

DON AND DONNA

This little narrative will recount a few facts and a short history of the separate lives, as well as the 55 year marriage, of Don and Donna Melum.

Donna

Donna Alice Kiel was born on November 26, 1912 in Marshall, Minnesota - the first child of Guy and Alice Kiel Marshall was a little burg of about 2000 natives located in the Midwestern part of the state. Guy Kiel opened a grocery store in town which he operated for several years until the family moved to Pipestone, Minnesota. Donna says she thinks the reason they moved was because extended family living in Marshall felt they could freeload at Guy's store. He opened up a new store in Pipestone.

Her sister, Kathryn was followed by their brother, Robert, all just a couple years apart. Guy was an enterprising fellow, and while his family was growing up, he made several good investments in real estate and business. He bought a farm in Tracy, Minnesota, then 3-4 houses in the area, and then opened the first Ford garage in Wessington Springs, South Dakota.

After Donna graduated from High School, they moved to Wessington Springs. The auto business would have been brisk had it not been for a shortage of new cars off the assembly lines. Donna went to nearby Huron College and lived in a women's dormitory. One of her suitors in college was to become a U.S. Vice President, Hubert H. Humphrey. (They called him "Pinkie"). In those days they sometimes went dancing at the Corn Palace in Mitchell, South Dakota to the music of Lawrence Welk.

Eventually, the rest of the family moved to Huron where Guy opened a used car business. Unfortunately, one day a friend of Guy's was visiting their home for the purpose of doing repairs to his truck (Beatty's Bakery). The truck accidentally rolled over Guy's leg causing a blood clot. It later caused his death at age 47. Donna was 20 at the time.

After a year or so, Alice took her grown children on a trip to California. In the course of their travels, she met an avocado rancher who made her an offer on a farm. They all thought it over, and instead, came back to Huron. Donna quit college after two years. Her father had wanted her to become a virtuoso on the piano, but she decided it was not to be. She went to work as a secretary for the H.H. Geiger Insurance Company earning \$10 per week. It was about this time that she met Don.

Don

Donald Briggs Melum was born August 18, 1913 in Huron, South Dakota. His father was a conductor for the Northwestern Railroad and his mother gave piano lessons to neighbor children. When Don was 15, his mother died during a blood transfusion. He went to Watertown, South Dakota to live with his grandmother until he finished High School. His father later died when he was in his 50's, of kidney failure.

Don tried several different trades in his early years. He went to the Black Hills School of Mines for a year where he studied engineering. He then came back to Huron and worked for the Coca Cola Company loading trucks. He dabbled at starting his own business in car waxing.

A 55 Year Marriage

Donna recalls fond memories of meeting Don on a street corner in Huron, South Dakota. She and a girlfriend were walking along when Don and a pal came driving up and offered them a ride. Don grabbed her arm and encouraged her to sit with him. She was always taken with his handsome smile and confident ways. Her mother was not always quite as pleased. When Don came to visit, he would head straight for the refrigerator, and make himself at home.

Since her mother was not completely sold on the arrangement, the two eloped on April 20, 1936. Don went to work at the "round house" for the Railroad in Huron. When their first child, Jerald, was born, they moved to Waseca, Minnesota. They lived there together with Donna's mother, Alice and her brother, Bob. Don worked in nearby Mankato, Minnesota for the Standard Oil Company. He earned \$125 a month working in the office.

Trying to improve himself, he took welding lessons. It was about this time that World War II broke out, and the family moved to Duluth, Minnesota, Don went to work as a welder in a shipyard. He continued to explore other options and took a CPA correspondence course, eventually earning a certificate. Their daughter, Carole, was born in 1943.

Donna's brother-in-law, Harold Terry, called them one day, and made an offer for the family to live on his farm near Redfield, South Dakota.. They moved, and helped Terry with the farming for several years. The children went to a one room country school house a mile or so down the road, riding a "doodlebug", a small electric scooter. The last child, Michael, was born in 1950.

They had several years with no rain and no crops, and there was insufficient income to support two families. Terry loaned Don the money to start his own business in town. He opened a billiard hall and sold beer, and called it "Don's". He later had several related businesses, and at the time he retired, owned a package liquor store, a tavern (The Pub) and a Laundromat.

They lived out their married years in Redfield, financially secure and happily, with friends and relatives nearby. (It wasn't all roses - Donna sometimes said, "the first 40 years of marriage are the hardest!") Don was a sportsman - a good golfer and wild game hunter. He was also a "man's man" and had many good friends who would drop by The Pub for a hand of pinochle. He was the strong, silent type around his family, saving his breath for a few choice words, e.g. "Bring on the feedbag!" (When do you think dinner may be served) He also had his own unique brand of humor, and like W.C. Fields, it was punctuated by his own, invented vocabulary.

Donna won't admit to being a good homemaker, but she raised three well-adjusted children (one more so than the others), and influenced them with her own interesting and unique attitudes and personality. She was always ahead of her time with her ideas on health diets, herb teas, exercise, etc. When Carole brought friends home from school, she always had to warn them to watch out for her mother, who would be found on the floor doing a variety of exercises.

In an era when women deferred to their men, Donna was no exception. But she was strong willed and persistent in her ideas. She guided her life by authors such as Norman Vincent Peale and their pearls were passed along to the children in daily doses. As with all things, there were certain disadvantages to her staunch opinions - e.g. chewing every bite of food 60 times usually left her alone at the table, while the rest of the family bolted their food and ran.

And so, the children have grown, and are dispersed far and wide pursuing their various work and activities - Jerry in Minnesota, Carole in California, and Mike in Alaska.

Don died of congestive heart and kidney failure on April 21, 1991, one day after their 55th wedding anniversary. He left behind many happy memories.

Donna continues to live in Redfield in the family home. She has coffee with her sister, Kathryn every day, plays bridge and is busy with various community activities.

*Carole Melum, a daughter
June 23, 1993*