died on May 28, 1987, and this began a series of losses and grief. But life continued, and over time we've found joy in the good changes in life, too.

My brother, Tom, remarried, Karen, and this brought a new person in our family. Their new lives together offered us new places to go and things to experience from Hayward, to Lake of the Ozarks, to Florida, where they reside today.

Gary and I also became involved in the lives of our niece, Jenny & Willie Sedlar, (Sally & Ole's daughter) after their marriage. There are just 5 cousins among the relatives...my brother's two girls (Julia and Jeanne), Jenny, and Chad and Jalane. (Gary is an only child.) Those were "good" years growing up together—and the cousins liked to tease each other. They were all about 2 years apart in age.



Tom & Karen



Judi Bentz



Willie, Jenny, Dustin & Page

29. Six Years and "Holding"

Remember that farm we owned? Well, we saved 20 acres and it beckoned. So we built another great house on Rolling Hills Lane right in the middle of the field with an awesome view. Then we built a house for Gary's parents next door. And, a fantastic "barn"— not the cattle kind, but one to store all our "stuff." We lived there six years.

Siblings can have profound effects on your life. My brother introduced us to the Parade of Homes in the Twin Cities—and for the past 25 years or more...we go ...twice a year to see what's new. What that does is give us the urge to build again. One day when I started using the decorative towels and the towels from the guest bathroom. Gary said, "This must mean we are moving again!" We both got excited about it and sold the house in 2 days with no place to go, again. This time we rented until the next house was done. To date, we've lived in 10 different places...and...who knows what lies ahead?



Rolling Hills Lane



30. (1993) God Had Other Plans

The bouncing ball of adversity is bound to hit and miss everyone at some time in their lives. But it hit us hardest on April 16, 1993, when our son, Chad, suicided after a disappointing end to a love relationship. At the time of his death, he was in the Army National Guards, volunteered for the Schofield Fire Department, and was going to school to become an EMT. We were more unprepared for this than any other experience in our lives.

The sadness and tears were unbearable, but God helped us push that bouncing ball off and that gave us a glimmer of hope. Chad's fiancé, Jenny, took her life ten weeks later. This double tragedy was a surprising new chapter in our lives, and we found we were just about to embark on a search for meaning that would last for many years to come.

31. Earning Our Wings

In 1993, we founded Wings—A Grief Education Ministry. This was a non-profit organization with a mission to help the bereaved. We spent countless hours learning about and sharing the journey of grief with others.

Wings™ published a grief support magazine from 1993—2003 that was mailed internationally. In 2003, Nan began to write for a national magazine Grief Digest and the Wings magazine was discontinued, but not the work the non-profit organization continued to do. We have a Board of Directors which my sister, Sally, has served on since the beginning, as well as some very good friends over the years.

Gary and Nan facilitate grief support groups 3 times a year, put on 3 seminars and workshops annually, and do speaking presentations. In 2005, we were speakers at the World Gathering on Bereavement in Vancouver.

August 2002

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Wings Founders receive their Certificate in Death and Grief Studies from The Center for Loss and Life Transition

WAUSAU, WI—Nan and Gary Zastrow recently obtained their Certificate in Death and Grief Studies as awarded through Colorado State University and The Center for Loss and Life Transition in Fort Collins, CO. Alan Wolfelt, PhD, a noted author, teacher, and grief counselor taught the certification process. The Zastrows began their certification in 1995.

Nan and Gary Zastrow are co-founders of *Wings*™, a publication for the bereaved and caregivers. *Wings* (or ©Roots and Wings, Ltd.) a non-profit organization, was founded in 1993. In addition to the magazines, Wings also provides community awareness and education about grief through workshops/seminars, presentations, and a Learning Support series. Nan Zastrow is the author of a book, *Blessed Are They That Mourn*.

Wings is an "aftercare" tool used by many funeral homes for their families. Sent quarterly, this magazine delivers education, inspiration, and ideas for coping with grief. It also serves as a reminder to the family that the funeral home respects their grieving process and remembers them. The *Wings* magazine is

mailed to the bereaved and caregivers throughout the USA and Canada.

The Zastrows chose to educate themselves about grief and obtain their certification after the death of their son, Chad, and his fiancé, both to suicide in separate incidents. As they struggled with trying to understand "why," they found their greatest comfort in reaching out to others and



Nan and Gary Zastrow

sharing the pain. Dr. Wolfelt became a mentor and later personal friend of Nan and Gary. He recently dedicated his new book "Helping Bereaved Parents" in honor of Chad. In the fall, the Zastrows will add a new presentation for funeral homes, the bereaved, clergy and schools entitled "How to Companion Survivors of Suicide." Many

of the suggestions offered are based on personal experience.

For other ways to obtain information about grief presentations, workshops, and the *Wings* magazine, contact Nan or Gary at (715)845-4159 or e-mail them at nangary@mail.com. Also check out the website at www.wingsgrief.org.

Wings
A Grief Education Ministry™



32. Education – Not All Book Work

Experience, they say, is the greatest teacher of all. In our case, our search for purpose and meaning led us to Dr. Alan Wolfelt, international thanatologist who also became a friend and mentor. We earned designations as grief educators from the Center for Loss and Life Transition in Fort Collins, Colorado and through the University of Colorado. Gary believes we went to the mountain like Moses (The Rocky Mountains of Colorado) on a quest...and that explains the gray hair we've acquired.



33. Books By the Ton

Nan always wanted to write, but she never dreamed it would be about grief. In 1997, Nan published her first book, *Blessed Are They That Mourn*. It was self-published and she ordered a required minimum order from the printer. When Gary delivered them on a pallet loaded on the back of his ¾ ton pickup truck...she gasped. We still have a good supply that we've moved 4-5 times from house to house. Nan just released her second book: *ASK ME—30 Things I Want You to Know*...about being a survivor of suicide published by Centering Corp. Writing has always been Nan's passion and a way to express feelings that sometimes you just can't say.

34. The Empty Nest

Our nest got emptier in 1999. Jalane moved to a supervised apartment where she lives with 6 other young women with special needs. She holds a job 4 days a week at the Northern Valley Workshop and has grown into a wonderful young woman. She participates in Special Olympics in swimming and bowling and frequently brings home 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th place ribbons. Way to go Jalane! Jalane has an independent life-style that includes work, house chores, personal grooming, entertainment, and lots of fun. Her favorite thing is "parties." Next to that it would have to be the movie E.T.



35. Speculation – Another Word for Risk

Gary liked building houses so much that he began building spec houses under the title Adopt-A-Home, LLC. We've built a half dozen or so now...and have thoroughly enjoyed the process.

People often ask, "Where are you living now?"—because we moved so often. If we aren't building, we are likely dreaming of "the next one."

Lately, we've found though that the sheet rock got heavier, the ladder got shorter, and it takes more hours to stain, varnish, lay flooring, hang doors etc. than it used to. We hire more of the work than initially. Since the housing market has changed, it's not as much fun as it used to be either. We recently closed on our latest spec house and plan to hang up the tool belt for a while.



36. By Land or By Sea

Most of our trips are the usual sight-seeing trips—nothing exotic or fancy, but just places we've wanted to go sometimes, more than once. We own a timeshare in Florida, plus friends and relatives there to visit.

We've been to Branson, Boston, New York, Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, Colorado, Las Vegas, California, and our favorite trip to Vancouver. This summer we are planning a "road trip" to Colorado again for another class and some personal vacation time. Got to visit those Rocky Mountains again—looking for Moses.

37. At Last – Your Own Boss

That entrepreneur urge surfaced again. This time Gary chose a new career doing something he talked about for years prior. This career comes with no benefits, no regular paychecks, no IRA, no vacation, and nobody to blame. But there is lots of training, and licensing to keep up---and, you are your own boss! Gary earned his Realtor's License in 2001 and works for Coldwell Banker Action. This finally touched the core of who Gary is— helping people move on. People think he's retired, but in truth, he probably works harder now than he has at any other career in his life.

P.S. Read "Confessions of a New Realtor's Wife" on www.realtytimes.com.





38. Caregiving

Gary is the sole caregiver for his parents. Lucille lives in an apartment at the age of 90 and Herb is in a nursing home. They were treasured grandparents in our children's lives. Gary and his dad spent many wonderful years working together at Schuette Bulders, Weston Homes, and Wausau Homes. They enjoyed hunting, building homes, farming, and creating experiences that bring a chuckle yet today. Many times, Gary wishes he could "rent" a brother or sister to help with the responsibilities of being a sole caregiver which involves being the primary decision making. It's a sober reminder of what the years ahead have to offer. It's also a reason to enjoy life one day at a time.

39. Location, Location, Location

A realtor thinks in terms of location and nothing is permanent. We moved to the Rib River Trails subdivision in 2000 where we built several houses. Next door to our last house, we built again. This rambler is our current home (2001) and sits on the edge of the woods at the end of a cul de sac. Perfect setting, beautiful house. Homes have stories and even though you lived in them a short time, like people ...they are a part of your life and your legacy.

This one has a rock wall that Nan built (with a little help from Gary) that goes around the entire back and side yard. It was something to do while Gary was getting his career going in real estate. It also sits on a piece of land where Chad once roamed with his friend Rick and where they burned down a hunting shack. Now there's another story!

For the past 14 years, much of our time is spent doing Wings work. When we aren't doing that, we find time to golf, ride bikes, watch movies, tour homes, yard work, take mini trips, and spend hours talking about everything under the sun.

Retirement is on the horizon, but neither Gary or I are ready to pursue it, at this point. We still enjoy working (most days), and our health allows us to continue this lifestyle.

When? and Where will we retire? Those are the questions we haven't answered yet. Everyone says, "you'll know when the time is right." And I guess we'll just take it a day at a time.





40. “You’re Still the One”

On Valentine’s Day 2007, Gary found this wonderful singing balloon that played that song. And here we are, at the time of this writing making plans to celebrate 40 years of marriage. Where have all the “flowers” gone...is the song that comes to mind. Instead of flowers...it’s been years. Doesn’t seem possible.

We’ve shared a few highlights of our lives together with you. We realize that many of you weren’t part of our life for all 40 years, but you are part of our memories. People come in and out of our lives all along the way and bring to it the blessings of good times and memorable places. We are grateful for the moments we’ve shared with you in our lives.

Over the past 40 years, we’ve experienced laughter and joy, tears and sorrow, triumph and tragedy, but through it all we’ve been blessed.

*Who knows the joys that lie ahead,
The secret smiles I’ll find.
The friends I’ll meet
The memories sweet,
The cares I’ll leave behind.
Who knows the beauty of the days,
I’ve never seen before.
My only wish for life is this...
The courage to explore.*



*We've never made a fortune,
and it's probably too late now.
But we don't worry about that much,
we're happy anyhow.
And, as we go along life's way,
we're reaping better than we've sowed.
We're drinking from our saucer,
'Cause our cup has overflowed.*

*Haven't got a lot of riches,
And sometimes the going's tough,
But we've got loving ones around us,
And that makes us rich enough.
We thank God for His blessings,
And the mercies He's bestowed.
We're drinking from our saucer,
'Cause our cup has overflowed.*

*We remember times when things
went wrong,
Our faith wore somewhat thin.
But all at once the dark clouds broke,
And the sun peeped through again.*

*So Lord, help us not to gripe,
About the tough rows we have hoed.
We're drinking from our saucer,
'Cause our cup has overflowed.*

*If God gives us strength and courage,
When the way grows steep and rough.
We'll not ask for other blessings,
We're already blessed enough.*

***Gary and I both Agree: If I Knew Then, What I Know Now...
I'd Still Choose You!***

Fast Forward Ten Years Later...

In Honor of Our 50th Anniversary

41. As Time Goes By

We aren't sure where the last ten years went or how we can account for the time. But it is here and now we'll try to summarize. Stepping back, this would make the year 2007!

Status at that time in our career lives:
Gary is still working for Coldwell Banker Action Realty and selling houses.
The market is strong.

Nan is still working for Aspirus Wausau Hospital as a Policy and Procedure Specialist.

Jalane is still living independently in a supervised apartment. She's active in work, special Olympics and enjoying her life with new friends.

Our romance lives on—visible in small ways, but within the heart—it's HUGE! We show appreciation for each other in our own unique ways. Whether Gary is bringing home a huge rock he called an Eagle's egg or another bouquet of flowers with a single red rose—it shows appreciation and love. I like doing things unexpectedly and seeing the surprise look on his face or reminiscing about our past and pulling him into the thought process...like this booklet. This always brings a smile to his face. But most of all, every day is appreciation for who Gary is as a person and nothing I could do would be "thanks" enough!



42. Home Building

What an awakening! As I started to write this section of the booklet, I compiled a history of our home building. In a 20-year span, we built 14 houses and 2 barns in our married lives. Twelve homes and the barns were built between 1990 and 2009. Each has a story that goes with it.

In 2008, we started building another house. Yes—one more. People that don't visit us often typically call to see where we are living now. This house was meant to be the last one heading into retirement. This time we located in Rib Mountain near the foot of the hill. Just as we started the foundation the housing bubble burst and the stock market tanked! We debated if we should fill in the hole and forget it or take a chance. With money already invested, we moved forward.



43. Violet Lane – The Best House of All

We moved into our Violet Lane home in Rib Mountain in May of 2009. This house was downsized from the others we built, but we love the floor plan especially the screened porch. Of course, we never move into a house that is finished. The lower level was unfinished and all our boxes were dropped by the movers in the middle of the room on a concrete floor. The carpet was back ordered and then discontinued, so we had to start all over selecting something else. This gave us time to paint and finish the trim—so good things do come with some delays.

Notice another rock wall that goes around the house....we love rock. Yes, we created that too. The bigger rocks we hired someone to move and all the other rocks were either moved by hand or by Gary's trusted old Ford 600 tractor that he bought with him from his "farm" days. Nan created a too many gardens and every one of them get weeds! We've tried training the Whitetails to eat the weeds rather than the blooming plants; but so far, we've been unsuccessful.



44. The Parents

In 2009, Lucille, Gary's mom, died at the age of 93. This truly left Gary alone as he has no siblings. Gary's dad, Herb, died in 2007 after several years with dementia. Both of my parents died years ago. My Mom died in 1970 just one week before our daughter Jalane was born. Dad died 20 years later in February 1990. Just recently we paged through volumes of photos and remembered the days when our family was whole. The memories and stories continue. Loss and grief has been a part of our lives for decades, not only our personal losses but the losses so many have shared with us in our Wings ministry. We are honored to be a part of their stories.

45. Volunteer Work is a Priority

Another thing that kept us extremely busy this past decade was our volunteer work. Gary and I became members of the Marathon County Suicide Prevention Team. We were involved in the Out of Darkness Walks and other efforts. Additionally, our work with our non-profit Wings-a Grief Education Ministry has increased. We hold support groups, coordinate a community Spring Seminar for bereaved and caregivers, and host a holiday program for the bereaved. Additionally, we do community presentations. We spoke at several national Compassionate Friends conferences, Bereaved Parents USA, and many conferences throughout the state. Nan wrote a couple more books and continues to be a writer for the national Grief Digest magazine.



46. A Job is a Job is a Job? Not really!

In 2016, Nan retired from Aspirus Wausau Hospital after 15 years of service there. Leisure life was a real adjustment after juggling so many obligations over the past years. At first, Nan continued dabbling with her beading projects, but this didn't fill the void. Nan's passion was still serving as a volunteer for their Wings organization. Writing would be her #1 enjoyment as it seems so much easier to write it and express feelings than to say it sometimes. Nan is always writing something on the computer. Gary often teases that she is having an internet affair—since every time he comes home, she's at the computer!

Nan's careers included: In the early years of marriage, Nan worked at First American National Bank. She also sold Amway, Sarah Coventry Jewelry, and Nutrimetics when the children were young. Her real career began at Wausau Insurance Companies which through the years was bought out by other companies where Nan continued to work. These included: Management Systems, Nationwide Insurance and Liberty Mutual Insurance. Combined she worked there nearly 20 years. Nan also worked for six years at CyCare Systems-Wausau. She retired from Liberty in 2001 and went to Aspirus Wausau Hospital.

Gary is still working as a realtor at Coldwell Banker Action Realty. His careers include a variety of businesses: Sam's Pizza, Concrete Services of Wausau, GPI, Schuette Homes, Schuette Builders, Wausau Homes, Weston Homes, Crescent Electric Supply and Coldwell Banker Action Realty. Does the word "homes" seem to resonate here? Seems like a big part of Gary's life. He even was a part of a project building dome homes at one time.



47. After Retirement, Doesn't Everyone Go to Florida? DESTINATION VACATIONS

We finally have time to take vacations. The first year after Nan's retirement, we decided to spend nearly a month in Florida. In March of 2017, we stayed at a Wyndham Resort in Pompano Beach, FL and "accidentally" were booked to the presidential suite on the top floor of the Wyndham with 4 bedrooms and 4 bathrooms! We invited Tom & Karen to come from Venice, FL and Sally and Ole were already with us. It was a great time for siblings to share time together. We also spent time in Orlando and Venice, FL before returning to Wisconsin in the cold.

We aren't big travelers, but we've enjoyed some very nice destination vacations. Most have been in the United States which is our preference. On occasions, we traveled with my sister Sally and brother-in-law, Ole. We also have traveled with my brother, Tom, and his wife, Karen. Destination trips (and many states/cities in between) included: Branson, Williamsburg, Dallas, Colorado, East-New York, New Orleans, San Antonio, San Francisco, Las Vegas, Myrtle Beach, Philadelphia, Boston, West Palm Beach, Canada and Puerto Rico. One great trip was Alexander Bay in New York where we visited Boldt Castle.

Every trip has a story. One story focused on a bug in Nan's ear – Gary promised it would "go to the light" if he held a small flashlight towards it. And even though we didn't "climb" Pike's Peak, we probably were the only ones who actually made a U-turn on the narrow winding road just 1 mile from the top!



48. Work is a 4-Letter Word!

The biggest realization of approaching 50 years of marriage is the fact that we've spent so much of our lives working—and I mean working hard. We've both held jobs while also managing personal, business, and community obligations or preferences. We've lifted one too many boards and rocks. Planted too many lawns in the heat of the summer. We've spent long hours at the job—sometimes on call. We've been frazzled by health issues—ours and our parents, but grateful for God's protective care. We've provided caregiving for our daughter and parents. We've spent money foolishly and made some great choices investing in friends and homes. We've purchased things we didn't need and sold them for pennies at the rummage sales, but oh how we enjoyed the pursuit! We've put on countless miles just driving around, often going nowhere—but being together was what counts! We've met hundreds of people, just because of our Wings ministry—many of them living somewhere throughout the United States. Some we call mentors, some we make a point to keep in touch with—and some we'll never see again after our initial encounter, but ALL we call friends.

Life has been good! Looking back, we concur with the words in the song My Way sung by Elvis: "Regrets we have a few, but then again too few to mention." We are proud of our accomplishments as they pertain to our personal growth, but we recently vowed to enjoy more time doing things—just because. If that means going for a long ride and leaving the grass grow for another day or eating out several times a week, just because we don't feel like cooking. So be it! There's nothing like a McDonald's iced coffee on a weekday morning! It's fun to take a day and remember how it was when we were young and dating. Life can be like that again, and now is the time. Therefore, if the phone rings and no one answers, we are probably out "goofing off." Leave a message. We'll call back later!



49. Should We or Shouldn't We

We celebrated our 40th anniversary with an Open House and couldn't decide whether or not to let the 50th pass as a normal day. But there is something special about a milestone like this. Fifty years—doesn't seem possible. We weave in and out of people's lives feeling guilty that relationships with friends seem to fade as our lives change. Our time is stretched so thin that we can't seem to fit in a moment to reconnect. That's what this party is all about...taking time to reconnect with people from the past ten years and beyond. The best way to do this was to plan a party. So we did!



50. 2017— 50TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

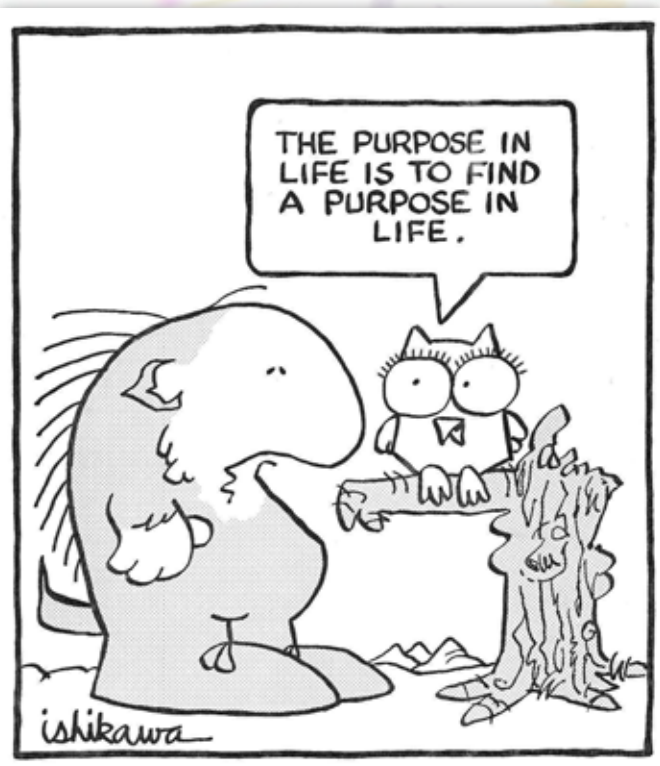
Where Have the Last 10 Years Gone?

So here we are ---present day 2017. How blessed we are to have made it all these years. Recently someone asked the usual question: “What’s the secret?” I really couldn’t think of a smart answer. I guess for one thing, Gary is the realist and the rock in our marriage. He’s supportive, easy going, attentive, forgiving, reasonable, precise, and patient. He was definitely the best “catch” of the 60’s! That makes me the luckiest woman! And my dad said, it wouldn’t last!

As for me, I’m more of the creative dreamer...always dreaming up things to do, creating parties and games, and projects without borders (limitless, no design in mind.) I fantasize about all we could do with Wings if it had endless income. I create the next book in my mind. Maybe this is the reason I spend one too many sleepless nights! It’s not uncommon to wake Gary up somewhere between midnight and dawn and share my sleepless thought with him! Plans for the next decade? Nothing cast in stone. But in our minds, spending more time together as we realize how precious time has been and is now. Another house, another move? Probably. But we aren’t building it! Time will tell. More traveling and vacations? Yes, Yes, Yes.

Continuing with Wings? Yes. In 2018, we’ll be celebrating our 25th anniversary as a non-profit organization. This is a worthy amount of time helping the bereaved and honoring the legacy created as a result of Chad’s death. I’m sure life would have been very different if Chad were here. It wasn’t the story we dreamed up 50 years ago or the way we would have written it, but things happen, lives change, and the search for the meaning of life evolves.

We have been blessed with a wonderful relationship, a strong marriage, and a desire to make our lives worthy of God’s blessings and each other. We don’t know what the future holds in store, but a lifetime of friends and family will always be a priority. Today, is just about the best blessing of all — 50 years of marriage. May there be many more!



*Thank you for celebrating
our 50 years together.*

Nan & Gary

