

Member spotlight: Ruth and Jerry Hazeltine

Interviewed by: Art Holden

Sitting up front on the organ side of the church, Ruth and Jerry Hazeltine have occupied that pew for many a year, but it's nowhere near as many as the two have known each other.

"I've known her since she was 3 and I was 5," said Jerry, now 81 years old. "Her mom and dad and my mom and dad were farming friends."

But the two took a long and winding route to becoming husband and wife, despite dating in high school – Jerry at Coventry, and Ruth at Northwest in Canal Fulton.



Jerry, whose mom died when he was 5 and his dad when he was 22, still lives on the property that he grew up on, just outside the Barberton city limits on Turkeyfoot Road. He went off to Vietnam in 1966 and 67 and returned to the farm after serving his time.

"I went on with my life and married Roemanas (Summerfield)," explained Ruth, now 78. They had two daughters, Amy and Tina, and joined High Church in 1968 at the suggestion of Bill Himelrich.

Roemanas Summerfield died in 1991, and at the urging of Ruth's brother, Jerry started dating Ruth again, and the two of them married in 1994.

"My brother and Jerry were best friends, he's always been part of the family," said Ruth.

But even though Jerry always had an eye for Ruth, there were still some "rules" he had to follow to make the marriage work out.

"I told him 'you don't interfere with church, God comes first,'" said Ruth. "'If you do, we're done.' A year later he said he was ready to start coming to church, and we've been coming ever since."

And while joining the church and pitching in to help where needed was Jerry's "part of the deal," Ruth had some learning to do as well, especially as they moved into the farmstead, where they built a new house, but Jerry was still set in his ways.

"My dad used to go to auctions and buy and sell, he was a 'horse trader,'" said Jerry. "So, I bought and sold a lot, that's what I do."

If there's an auction within 30 miles of Barberton, you can probably find Ruth and Jerry in the crowd. In fact, Jerry for years worked part-time helping auctioneer Harold Farnsworth, that is when he wasn't at his side job at Chislers Monument and Stone or working full-time for 31 years at B&W.

All his life, Jerry has tinkered with engines, tractors, and lawn mowers, fixing some and scrapping others. Over the years, he figures he's had well over 35 farm tractors, and has a particular love of anything John Deere, even having as many as eight at one time in his barn. If you need an old engine part, a belt or bolt, carburetor or back tire, Jerry's probably got it somewhere in his barn.

As for the church, Ruth and Roemanas started out teaching Sunday School together, and for years after Ruth and Jerry got married, they were in charge of the nursery. Ruth also spent many years as chairperson of missions for Emanuel, and now Ruth and Jerry pitch in where needed, and are big helps during the annual High Church yard sales.

"We really like the friendliness of the church," said Ruth. "The church tries to include you in all the activities. We'll always help when we can. That's our duty, to help people."

In the meantime, you can find Ruth and Jerry three rows back at the end of the pew. And, if you watch closely, and it's an old-time hymn favorite, you might see Ruth's head bobbing as she's particularly fond of the classics.