

Posted on: Sunday, October 3, 2004

Life, marriage are golden for 'Bookich' and his 'angel'

By **Tanya Bricking** Leach
Advertiser Staff Writer

Mary Konjevich, the daughter of an immigrant from Yugoslavia, first met Charles Book in 1950 at an out-of-town church concert in Gary, Ind.

They were both from Joliet, Ill., and attended the same Eastern Orthodox church there. When Book spotted her at the concert and told her friend he wanted to meet her, the friend warned that Konjevich would never go for him. Her friend said she liked Yugoslav men. So Book introduced himself to Konjevich as Chuck Bookich, trying to put an ethnic twist on his Anglo name. When she asked where he was from, he said Iowa, and she doubted there were any Serbs who hailed from Iowa. She wasn't impressed, especially after she asked him to dance and he didn't know how.

A few weeks later, back in Joliet, Konjevich's bowling-team buddies decided to check out a new club in town.

Guess who was there? None other than "Bookich."

Konjevich tried to ignore him, but he came up and asked her to dance. She pretended to be absorbed in her girlfriend's conversation. Chuck Book convinced her to come out to the dance floor anyway. It was a music with a Glenn Miller feel to it — slow, ballroom-dancing kind of music, the kind of steps Book knew.

He danced his way right into a date, and soon, they became a story of opposites attracting.

"She was raised on a farm, and I was raised in the city," Book said. He was an only child. She was the second of 12.

Her father worked the steel mills in Illinois by night and was a farmer by day.

Konjevich's mother worked in the fields, and Konjevich kept up the house and took care of her siblings. Book appreciated her work ethic, and he fell in love with the whole family. She admired his sense of adventure.

He wanted to marry her and take her off to Germany, where he'd be stationed with the Army, but Konjevich declined his offer. She didn't want to leave her family. They kept in touch, and Book came home two years later and asked for her hand again. She accepted. They married on Sept. 12, 1954.

Book had gotten a job with United Airlines, so they postponed their honeymoon until 1955, when they could fly to Hawai'i using his airline benefits.

Once in Hawai'i, he didn't want to leave. He applied for a transfer, and he talked his bride into moving here in 1958.

At first, she was homesick.

"I always tell everybody that I made the Pacific Ocean deeper from my tears," she said.



Chuck and Mary Book celebrated their 50th anniversary last month. They say the keys to a long and happy marriage are communication and a sense of humor.



Charles Book and Mary Konjevich were married on Sept. 12, 1954.
Book Family photo

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But soon, she made friends with the beach boys and learned how to paddle an outrigger canoe. And she got a job with the Federal Aviation

Administration. Because she and Chuck both worked at the airport, they'd drive in together and have lunch in the airport's garden. Those were the days when greeters met planes with arms full of lei, which brings back nostalgic memories for the Books. They still have a newspaper clipping from when they were in their hometown Joliet newspaper holding up a Honolulu paper proclaiming statehood.

Here, they raised two daughters in the house they bought in the 1960s in Aliamanu for \$16,000. Their grown daughters now live on the Mainland, but the Books are still here, in the same home.

Chuck retired from United Airlines, and Mary retired from the FAA.

"Mary has been more than just a companion," said Book, now 74. "She has stood by me."

Mary, 75, said life and marriage have taught her not to put anything on hold, because time doesn't wait. One of their most trying times was after Chuck suffered a stroke in 1996. He was paralyzed until Mary decided to allow doctors to use an experimental drug that sped his recovery.

They consider themselves to have a blessed life.

They say the keys to a long and happy marriage are communication and a sense of humor.

"I still think she made a beautiful bride, and I always tell her, if God put an angel on this Earth, it had to be Mary Konjevich Book," Chuck Book said. "It's been a great life, so far."

They celebrated their 50th anniversary by going down to Waikiki and taking a tour on the Atlantis submarine. They also stopped by the airport to buy a ticket for a seaplane tour, which they have yet to take.

Mary says she wants their 50th year to be full of fine dining, so she's choosing 50 restaurants where she plans to toast to their wedded bliss, one night at a time.

Tanya Bricking Leach writes about relationships. If you'd like her to tell your love story, write to tlease@honoluluadvertiser.com, call 525-8026 or mail your photo and details to Love Stories, Tanya Bricking Leach, The Honolulu Advertiser, P.O. Box 3110, Honolulu, HI 96802.



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