

Hear our FUMC Georgetown Family Stories

When you have spent 73 years with someone you are a certified expert on who they are. Nell Benold adores her husband, Doug. She admires him for his selfless work with the ill and for the never wavering, generous man he's always been. They now live at the Wesleyan. They have four children, two sons and two daughters, two of whom live in town.

Doug was the youngest of seven children. His dad was a circuit pastor serving a collection of Methodist congregations in small Texas towns in the Hill Country of the Southwest Conference. He grew up in those small towns, like Kerrville and in Mason County, but also San Antonio.

Nell grew up the daughter of a teacher turned farmer in the tiny town of Chester, northeast of Livingston. She had one sister who was four years older. Her family was very devout and adamantly sought to make sure that the children knew they needed to be a Christian and circumspect in their actions. Nell's mom always had dinner waiting on any Sunday in case nobody else asked the visiting pastor to come to lunch.

Nell's upbringing was in the local Methodist church. The building was shared equally with the local Baptist Church. Two Sundays would be with Methodists leading the service and two Sundays with the Baptists leading the service. One Sunday, a brand-new graduate Methodist pastor came to town to do the service. He prepared Communion, which had never been observed in the local shared church services. He first took it to the Baptist pianist. She accepted and took it, and as Nell explained, "All hell broke loose because she took communion from a Methodist." The Baptists left never to return, and she says both congregations were weakened.

Doug had gone to Southwestern University as an Army reservist, was drafted right after college and was ready to serve. Money was scarce in those days, if not minimal for a young man wishing to become a doctor. The situation was aggravated by the Depression. Doug was in California scheduled to serve in WWII as an infantry man, and a man walked into a room full of recruits about to go overseas and asked if anyone had been accepted to medical school. Doug raised his hand and after taking several tests was whisked away, as only the Army can do, to the University of Chicago for his pre-med education.

Later, Doug was in medical school in Houston where this girl was going to college. They dated. Nell had heard plenty about Doug from that girlfriend and assumed, mistakenly, that the girlfriend and the man she oohed and aahed over were engaged. They were not. Later that girl would become her sister-in-law.



Doug and Nell Benold

One of Doug's friends was in Seattle when there was a wedding in Chester, Texas (northeast of Livingston). He called Doug and asked that he substitute as groomsman in this wedding. Doug agreed. He'd been working many nights and really needed a break. He went to a wedding where he didn't know anyone. Nell says she thinks God was up there saying you two need to get together.

Following his graduation from Baylor Medical School in Houston, Doug went to Indiana to intern and then to El Paso to do his residency. He told Nell that as a small-town doctor he would have to know how to do everything.

Nell says that she was a little scrawny, freckle faced blonde, and she couldn't imagine what Doug saw in her. She says Doug was the handsomest thing she'd ever seen. Doug says he was thunderstruck the first time he saw Nell. The first time she was not dressed up, he says he fell in love with her almost immediately. She was so friendly and sweet. Later, dressed for the wedding as the maid of honor, he thought, "she was oh so pretty." Doug continues, "I got to know her a little bit at the reception that her Mom was in charge of." Nell says that not knowing anyone there, he took his cake and punch out to the back porch to eat alone. Nell came out to get more ice and he stopped her and said to her, "Someone told me you were going to go to Southwestern." Nell said that was true. Doug replied that he had gone to Southwestern. He added that his parents lived in Georgetown, and when she got there, he'd love to show her the big city. (Compared to Chester, Georgetown was the big town.) Nell's hands flutter as she says, "It was like stardust!"

Nell entered Southwestern as the GI Bill was passed, and a whole generation was educated. Southwestern went from 400 students to 1400 and barracks from Killeen were moved to the school for housing. After Doug returned to Indiana he wrote to Nell. She

didn't answer, and he thought it was the end of it all until the letter was returned marked unclaimed. He wrote her again, and it arrived on her birthday. She was very homesick as it was the first time she was away from home. She answered the letter. She says again, "It was like stardust." They continued the letters flying back and forth from Southwestern to Indiana. Nell and Doug wrote hundreds of letters. They were married in 1948 in Chester. They went to New Orleans for their honeymoon, and then they had to go all the way to El Paso.

In 1952, Nell was 24 years old, and the couple was living in Georgetown. Doug's medical practice had only been established for two years. His practice was in the back of a drugstore as that was the common practice at the time. Then, Doug was drafted. They had three small children, 3 1/2, 1 1/2, and a brand-new baby, born the day before Doug left. He left immediately for Korea as an Air Force surgeon. Nell says that she thought the end of the world had come. Duty marked this man's whole life, and he felt that since the Army had paid for his medical degree, he owed his service. So, he said he went willingly in thanks for his education.

Those were two hard years for Nell, miserable and alone with three small children. She was terrified he'd be killed. Nell didn't know what she was going to do. Doug's mom told Nell she'd keep the kids for her if she wanted to get a job. Nell was hired by the high school and went to work. His mother, wife of the Methodist minister, had never had a job nor money of her own. She paid her mother-in-law for the babysitting and both women profited from the arrangement. She says her mother-in-law saved her life and she wasn't crying all the time. She identifies her mother and mother-in-law as angels in her life. She says she was so fortunate to be married into this family of Doug's.

When Doug finally got to come home, he again began his practice and later he and another doctor bought the Martin hospital which was eventually renamed Georgetown Community Hospital. The hospital eventually became St. David's Georgetown.

The phone would ring in the middle of the night, and he would answer, dress, and leave to help someone in medical trouble. One night, as he was dressing for his third house call in a row, he thought, Nell was over there in bed, and he wondered if he would do this for his whole life, getting up in the middle of the night. This went on most of his life. But he declares that he enjoyed his entire career as a physician. He says there were many things he had to do that he didn't enjoy, but they needed to be done. Nell says many times he told the clerks at the hospital not to charge the patient for his part, just bill the hospital part. He did many medical procedures for free. However hard it was, Doug insists that he enjoyed every bit of his career. He tried to learn as much as he could and took as much extra training as he could.

The handsome soldier/doctor is now 98, having survived a stroke, recent broken neck, broken back, and Covid. Nell is 94 and still sings the praises of her lifetime partner, "The gentlest, kindest, most giving human being I've ever known." She then adds, "I've never heard him say a bad word about anybody."

Doug doesn't really believe in miracles but strongly believes in cause and effect. He feels that following God's laws is the best way to live. He believes in constant praying to God for guidance in making the right choices.

Doug says the happiest time of his whole life was when he was courting Nell and when they were first married. Of course, he was happy to come back after Korea. He says he has been happy his whole life because of Nell.

They both served faithfully at FUMC Georgetown in most any capacity needed. The church, the community, and the state owe a great deal to this faithful, long-lived, dutiful, kind, and hardworking Christian couple.

Interview and article provided by Patti Ruth