

## Bob and Diane (Kehs) Hirling



Bob and Diane (Kehs), a “classmate couple” exchanged marriage vows on June 15, 1963 in New York City. At that time, Pennsylvania required a person be age 21 to marry and Diane was only 20. To marry under age 21 required parental signatures and although Diane's parents originally consented to her marriage, they reneged at the last minute. Bob and Diane were to be married at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Bethlehem. Fortunately, the pastor had a friend who was the minister of St. Patrick's Lutheran Church in New York City. He agreed to marry them and the rest is history. There is a certain amount of stigma attached to marrying young, but the fact is, Bob and Diane had and still have a very strong, loving relationship.

Three months after graduating from Liberty, Bob enlisted in the U.S. Navy and spent his entire tour of duty as a Radarman Second Class aboard the U.S.S. Algol. The Algol, launched in 1943, was eventually sunk to become an artificial reef. Bob expected to be discharged in 1965 but his enlistment was extended because of the Vietnam War. Diane, who was working as a typist for Bethlehem Steel, quit her job and moved to Norfolk, VA, Bob's naval home port. After Bob's discharge in 1966 they returned to Bethlehem, where Bob worked at Bill Bogar's Store (Broad Street) as a TV repairman and Diane worked for Bethlehem Steel's aviation department.

In 1969 Bob and Diane decided to escape the northeast's snowy, icy, cold winters, and moved to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida where Bob worked as a Special Products Coordinator for Motorola and Diane worked for a law firm as a legal secretary. Diane's father passed away in 1977 so she and Bob returned to Bethlehem for a short time to help her mother. During this period Bob worked in construction and Diane worked as a legal secretary in the patent's department of Air Products. Diane's interest in law prompted her to earn a paralegal degree from Keiser University and in 1984 she became nationally certified as a paralegal. Diane worked in all phases of the law, but specialized mostly in probate and real estate. In 1985 Diane's law firm relocated to Boca Raton. She and Bob made the 21 mile move north where she continued in the legal profession and Bob worked for Chemical Packaging Corporation as a chemical buyer.

The next several years were challenging for Bob and Diane. Bob started exhibiting symptoms associated with bladder disease and after some testing, he was diagnosed with bladder cancer. The tumor, which attached itself to the bladder was surgically removed and required no chemotherapy or radiation. In 2001, Diane was diagnosed with cancer on her right ear lobe, which was partially removed by surgery. Then in 2014 she was diagnosed with numerous skin cancers, (too much Florida sun) resulting in several surgeries and over 90 radiation treatments. The experience of each having a catastrophic illness was devastating, but the Hirlings, being the godly people they are, remained very positive and are happy to be healthy and alive.

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In 1992 Bob and Diane moved to Gainesville, Georgia when Bob received an offer from Piedmont Laboratories to be a Chemical Buyer. He remained with Piedmont for 18 years and retired in 2010. In 1993 they moved a short 12 miles to Flowery Branch, Georgia which is part of the Gainesville metropolitan area and proud home of the Atlanta Falcons. The Flowery Branch city council hired Diane as City Clerk. She was responsible for the administrative staff, signed all important documents, attended all City Council meetings, including keeping the minutes, attended all city functions, and performed duties assigned to her by the city. As City Clerk, Diane had first-hand knowledge of the problems Flowery Branch was experiencing. The members of city council and the mayor were incompatible. City Managers either resigned or were terminated after a few months in office. The city was divided between the “good 'ole boys” who did not want change and new residents who wanted to improve the city. With a population of nearly 6,000 people, Flowery Branch had a plethora of problems that needed to be rectified. A group of concerned citizens got together and decided the City needed a new image. Seeking the most qualified candidates, they asked Diane to run for Mayor and she accepted. Diane ran against the previous mayor, won the election and started her four year term on January 1, 2006. She was the first woman and first “northerner” to be elected mayor in 125 years. She did bring stability to the City of Flowery Branch. In 2009 Diane ran unopposed for re-election and was sworn in for her second term as mayor on January 1, 2010. Shortly after her swearing in Bob decided to retire from his job. Diane resigned as Mayor on May 31st and on June 10th they moved back to Florida.

For recreation Bob and Diane go to the library once a week. She likes to read fiction and biographies while he is into reading novels about the civil war, world wars and history. They enjoy going out to dinner with friends and visiting two friends who were Liberty classmates; Barbara Zweifel Scherer who lives in Apollo Beach, Florida and Teri Matey Allen who lives in Wilmington, North Carolina. Diane is an active member of Project Linus, an organization that crochets blankets for babies and young children in need. Over the past years, Bob and Diane traveled throughout the United States, including one trip to Canada. They took two trips to Europe with friends and two cruises to Freeport, the Grand Bahama Island, the Cayman Islands, Puerto Rico, St. Martin and St. Kitts.

Bob and Diane have been back to Bethlehem numerous times in the past 40 plus years and are quite impressed with the improvements downtown and the annual Music Fest. The one thing they miss about Bethlehem, and of course Philadelphia, is the famous Philly Cheesesteak. Since 1961, the Hirlings faced some challenges, but countless successes. Together they have experienced some of life's most important milestones; living and working in different states, participating in the political arena, sharing each other's passions and watching all their dreams come true.

