

Keep a level head, and keep the faith, say 80-year couple

By Meredith Rutland
STAFF WRITER

EUSTIS — Hastings Bean, 101, dropped out of Washington Missionary College near Washington, D.C., to be a supervisor in the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Co. He made top wages: 60 cents an hour.

His wife, Norma, was a housewife. She raised a “strong-willed” daughter and took in about a dozen people — from family to the elderly — throughout her lifetime. She made chocolate-covered cherries that people begged to buy.

The Beans moved to Eustis in 1985. Fourteen years later, Norma got, and beat, breast cancer.

They get along splendidly, and today they will celebrate their 80th wedding anniversary.

“What would you argue about?” the 99-year-old Norma asked. “I know my mother and father used to holler at each other, but we’ve never done that.”

‘God bless them’

Both said there is no secret to their long lives together — it’s a matter of keeping a level head and not letting bad things bother one too much. A diet of fruits, vegetables and Kit Kat bars helps.

Faith is also vital, Norma said. The Beans attend the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Eustis.

The family Bible sits in a glass case in the living room, its pages worn from generations of use. Tucked inside are yellowed newspaper clippings and photographs of relatives. Seven generations of family births and deaths are listed in that Bible.

The Beans’ love is inspiring, said Andrew Daire, executive director of the University of Cen-



TOM BENITEZ/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The Beans’ marriage began with a surprise engagement and a surprise wedding. They moved to Eustis in 1985.

tral Florida’s Marriage and Family Research Institute. With the national divorce rate at 55 percent, and Florida’s rate slightly higher, he said lifetime marriages are becoming rarer.

“Oh, God bless them,” Daire said. “I think it’s outstanding.”

Still a gentleman

Their long journey together included a surprise engagement — Hastings took Norma to a jewelry store and told her to pick out a ring. He also pulled a fast one when they got married. Supposedly on their way to visit relatives, Hastings made a wrong turn on a highway, Norma recalled.

“I said, ‘Hastings, we are going the wrong way.’ He said, ‘No, we’re not.’ I said, ‘How come?’ And he said, ‘Because we’re going to get married,’” Norma said.

They drove in his Ford Model T over the West Virginia border and were married in a St. Marys courthouse.

He was always like that, Norma said. He would

make a decision and let you know about it when he was good and ready for you to know.

Norma said she fell for Hastings because he was a gentleman. He still is, she said.

Their wedding photo shows a young man with a dapper goatee smiling sheepishly next to a woman with glowing skin and shining eyes.

‘Wonderful life’

Eighty years later, their looks may have changed, but Hastings said his wife still has her beauty — and her slender legs. His hearing is fading, and Norma can’t stand for long, so they help each other. When they make dinner, Hastings gathers the ingredients from the cabinets and lay them out where Norma sits, chopping and preparing their meal. They use a lot of paper plates.

They said they’ve savored their years together.

“We’ve had a wonderful life,” Hastings said. “We’ve got a lot of years ahead of us — but we’ve got more behind us.”