A lesson in longevity

Gutsches celebrate birthdays, anniversary together

BY CHRIS GESSELE

Laura Unterseher was with Elmer Moran and Viola Suesen on the day she met Reuben Gutsche. She knew him as the cousin of her friend's boyfriend -- and the guy who talked a lot. "The more I saw him the more I liked him," Laura said, smiling. "He always had something to say." "I had a car," Reuben said, offering his explanation for Laura's interest in him. Reuben, on the other hand, appreciated Laura's Hazen upbringing. "None of this out-of-town stuff," Reuben said. "Nothing like a home-grown girl!"

Fast-forward seven decades, and Reuben and Laura Gutsche are celebrating their 69th wedding anniversary and 90th birthdays together. Reuben was raised by Reinhold and Christina Gutsche on a farm about 12 miles north of Hazen. He had four sisters. "She (Sister Rhea) wanted to play house all the time. She could not get it into her head that I was not a girl," Reuben begrudgingly recalled.

Reuben was baptized as "Robin," though his Norwegian teacher "knew better" and changed his name once he started school. Laura, the daughter of Dave and Ida Unterseher, grew up in Hazen. Coincidentally, she also underwent a name change. Laura was originally named "Lorentina" at the suggestion of a family friend, though her mother changed it when Laura started school. Reuben and Laura began "seeing each other steadily and a lot" by the time they were both 19, Reuben said, and he felt it was time for them to get married. His mother, however, forbade him to marry until he was 21.

Reuben obeyed his mother's wishes. Barely. He married Laura on April 18, 1942 -- two days after he turned 21 -- at St. Peter's Church along North Dakota Highway 186 north of Hazen. It was the same church in which Reuben was baptized and confirmed, he said.

The couple moved to Hazen in 1945, and has kept busy with chores inside the home and on the farm. Reuben said Laura is a "good worker." That's another reason I married you," he said.

In the 1940s the couple lived for a short time in a house in Stanton for $800, with money from the sale of Reuben's 1939 Ford convertible, and in Minnesota. Reuben and Laura recalled many good times being rationed during World War II, and that stamps were required to buy products such as gas, tires.

You don't agree all the time, but we have our ups and downs. I think that's what makes us stronger," Laura said. "We have our Christianity. God was with us a lot of times. Things have happened to us, but God was with us.

People don't live how they used to," Reuben said. "Things are different, they're not dedicated like they used to be. Not even to their own kids. The word 'no' they don't want the kids to learn the word 'no.'"

"And when things go bad, you don't have to fall to pieces. When things go bad ... you just have to accept it," he added.

In addition to their 69th wedding anniversary on April 18, Reuben celebrated his 90th birthday on April 16 and Laura will turn 90 on May 1.

"Celebrate with the Gutsches"

An open house will be held in honor of Reuben and Laura Gutsche's 60th wedding anniversary and their 90th birthdays from 1-3:30 p.m. Sunday at Hazen City Hall.

The event includes a program starting at 2 p.m., which will consist of performances by the English Lutheran Church Choir and Occasional Gospel Quartet.

The Gutsches' wedding anniversary fell on April 18. Reuben turned 90 on April 16 and Laura will turn 90 on May 1.

She said, as her mother lived past 100 and her grandparents survived to their late 80s and early 90s.

As the old saying goes, work never killed anybody yet," Reuben said.

In celebration of their milestone birthdays and wedding anniversary, an open house will occur for Reuben and Laura on Sunday at Hazen City Hall.

The open house will run from 1-3:30 p.m. Sunday, with a special program starting at 2 p.m. that will consist of the English Lutheran Church Choir and the Occasional Gospel Quartet.

"We're very happy about it. It's exciting -- so many good friends that are doing this," Laura said. "I never thought anything like that would happen to us."