

Pennies Get Pinched as Couple Starts Out

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Helen Donovan's late husband, Thomas, graduated with a teaching degree and taught high-school math for 30 years in Hamilton. Helen worked for Rocky Mountain Laboratory. She has six children and nine grandchildren.



We were married at St. Helena Cathedral in July of '46. We had a beautiful wedding but had no idea where we would go on our honeymoon.

We flew in grand style from Helena to Great Falls. From there he wanted to hitchhike (with no destination in mind!), but I didn't think that was a good idea; so we got on a flight to Canada (the plane had been delayed for repairs).

We couldn't sit together, so I had to sit with an elderly lady who every once in a while grabbed my arm and said they really hadn't repaired the plane and she knew there was something wrong with it. So I was pretty nervous since I wasn't even sitting with my darling new husband!

However, we landed safely at Lethbridge, took a bus to Calgary, a train to Baniff and the first thing we did when we got there was take a boat ride down the Bow River. We had no hotel reservations so we stayed at "approved accommodations" homes for the week.

He was a WWII veteran, and I had been a government office employee. We started our married life at Montana State College in Bozeman. He was on the GI Bill (\$105/month) and I was secretary to the dean of agriculture (staffed at \$125/month).

We lived in a tiny trailer (\$25/month) just off campus along with many other newly married veterans and their wives. We were one of the “lucky” couples because our trailer was right next to the community bathroom.

There was a couch at one end (living room), stove and fridge in the middle (kitchen) and bed at the other end (bedroom), and I made appropriate curtains for each “room” (sewed by hand) and my Irishman painted the inside a Kelly green.

I did not know how to cook and learned the hard way on an oil stove that was really frightening to operate. But somehow I managed not to poison him. He said he would have starved if we hadn’t owned a can opener.

One of my many nicknames was “Settler,” and there’s a couple in Bozeman who still call me that!

When we could afford it, we went out dancing on Saturday nights. We also played a game called Tripoli – and you would not believe how we fought over those pennies!

My husband would sit with one foot out the door in winter ready to get in a snowball fight with the guys on their way to the bathhouse. We had a Christmas party that year in one of the trailers with about 20 of us plus a 6-foot Christmas tree.

When they would drink toasts, everybody had to stand up, and, if one person wanted to move around, someone had to step outside. This did not last very long – we all ended up at a nightclub before the night was over.

Somehow they did manage to study – they settled down a lot by the second quarter, but that first quarter was unforgettable.

These men had seen action both in the Pacific and European Theaters, and I never got tired of listening to their stories. I don’t think they talked about it as much afterward as they did that first year after their discharge.

I don’t think there are any newlyweds today who start their married lives like we did. I thank the good Lord for giving me a sense of humor that sustained me throughout my married life.

Helen Donovan
Billings