

Family Affair: John and Joan Haldeman

By Donna Ahrens

This fall, John and Joan Haldeman celebrated three decades of marriage—a partnership that began in front of a roaring fire in the Martha Crone Shelter. The couple had planned on a small ceremony on Oct. 3, 1981, in the Upland Garden, but the day was cool and rainy. Fortunately, Garden Curator Ken Avery was on hand to build a fire and welcome the wedding group of about 15 family members into the shelter.

Though the wedding marked a highlight of their relationship, the Garden had long been a presence in both their lives before they met. Joan, who grew up on Minneapolis' North Side, says trips to the Garden with her mother were a part of her life from as far back as she can remember. John's mother was a member of the Kenwood Garden Club, and he accompanied her on many trips to the Garden. "It's such a nice quiet haven," he remarks. "You go in there and you just don't hear the noises of the city."

Though John and Joan met in 1954 as students at West High School in Minneapolis, they didn't become a couple for more than 20 years, after they reconnected in 1977. The Garden was a point of connection for them and has been an important part of their lives together. They joined the Friends of the Wild Flower Garden in 1975 and have been active supporters ever since. Memorial plaques to their mothers hang in the shelter, and over the years they've contributed to many Garden projects and education programs.

Ken Avery was a beloved friend, and they often visit the Ken Avery Birding Terrace, which memorializes his service to the Garden. In the early 1970s, John invited Avery to speak to the 75 Club, a large group of Minneapolis business professionals. "He was delighted to spread the



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Photo by Judy Remington



news about the Garden," John recalls. The group met at Charlie's Café Exceptionale, the classic downtown Minneapolis supper club that was run by Charlie Saunders—whose wife, Louise, was also a "North Sider" and Wildflower Garden devotee, Joan notes.

The couple say they never tire of the Garden's changing beauty throughout the seasons. "We're there at the outset, as soon as the Garden opens," says Joan; John adds that they eagerly await the emergence of the anemones, trillium, hepatica and other early-blooming flowers. "We're always there for the lady moccasins in June," Joan continues. "In the summer we enjoy walking in the upper and lower gardens. And then we come in the fall around the time of our anniversary,

which is just before the Garden closes." Avid bird watchers, they're always listening and looking for birds as the seasons change, and especially look forward to seeing the pileated woodpeckers every year.

"The Garden has always been part of my life, and of our life together," Joan says. Their wedding and their visits to the Garden over the years have helped Joan and John sow a lifetime of memories, and their longtime devotion to the Garden and the Friends mission has enriched the experiences of countless other couples, families, and friends. We wish the Haldemans many more treasured walks in the Garden.