

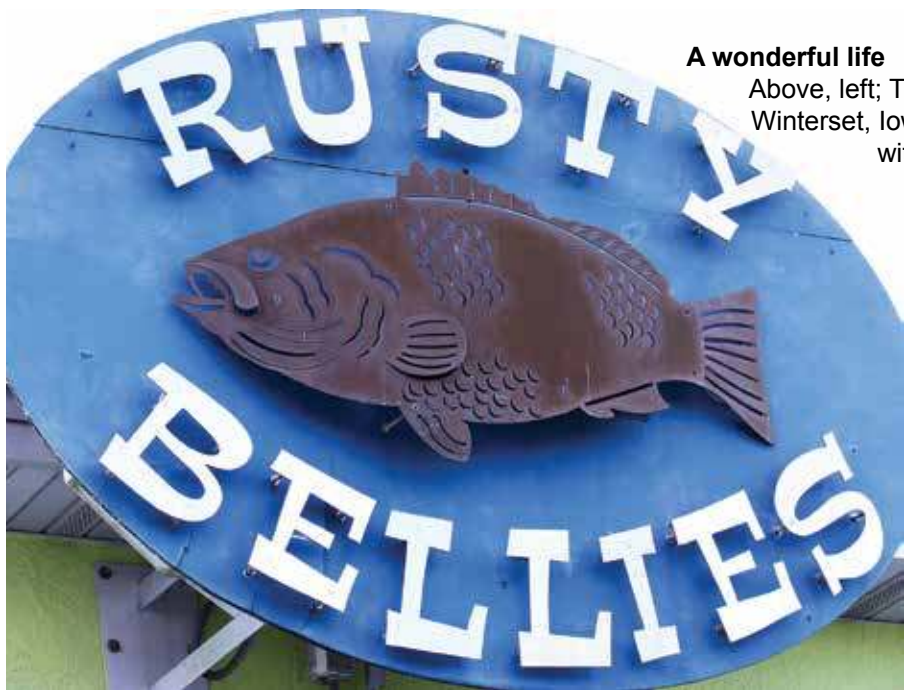
Remembering a life together, Bob and Alice



PHOTO COURTESY OF BOB GIBSON

A wonderful life

Above, left; The courtyard at Ringling Museum. Above, right; Married on June 28th, 1958, in Winterset, Iowa, they spent 62 glorious years together. Above, middle, left; A diver connects with a manatee in Crystal River. Middle, left; Rusty Bellies compared favorably to Anna Maria Oyster Bar. Bottom, left; A white egret poses for a picture.



Dave Gibson Bradenton, Florida

Shortly after arriving in Wisconsin for my mom's funeral last October, my dad asked me if I would accompany him on a trip to Florida to visit some of the places he and Mom spent time together and relive some of those fond memories. It had been a hard year for him caring for Mom and even sleeping on an air mattress close to her hospital bed in the kitchen during her final months in case she needed him.

At Mom's funeral, my dad's best friend Bill Griffie who performed the service noted that it was as if they were joined at the hip. Their lives began together in 1958 in North Carolina where I was born while my dad served his hitch in the Marine Corps and my mom, with her head for numbers and communication skills, worked a good-paying job at a bank. Living in a small trailer, it was a joyful time where they made lifelong friends and liked to reminisce about.

After serving his time in the military, Dad took employment as a pharmacist in Rochelle, Illinois. My sister Sue was born there in 1961 and my brother Dan in Beloit, Wisconsin, in 1966. At the age of 33 my dad purchased a drug store in Woodstock, Illinois, where they raised their family. My parents would own and operate several successful gift stores thereafter.

my dad's life and at age 50 they semi-retired to a home they built on Geneva Lake, Wisconsin, so he'd have a place to anchor his sailboat. Collecting the mail at their pier from the mail boat during the summer months was part of the routine. For a few years he was a tour boat captain on the Lady of the Lake.

When the Great Lakes became too small, Dad and his younger brothers Denny and Mark motored his 36 ft. Bavarian sailboat from Lake Michigan down the Illinois, Mississippi, Ohio, and Tennessee Rivers to Kentucky Lake which was as far as his brothers could accompany him. As always, my mom and dad could count on one another so Mom drove down to Kentucky Lake to be with him and complete the transit via the Tennessee and Tombigbee river systems and onward to Bradenton, Florida where they'd moor the boat at Twin Dolphins Marina. I probably visited a half dozen times staying on the sailboat or in the condo they later purchased.

From there adventures sprung dragging my mom and dad to various refuges for wildlife pictures, to which they more than willingly complied. Swimming with the manatees in Crystal River and frolicking alongside dolphins at Marathon Key were among the excursions. My dad likes to tell the story of when at Myakka River State

Sailing was always a fulfilling part of

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PHOTOS BY DAVE GIBSON

Sharing adventures together

Above, left; Bob and Alice Gibson cozy up on the couch. Above, right; Captain Bob behind the helm on an evening sail. Bottom, right; Inspired by the famous Life magazine photo, the *Unconditional Surrender* sculpture looms large in Sarasota, Florida. Bottom, left; Relaxing on the 36 ft. Gibson Girl.

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Park he claims I asked him to distract an alligator for a better picture. To my recollection, I might have said I needed the sleepy alligator's eye for the shot, but it was of his own volition that he crossed the bridge to the other side of the river and stood 25 ft. behind the rather large gator with its eyes wide open. We once spotted a rare Florida panther on a trail and fished the Everglades where Mom pulled in a feisty bluefish. I joined them for an epic six week sail to the Bahamas (see Red Port Wine, September 6, 2007, at www.DaveGibsonImages.com under Articles/Newspaper Articles) and a trip to Dry Tortugas with my aunt and uncle.

Landing at Tampa in the afternoon, our first stop was Anna Maria Oyster Bar on Anna Maria Island. The Early Bird Special of all-you-can-eat popcorn shrimp was no longer on the menu, but the all-you-can-eat fish & chips made a fine substitute. Thinking back upon all the good times that he spent there with Mom and friends or family that visited made my dad sad.

Their favorite restaurant was the Hickory Hollow which they jokingly labeled the "Headless Hog" after the pig sculpture sign by the road missing its head as a result of an ordinance dispute. Happily, its head has been reattached but now wears a mask. Being an Iowa farm girl, it was particularly beloved by Mom for its sweet tea, pig-shaped wooden cutting board menu, and the

rural ambiance. My dad ordered the only thing he ever orders when dining at the "Hog" - a satisfying pulled pork sandwich. Another local attraction they enjoyed is the Ringling Museum in Sarasota. I remember my mom posing for a photo at a display with her head in an open tiger's mouth.

Charming the attendant to gain entry to the pool area and docks at Twin Dolphins Marina much as his father would have done, my dad said it was like entering the *Twilight Zone*. The amiable ex-drill sergeant harbormaster Charlie had died a year earlier and except for bigger boats in the marina than before, little had changed. In the coming days we were able to retrace much of the old stomping grounds. Places that might seem insignificant such as the Publix Super Market, library, or a now-closed ice cream parlor where young grandson Evan was convinced served the "best ice cream in the world" had meaning. Mixon Fruit Farms offered fresh-squeezed Florida orange juice samples and a multitude of delicious fruits, cured meats, bakery, and confectionaries.

Dad said he was glad he had made the bittersweet journey and I was more than happy to share the week with him in what he described as a "catharsis." He also philosophized about life being divided into chapters for which the one in Florida was special for them both. Now 84 years old, he treasures the 62 years spent with his lovely bride and holds her dear to his heart thinking of her often.

