

A WEDDING FOR THE AGES

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Describing the wedding as “the marriage of the century,” Pastor Antonio Zotti told the groom that he could kiss the bride.

“Whoopie,” replied 90-year-old John “Jack” Albaugh much to the surprise and delight of his 83-year-old bride, Lorraine Palka, who leaned over closer to her new spouse to receive the promised kiss.

“I thank God every day that he is here,” said Palka as nearly 150 well wishers passed by to greet the couple at the end of their nuptials.

“Jack asked me to marry him 2 ½ years ago, but it just took me a long time to decide,” she confessed. “I had been widowed for 22 years, but he talked me into it. He is a very persistent person.”

Albaugh’s determined nature left him relatively relaxed as his wedding day arrived. When asked by one guest how he was feeling, he joked, “I’m still feeling.”

Explaining why he decided to remarry at an advanced age, Albaugh explained that “We liked each other and I was empty and she was empty, so we decided to get together.”

Describing his feelings as “not bubbling over but feeling good,” he described his new wife as “a wonderful woman.” Albaugh and Palka were both widowed.

Albaugh, who moved to south Florida 40 years ago from Baltimore, said that he would encourage other people his own age to make the same step. “Let them make up their own minds,” he said.

“It’s not unusual for older people to get married,” explained Zotti who has served as the pastor of First Assembly of God in Hollywood for the past four years. “Many younger people often get married for the wrong reasons, but for this couple, love just oozes out of them.

Zotti said that at an older age many marry for companionship and to spend their lives together. He said that they can “share their hurts and joys, which is especially important at that age. They have an awesome capability for that.”

During the wedding sermon, Zotti said that love like theirs is “beautiful and exemplary,” and he charged the couple to be an example to their children and grandchildren.

Palka’s daughter, Dawn Mason of Hollywood, says that the relationship between her mother and Albaugh is “true love.”

“We are very excited about it even though some thought she was crazy to marry at 83,” Mason said. “The wedding was a wonderful opportunity for her friends to get together and celebrate with her.”

Mason said that while Albaugh had lost two previous wives to death, he had never had a formal, public wedding of this nature before. “Both of his previous weddings were just private affairs with witnesses. So for him, this is his first really big wedding,” she said.

The marriage means adjustments for many of those involved beyond the new husband and wife. “While I’m happy for her, I’m really feeling it,” Mason said. “I have lived with her since my father died 22 years ago and she helped me raise my children. Also, I was able to care for her, even though she doesn’t need a lot of help.”

“I cried the night before the wedding when it hit me that my mother really was getting married,” she said. “But at the wedding I did real well. I had a real good feeling about it.”

Mason said that she isn’t totally surprised by her mother’s new venture in her 80s. “She has never thought of her self as too old to experience something new and wonderful,” she said.

In fact, Palka remains very active and worked two part-time jobs until her marriage. “I think that she will continue with just one of them for now,” Mason said.

Palka and Albaugh met through Lions Club activities. Albaugh is blind and Palka has traveled to Lions activities throughout the state as an officer of Lions organizations in south Florida. Palka met her future husband at a Lions activity in North Miami Beach where Albaugh lived before their marriage.

“Her activities are what have kept her young,” Mason said. “I think that she might settle down a bit now.”

However, the couple has no thoughts of becoming too immobile. Mason said, “Jack is thinking of taking Mom to Japan for their honeymoon.”

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