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Kenny & Shelly Zegart

Ashley Anderson | August 16, 2012

Photo By ASHLEY ANDERSON | The Voice-Tribune

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Kenny Zegart has worn the same \$10 ring in the same size for the last half a century. But, this year, that ring - his wedding band - underwent a small change when his wife, Shelly, finally had it engraved as Kenny had wished 50 years earlier.

"In this ring underneath it says 14K; K is not for Kenny," he laughed. "It was never engraved, so for years I said, 'Why didn't you engrave this ring?' Contrariwise, she had the typical, at the time, very nice engagement ring, for which I paid for by selling brushes a couple summers."

Figuring better late than never, Shelly fulfilled Kenny's long-awaited request on their 50th anniversary by having their initials, the number '50' and their wedding date, June 17, 1962, etched on the inside surface of his band. "The engraving probably cost more than the ring," Kenny said with amusement.

The couple first met in Ann Arbor, Mich., where Kenny, from Louisville, attended school with Shelly, a native of Pennsylvania. "My dad always said he didn't want me to get married 'til I finished college," Shelly said. "I finished college on Saturday and was married on Sunday."



While Shelly honored their 50th anniversary with a ring engraving, the couple also rang in the occasion with a trip to Italy for the family. For 10 days, Kenny, Shelly, one of their children, a son-in-law and three grandchildren traversed the breathtaking Amalfi Coast and Rome. The couple laughed while recalling memories from the trip, including their young grandkids' precocious knowledge of Greek mythology, which left their tour guide stunned.

Finding time with their family is important to the couple, who have one daughter and grandchild living in Kentucky, as well as a daughter and three grandchildren residing in Palo Alto, Calif. To steal time away with the little ones, Gram Z and Papa Z - as Shelly and Kenny are affectionately called - host "hotel night," where each grandkid is given one night to spend with them and indulge in candy their mom and dad don't always let them eat.

"We do lots of things with the kids to keep this bonding thing going, including (Kenny's) learned magic," Shelly said.



A current member of the Louisville Magic Club, Kenny is a retired OBGYN, who recently took up the new hobby to share with his grandchildren. He's also keeping busy helping Shelly with her recent project, "Why Quilts Matter: History, Art & Politics," a nine-part documentary series that aired on PBS.

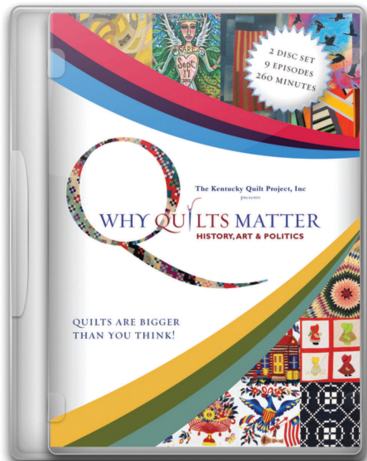
"People just don't have a clue just how much you miss out with your own family helping other families, and so

since he's retired, he's really been able to do things he wasn't able to do before, and that includes helping me with this project," Shelly said.

A renowned quilt collector, curator, author and lecturer, Shelly first developed her love for the ornamental artwork in the '70s, while she and Kenny were looking to decorate their former home.

"(Kenny) didn't really like (the art) I was bringing home because it was a little more edgy," Shelly explained. "So I was basically just on a sort of hunt for large pieces of art that he might like, as well, and just totally fell into quilts. I ran into some friends who I still see, and I was invited over to see the quilts that a young man from here collected that he took to New York and California to sell. I had to really behave myself, I was like, I want them all."

That night, Shelly envisioned "dancing quilts" as she kept quiet about her hope of buying a few pieces for the home. The next day, she had the quilt collector visit her house with potential purchases to show Kenny.



"I was blown away," said Kenny, who originally had the impression quilts were "musty, smelly, awful things." "(The collector) pulls out these works of art - which they are - and I think we bought six of them that night."

Shelly soon became engulfed in the industry, buying and selling to support her collecting habit and to pay for her not-for-profit work, including The Kentucky Quilt Project, Inc. and The Alliance for American Quilts, both of which she's a founding director. "I've never made a quilt," she said. "I always tell people I work with my mouth and not with my hands. That is not my skill set. I've certainly tried, but I feel like my role is the role of looking at, 'Why quilts?' 'Why now?' 'What do they mean?'"

In 2002, Shelly's personal quilt collection was acquired and exhibited by The Art Institute of Chicago. Six years later, she began working on the DVD series, which explores the influence quilts have today, their four billion dollar economic impact annually and the role they have played over the last two centuries.

"Quilts matter because they're at the center of American culture," Shelly said. "They have women's history that's not written. Men's history is written: wars, politics. The women's history is told, and women's art a lot of it's told, through their quilts. Quilts are one of the main pieces of material culture that really tell the stories of our society."

Independently produced and funded, the DVD series aired on a limited number of PBS stations last Fall and is distributed through NETA, the National Educational Telecommunications Association. It's available on DVD for purchase, as well, at

whyquiltsmatter.org. Shelly is also now in the process of making companion guides for the series that will be used in schools, libraries and under-served areas.

Aside from working on the project and selling DVD copies, Shelly and Kenny are heavily involved in the community.

They attribute their successful 50-year marriage to their sense of humor and humility. And compromise is key, Kenny emphasized, with the zealous woman he loves. She's "not the wind under my wings - She's the tornado under my wings," he smiled.

Category: In Tandem

About the Author

Ashley Anderson

Ashley spends half her time writing stories at The Voice-Tribune office and half her time out on the town conducting interviews, while occasionally dressing in wild outfits to fully immerse herself in the experience (aka Princess Leia at Comic Con). Ashley is a huge UofL fan and loves the Yankees and the Boston Celtics (she is fully aware of the irony). She hopes to one day outshine Erin Andrews on ESPN and enjoys running, Bardstown Road/Fourth Street, Breaking Bad and reality TV (she's not ashamed to admit that).