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WEEKEND BREAK

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Muriel and Ronald Jensen on their first wedding anniversary.

Contributed photos by Muriel Jensen

Ron | The story of a long, loving marriage

By **MURIEL JENSEN**
 For The Daily Astorian

You may have read that my husband, Ron, passed away on Memorial Day. We had his Celebration of Life service today, Aug. 10, on what would have been our 50th wedding anniversary.

I planned this column about how cool it is to have a lifelong relationship back in April when I still had it. But I feel as though it continues, so that everything I had in mind to tell you still applies.

Ron and I met while working together at the Los Angeles Times. I was a receptionist on the editorial floor, and he passed my desk several times a day. He was smart and funny and wanted to be an artist. We became friends. We had lunch together a few times then he asked me to dinner. Over brochette, he proposed.

I had big dreams to move to Italy, write the great American novel and take in homeless children. (I know. How did I think I was going to do all that at the same time? Big dreams, short on plans. But that's me.) I said no.

He launched a campaign to make himself indispensable. A single rose was delivered to my desk every day. A cup of tea would appear when I returned from an errand. I found little gifts in my file drawer. Once a very realistic plush white mouse made me scream so loudly that security came running from all directions.

Then Ron disappeared for several days on a sudden, unannounced vacation. Life at my desk was grim; no flowers, no mice, no jokes. No tea! When he returned the following Monday, I proposed to him.

We lived in McMinnville, where he was editor of the News-Register, and where we adopted our children; Boise, Idaho, a nice city, but we all missed the water; then came to Astoria in 1976 to buy the Columbia Press. We lost our shirts, but we'd found our home. Ron got a job selling cars, painted on the side, I worked in retail, and life went on.

Life together

In 1983, Harlequin expressed interest in a romance novel I'd submitted. It required a few changes by Decem-



Muriel and Ronald Jensen celebrating Ron's last birthday, March 20.

ber (this was October) before they would go to contract. I worked full-time in a Hallmark shop with Christmas around the corner.

The "few changes" were a complete rewrite. I was almost hysterical, but Ron had it handled. He cooked, did dishes, cleaned house, shopped and rode herd on the children so that all I had to do was write.

When I sold the book, he finally had time to paint. Boats and historic homes were his favorite subjects, and he did well enough to support a small studio above what is now Carruthers.

My favorite memories of our time as empty-nesters are road trips to writers' conferences and art shows. We talked and laughed, nibbled on sinful snacks and enjoyed the intimate bubble surrounding two people in a car on the open road.

We were in that magic circle in a relationship where the more love you give, the more you get back. The more you get back, the more you want to return. And on and on. It was both miraculous and comfortingly stable, like

being on a broad sidewalk in the middle of the sky.

Then diabetic neuropathy took its toll on his body. No longer able to hold on to or manipulate a brush, he eventually gave up painting. Walking grew difficult.

He complained very little, though everything became an ordeal. Sometimes he was grumpy, which made me grumpy.

Something that frustrated both of us and became an inside joke was his need for "one more thing." Toward the end, he could do very little for himself. I tried not to leave him for too long, so he would save every need for the next time I passed through the room. "Could you plug in my Kindle? Clean my glasses? Bring me some coffee?" I would provide all those things, then he'd say, "Oh, and one more thing ..."

By 11 at night, that one more thing could make me crazy. We snarled at one another occasionally but understood, I think, that we were just doing the best we could in a tough situation.

He seemed to have such endurance, I thought he would live forever.

'I will love you always'

I have no regrets, and I don't think he had either, which makes it hard to be sad. His spirit lingers in the house and on the porch, where we often sat on sunny days.

I was going through cards and letters I've saved and found a card he gave me on our 42nd anniversary. He wrote, "I have loved you for 42 years. I will love you when it's 50 years. I will love you beyond that. I will love you always. Here's to love, romance, and fun." He signed it with a sketch of a heart and clinking champagne glasses.

So I guess this is still a story about how great it is to have the love of a long marriage. What I didn't know before is how well that love can sustain you when you're forced to go on alone. But what I wouldn't give now to hear him say, "Oh, Honey? One more thing ..."

Jensen wrote for Harlequin from 1984 until her retirement last year. She's published 93 books in the American Romance line, Superromance and Harlequin Historicals. She lives in Astoria with a Westie mix named Claire and a pair of Tabby cats. She has three children, nine grandchildren, and the great-grands are still coming.