

One picture to tell the tale of 55



John and Janet Jouvstra of Colborne marked their 55th wedding anniversary March 13.

There is one wedding photo to recapture the marriage of John and Janet Jouvstra.

"You couldn't get nothing in those days," Janet recalls in her Dutch accent.

"But there was always a way," chuckles John.

The photograph, taken in Holland in 1944, has its own tale to tell.

"I had on a dark dress because you couldn't get white material," says Janet.

In fact, she borrowed the dress from a friend who had worn it for her wedding three weeks prior to the Jouvstra ceremony. She was 20 years old, he 21.

"She didn't want money, no payment for the dress, but she asked me for a cake," Janet recalls. No easy feat when sugar, butter, even flour were precious and rare commodities.

"But we did it," and John, smiling, offering up no further explanation.

Fifty-five years married; John and Janet shake their heads in incredulity - and simultaneously burst out laughing. That humour, the ability to laugh at themselves and the foibles of personal characteristics, is a warm, sparkling bond in their William Street living room. The charm, and John would no doubt guffaw the term, is heightened by their frank acceptance of both good and bad times.

was no market for the product in Canada). So, I rented a house, barn and four acres. I was going to farm. I had four cows and some pigs."

To augment the income, he first worked in construction, then again in farming at Newmarket. Still trying to even out the seasonal financial fluctuations, he took work at a tannery in 1953 but, "Sure enough, February 1954, I was out the door. Plastic came in. Plastic shoes, handbags, and leather went down."

To get feed for his livestock, he began work at a feedmill, working very long hours for very little money.

"Then I began a chicken-killing operation - 15,000 broilers. That's small potatoes now, but it didn't pan out. They squeezed the little man out with larger operations."

In the fall of 1954, Hurricane Hazel struck with devastation.

"I had a connection with the local IGA. We sold dressed chicken to them, and they asked me if I would be the store manager in Sutton," John laughs. "I said I'd have to learn a lot. I worked till April, but it was not for me, stocking shelves and inside. I went back to the feed mill as a truck driver delivering feed."

By 1956, the Jouvstra's were back on a dairy farm where John was the

farm manager. The owner, an engineer at the Avro Arrow plant, suddenly dies of cancer in 1958 and his son, also an Avro Arrow employee was laid off and came home to run the operation. John was laid off.

"We went to Hanover to a dairy farm, the guy I worked for was not bad, but he was a peculiar guy. He could make money like water. He ran a textile mill on the second floor," an added responsibility for John. Working 4 a.m. to 7 p.m. and with a young family at hand, John called it quits.

A friend from Colborne, employed apple packing, urged the Jouvstra's to come to Colborne to live and work. When the friend phoned to report a job was waiting, the move was on.

"I rented a house behind the Baptist Church in town. It had been condemned, so we did a lot of work there, put hydro in, stayed a year."

In 1959, the Jouvstra's bought a house on William Street, across from their present home.

"Then I worked on different things. A bakery truck, at the cement plant, apple packing, Bowes."

In 1969, Janet and John built the home they now live in. Piece by piece, the home was entirely constructed by themselves, hoisting walls in place

with the help of neighbours.

When completed, they rented the new home. In 1975, they sold their original house and moved in to their self-made home.

Marking their 55th wedding anniversary seemed a trick of time for the Jouvstras.

"It seems like we just had 50 years," says Janet. "It's like going from Monday to Friday for 55."

On March 13, 28 family members gathered at John and Janet's favoured dining establishment - The Swiss Chalet at the Highway 401 exit to Port Hope.

"We were in the middle with everyone around," Janet says. "I got lots of hugs that day."

Their two sons and one daughter, "6.5" grandchildren and four great grandchildren, the family celebrated.

Missing from the dinner was their newest "family" member, a cat inherited



from a man John used to drive to medical appointments.

"I have been driving for Community Care for 11 years. I drive people. That's what I like. It's something to do."

When the cat required a home, John initially refused.

"But it's a lovely animal," he says. The cat adores Janet, playing like a kitten for her.

The couple laughs at their smitten enthusiasm for the cat.

"When we run out of topics for conversation, we can talk about the cat," John laughs.

"I call her the Road Runner," John says of Janet.

"I like to be outside, to walk. I used to walk uptown twice a day every day, but now I don't do that. I stay around here because I'm afraid I might get lost," Janet says, explaining, "I don't remember too good anymore."

Which leads to more mutual laughter. "I can't remember what I watched on television the night before. I try to tell him about a story I've seen, but I can't remember how it ended. And I don't remember names of people, but I remember where they live, what their houses look like."

No problem. They'll be talking community news, and Janet will describe the person she's referring to by their residential attributes: John fills in the name. Drawing on 55 years-plus of residential data strikes them both as being particularly humorous.

The 1950, the Jouvstras came to Canada to work on a Quebec dairy farm.

"We didn't speak English," John says, and with his characteristic practicality, he bought a radio to serve as their ESL instruction.

"I worked hard for him," John says of his first employer. In the winter, we went into the bush to cut wood with a hand saw. It was very hard work, but when you come to a foreign country knowing nothing, you are the water bearers. You do what you can. If you want to work, you've got to go after it."

In 1952, the couple moved to Alliston, Ontario for three months, and on to Queen'sville north of Toronto, "I worked for a turnip farmer, but in those days of foot and mouth disease, there was no trade with the United States. The prices could fall (if there