

Celebrating More than 50 Years

A VALENTINE'S DAY SPECIAL FEATURE



A Romance that Started at Age 14

Joe and Barb have a love story that began when they were only 14 years old. The Badger High School band was to perform in the Orange Bowl that year and Joe and Barb were Freshman band members. "When we met, we had a connection right away," Barb recalls. "Between practicing and fundraising for the trip, we were together all the time that year." Even from a young age, Joe had a confidence about him and knew what he wanted out of life. "I remember he told me that he was going to own his own business, have a big house and car, and marry me," Barb said. "I was flabbergasted by the comment at the time – who knows what they want at age 14?" But the confidence of that young tuba player would come to fruition.

The couple got married when they were 21 and made a life in Lake Geneva. Joe did start his own business, Spiegelhoff Insurance, and had a successful career. Barb was an English teacher at Badger High School. The couple have three children and ten grandchildren. "God had this all arranged," Barb said. "We are very different people, but it's a good recipe for marriage. Our different strengths match each other's weaknesses, so we just work!"



Joe & Barb Spiegelhoff
Lake Geneva, WI



The couple celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 2021 and took their entire family to the Dominican Republic to celebrate.

A Change in the Journey

Their journey took a different path in 2016 when Joe was diagnosed with Primary Progressive Aphasia and Frontotemporal degeneration at the age of 64. "It turned our lives upside down," Barb said. "It's a heartbreaking disease, especially since it affects his ability to communicate, but our love and commitment remain."

Primary Progressive Aphasia affects your ability to communicate and people who have it can have trouble expressing their thoughts and understanding or finding words. "I was thankful he was diagnosed early and accurately," Barb said. "Some people are misdiagnosed for years, which can be even more frustrating."



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Barb did a lot of research and sought out resources to support them on their journey. She took several Alzheimer's Association caregiving classes. "The classes gave me ways to cope and a sense of community that there are others going through this," Barb said. "I also highly recommend getting involved with a support group. The journeys are all a little different, but we all know where we're heading. A support group can really hold your hand."

Living Each Day to the Fullest

"This journey has taught me to be grateful for every day," Barb shared. "I feel blessed to have Joe – it's a lifetime deal. He tells me he's grateful for me and I know if the roles were reversed, he would care for me in exactly the same way I'm caring for him. Having this disease is like a dance and the steps are always changing. Just do the best you can and enjoy each day. Life is finite and you have to adapt an attitude of being OK with where you are at. I've been so impressed by Joe's positive attitude. He knows what is happening to him, but he's still positive and upbeat. As I look back at those 14-year-old kids, I now know that God had a plan."

The couple winters in Florida and stays in Lake Geneva in the summer. They enjoy being outside as much as they can on walks to the beach and nearby parks. They are also active in the Walk to End Alzheimer's® Walworth County.

This Valentine's Day we salute Joe and Barb for their commitment and love for over 50 years.

