

# THE WAY WE WERE

## The Way We Were: Bill and Barbara Ketchum

BY MARY WANSE  
RESIDENT COMMUNITY NEWS

This month marks the 62nd wedding anniversary of Bill and Barbara Ketchum of Ortega. Although they love being in large groups at clubs and dinners, they have quiet plans this year with friends and family. Included in those plans is time set aside to read this article in The Resident, a paper they consider a community asset.

As for their 61 previous anniversaries, Barbara said, “We’ve had some of them in great places. That’s the wonderful thing about doing as much as we’ve done. We don’t feel a strong need to do a lot more.”

As a marriage and family counselor for many years, Barbara is aware of how lucky she and her husband are. “We have had an unusually and remarkably happy marriage,” she said. She attributes that good fortune to their differences. They each bring aspects to the relationship that the other doesn’t.

“She’s an extrovert and leads us in our nighttime social life, lining up dinners with people,” Bill said of his wife.

“I talk about ten times as much as he does. And I don’t like dealing with numbers, but that’s all he did in his career and for our family. He took care of anything that had to do with numbers,” said Barbara.

In addition to their differences, Barbara credits their long and successful marriage to Bill being “such a nice person,” describing him as “quiet and supportive.” Their shared values and enjoyment of travel have counted as well. “We’ve traveled all over this world. I’m happy we did it when we did it, because we’re too old to hassle with it anymore,” she said.



Barbara and Bill Ketchum, 2019



Despite their wanderlust, the Ketchums are deeply rooted in Jacksonville. Born in Avondale, Bill grew up on Pine Street. He went to Fishweir Elementary and Lake Shore Middle School. He graduated in 1950 from Riverside High, formerly Robert E. Lee, and played halfback for their football team when they won the 1949 state championship.

“I never left here, except for the military and for college,” Bill said. That’s only twice in his 91 years that Bill ever moved away from Jacksonville – once to serve the country in the Counterintelligence Corps of the U.S. Army, and before that, for his education at the University of Florida in Gainesville prior to grad school at The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania. And in over nine decades, Bill has resided in only three different Jacksonville houses.

Barbara will turn 88 next month. She was born to American parents in Havana, Cuba, and was raised there until Fidel Castro came to power. Barbara’s family fled the country in the late 1950s. She began her higher education at 16 at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee. Upon graduation, she moved to Jacksonville and lived with her friend Mason Darby in Mrs. Lane’s garage apartment on Richmond Street in Avondale, the property that came to be known as the Lane-Towers House.

Barbara and Mason traveled together on a seven-week grand tour of Europe. When they returned in the summer of 1956, Mason hosted a party on Mrs. Lane’s front lawn. Bill, home on break from Wharton where he was working toward earning an MBA, was invited. He first met Barbara at that party.

It wasn’t until spring of 1960 when Bill and Barbara had their first date. He invited her to a Friars party. The Friars was a single men’s group that Bill had belonged to for years. The girls had a similar club called The Spinsters, of which Barbara was a member. For the Fourth of July that year, Bill invited Barbara to another party with friends in the mountains. “That’s when we really started focusing on each other,” Barbara said.

On May 6, 1961, Bill and Barbara walked down the aisle of St. Mark’s Episcopal Church. It’s where they’d later attend on a regular basis as a family with their three children, and where they remain active members to this day. Bill still participates in weekly Sunday school classes, and Barbara still provides some premarital counseling sessions.

Upon their marriage, the couple moved to Huntington Road in Ortega. There, the Ketchums grew into a family of five. When their children were 9, 7 and 5 years old, Bill and Barbara moved the family to Apache Avenue in Ortega Terrace. “It’s a wonderful neighborhood to raise children,” Barbara said.

That was back in 1971, and Bill and Barbara still live there today, 52 years later. “When we moved to where we are now, we were the youngest persons in the area, and now we’re by far the oldest,” Bill said.

While reflecting on their Jacksonville life, Bill shared that he had held a career in the mortgage business while Barbara cared for their children at home. For 21 years, Bill was with Florida Title and Mortgage Company; he spent an additional 18 with Barnett Bank of Florida, which eventually became Bank of America.

When not at the office, Bill often could be found on a tennis court at the Florida Yacht Club. He played on men’s teams, Barbara on ladies’. “And later on, I played a lot of golf,” Bill said. “All around town, at 10 or 15 different courses. All I do now is walk with a grocery cart at Publix.” But that’s not really all. Bill exercises at the Club’s gym three or four times per week. He attributes his health and longevity to the genes he inherited from his mother, who lived to 93.

“We have observed a healthy lifestyle. We didn’t eat fat stuff when everybody else was. And Bill is very disciplined,” Barbara said.

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The Ketchum Family, Lake Glenville, NC, summer 2021

As a family, the Ketchums took a lot of trips. One of note was when the children were 10, 8 and 6. They drove for six weeks in their brown Mercedes sedan to visit Yellowstone National Park, stopping at significant sites along the way. “It was a tight fit, but we did it, with three children squeezed into the back seat, fighting the whole way,” Barbara said.

When not traveling, while the children were in school and Bill at work, Barbara volunteered for a full decade on a part-time basis as a counselor in jails and prisons. When the three were grown and in college, Barbara, at age 50, pursued a graduate degree at the University of North Florida and earned a master’s in counseling psychology.

As a part-time career, Barbara worked as a counselor for more than 30 years, the first 10 at Psychiatric Association of Orange Park and over 20 at Grace House Counseling Center in Fleming Island. By the time Barbara retired, she was already in her 80s and still quite active. “I always worked part-time because I’ve been very involved in the community,” she said, referring to her dedication to volunteer service.

Barbara was on the governor’s task force for prison reform in the 1980s. In 2010, she was presented with a golden apple trophy, the EVE Award for Volunteer Service, honoring her work with St. Johns Riverkeeper, an organization that will always be close to her heart. “More recently, I’ve been very involved in the downtown waterfront,” she said. Barbara is on the steering committee for the Riverfront Parks Now coalition.



The Ketchums, Ponte Vedra, August 1970

he meets with once or twice per month. One of the groups is called The Lee Geezers, made up of six guys who had graduated from Lee from a variety of classes. “There are not many people exactly my age still living, so I’ve branched out to slightly different ages,” Bill said.

“He has more of a social life than I do,” Barbara admitted.

The Ketchums feel privileged to be part of such a wide circle of shared friendships, yet nothing tops their time with family. “Family is the best thing in the whole world,” Barbara said. She and Bill use the words “wonderful, loving and caring” when they speak of their adult children.

Their elder daughter lives in Atlanta. Their younger daughter and only son live nearby in Jacksonville. They have two grandchildren; one attends The University of North Carolina and the other works for a company that helps with government contracts in Washington, DC. “They are perfect grandchildren,” said their grandmother.

There’s not much more the Ketchum couple could ask for from life, and they know it. “We’re extraordinarily blessed,” Barbara said. And to be living all of this in the city they’re so fond of is a bonus.

“I love Jacksonville!” Bill said.

“I do, too,” Barbara agreed. “It’s what everybody calls a hidden gem that’s not so hidden anymore.”



Bill Ketchum (7) in front of the family Packard, Avondale, 1939



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