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The Beacon Journal
Sunday
December 3, 2006



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Dove family celebrates love



Akron couple reflect on life's lessons over time

He would have to be convinced.

Ray Dove is a man of science, and when it came time to celebrate the 60th anniversary of his marriage to his wife, Elvira, he was going to need evidence that the numbers were in order.

In his recollection, the wedding was Dec. 7, 1947. The rest of his family, planning the diamond anniversary, insisted it was 1946.

Documentation, logic and the persuasive tone of his daughter, poet Rita Dove, fi-

Elvira and Ray Love on their honeymoon in Toronto, some 60 years ago.



DAVID
GIFFELS

ly had a celebratory dinner together last weekend at Tangier when everyone was in town for the Thanksgiving holiday. Ray and Elvira Dove will mark the actual celebration Thursday with a quiet dinner.

And that might be the end of it if the Dove family didn't

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nally won out.

"Well, at least I remember the month and day," he said.

A good husband always does.

The fam-



Photo by Ray Dove, Jr.

Elvira and Ray Dove, who celebrate 60 years of marriage on Thursday, raised four children – Ray Dove, Rita Dove, Rhonda Harrison and Robin Waynesboro – and have four grandchildren.



Family photo

Ray and Elvira Dove at the White House with daughter Rita (center), who represented Ohio as a Presidential Scholar and was one of the most outstanding 100 high school graduates in 1970.

Giffels

Heartache and joy
in couple's journey

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have a larger story to tell about Akron, an organism that has changed so much over the 60 years of the Dove marriage. They have reflected and added to our collective experience in a number of remarkable ways.

The story goes back three generations, to the arrival of Elvira's parents in Akron. Their experience provided inspiration for *Thomas and Beulah*, a slender book of poems by Rita Dove that won the 1987 Pulitzer Prize.

The book begins with Thomas' migration from Tennessee in the early days of the rubber industry, when tens of thousands of new residents flocked here for work, making Akron one of the fastest-growing cities in the country.

Heading North, straw hat cocked on the back of his head, tight curls gleaming with brilliantine, he didn't stop until the nights of chaw and river-bright

had retreated, somehow into another's life. He landed

in Akron, Ohio
1921,

on the dingy beach
of a man-made lake.
- from "Jiving"

Ray Dove, the youngest of 14 children and son of an Akron tire builder, was born that same year, 1921.

He was the first black student enrolled in the accelerated wartime graduate program for Army recruits at the University of Illinois in Urbana.

He and Elvira met when Ray returned to Akron after serving in World War II. They courted and married, with Ray supporting the family by working as an elevator operator at Goodyear Tire & Rubber.



Family photo

Aviva Dove-Viebahn, a graduate student at the University of Rochester, poses with her grandparents, Ray and Elvira Dove.

He earned his doctorate, but midcentury racial discrimination denied him entry into a professional career. None of the rubber companies would hire him as a chemist, and he continued punching elevator buttons despite his Ph.D. Finally, through quiet persistence and the aid of an influential friend, he managed to break the race barrier at Goodyear, the first black chemist hired at an Akron rubber company.

The couple raised four children - Ray Dove, Rita Dove, Rhonda Harrison and Robin Waynesboro - and have four grandchildren.

Rita Dove, the former U.S. Poet Laureate and now a professor of English at the University of Virginia, said last week that her parents' marriage offers an important example of stability, especially in an age when such examples are in short supply.

Last year, according to the National Vital Statistics Reports, Ohio reflected an alarming national imbalance: more than half as many couples got divorced (41,720) as got married (76,258).

Sixty years, then, is all the more remarkable.

"I've always felt that a marriage - it begins, hopefully, with a grand love affair, but marriage is also work," said Rita, who has been married to writer Fred Viebahn for 28 years. "You keep talking to one another and trust-

ing in one another's love. And that's what I've seen in their marriage: it's a living and breathing entity."

Although Ray Dove has accepted the evidence that, indeed, six whole decades have passed, he still has a hard time believing it.

"Time has telescoped on us, where 60 years seems like nothing," he said. "They've been quiet years. Some might call it humdrum, but the tenor of times has been calm."

He is 85; Elvira is 82. Her health has slipped some recently, but the couple still live independently in the same west Akron house that they've shared for more than 40 years.

There isn't a secret to their longevity. In fact, when the retired chemist lays out the formula, it seems obvious: they each came from strong families; having children cemented their relationship; and they have served as best friends to one another.

They complete one another, not so much in a profoundly romantic way, but in a more important, everyday way.

Those days have strung together into 60 years, and they now serve the rest of us as a valuable example, and that alone is reason to celebrate.

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Factual corrections:

Ray Dove was the second youngest of 10 children.

He and Elvira courted before he went to fight in Europe in WWII.

He earned a degree as Master of Science in chemistry but was not able to finish his Ph.D. because he had to feed his young family – besides, for years after earning his Master's as the second in his class, the U.S. rubber industry refused to hire him in his field while giving jobs to his white former classmates.