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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

True Romance: 75 years of marriage prove there's more to attraction than a Model A





Inez and Clifford Douthitt, who live at Chambrel at Club Hill in Garland, will celebrate their 75th anniversary Dec. 30. They've cohabited even longer, and it's not what you think. (Rose Baca - Staff Photographer)

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If you have impressionable children close by, you might want to cover their ears: Inez Douthitt is about to share something rather personal about herself and her husband, Clifford.

“We started living together from the day we met,” she says.



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Lest you can't hide a gasp of disbelief at such disclosure — she is 94, by the way — hang tight. Inez pauses to let that sink in and then — comic timing, if you will — she continues.

“He had a room in the house where I went to work as a nanny for a 4-year-old,” she says.

The year was 1939; the place, Salem, Ill., where the oil boom was opening up jobs. Apartments weren't exactly bountiful for the influx of workers, so townspeople rented out rooms in their homes. Clifford and a buddy had been in one such home for a few months when one morning, he met a cute girl who hadn't been there the day before. Come to find out she had moved into the house to clean, cook, do laundry and look after the landlords' child while they worked at a nearby shoe factory.

"I said I wasn't going to let her slip away if I could keep from it," says Clifford, 95.

So what started the sparks between them?

"I had a Model A," he says. "The '39 Ford caught her."

"I had no other way of transportation, so he took me home on the weekends," Inez says.

Aw, c'mon. There's gotta be more to the attraction than four wheels and a steering wheel.

"It was natural," Clifford says. "Just one of those natural things, I guess."

He took her to a dance that first Saturday night. A few months later, on Sept. 24, 1939, Clifford gave Inez an engagement ring. On Dec. 30 of that year, they drove that Model A 50 miles west to Missouri, where they didn't have to wait three days after obtaining a license to get married.

"From the day they met," says their daughter, Nancy Aldinger, "they always lived under the same roof except when he was in the service."

That includes 10 houses in their first 10 years of marriage. Eventually, he bid on a job in Longview, where they settled down, built a home in 1964 and raised their three children. Clifford worked for an oil company all those years, alternating shifts every few weeks: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., 4 p.m. till midnight, and midnight to 8 a.m.

On holidays, the family would wait until he got off work to celebrate. That's just the way families do things; a few extra hours to wait for turkey is a small price to pay

for being together.

“I learned to stick it out,” says Nancy, who’s been married almost 46 years. One brother has been married 50; the other, 47. The oldest grandson has been married 25 years.

For a couple of decades after Clifford retired in 1983, he and Inez spent two months every year in the Rio Grande Valley and another two in Colorado, pulling their little trailer to the same parks and meeting the same friends. Eventually they stopped, but they’ve never stopped being active.

“Through all the years they’ve been together,” Nancy says, “Daddy could build anything that needed to be built, and Mama could sew anything that needed to be sewn.”

Clifford built furniture, including several china cabinets. Inez’s sewing projects included formal dresses for her daughter — “back when they had tons of ruffles,” Nancy says.

When Inez made her granddaughter’s wedding gown, “it worried him to death,” Inez says. “He stood over me like I didn’t know what I was doing.”

Says Nancy: “My husband said Daddy carried that dress in his arms like it was a baby.”

Inez stopped sewing three years ago, when macular degeneration made seeing small stitches just too difficult. Health issues lately have been landing them in the hospital occasionally. So a year ago in July, they moved to an independent-living facility in Garland where they would be closer to their children. They also have eight grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren.

“I guess we were ready,” Inez says. “We’ve done all right.”

Last May Inez fell and “I mussed up a shoulder,” she says. Not long after, Clifford passed out, hitting his head on the concrete. He had a concussion and bleeding on the brain. Looking back, Nancy says, “I didn’t think he’d wake up the next

morning.”

They’ve rallied though, and are back to their almost-every-morning exercise routine. Clifford does the crossword puzzles and is walking regularly again. He’s not driving though; as he says, “I’m going to have to work on that.”

Even without a car — yeah, even without a Model A — the two of them are, quite obviously, in this for the long haul. Just one of those, as Clifford would say, “natural things,” ya know.



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