

Fred and Yvonne Large

Theirs is a love story that spans more than half a century of adventurous living and unconditional loyalty to community, church and country. The boy was 17, the girl only 13 when they first met, having attended the same schools and church in East Cleveland, Ohio.

Fred and Yvonne Large, known at Unity as ushers, greeters and Lightbringers, were married on June 14, 1958. Yvonne had just graduated from high school, and Fred was in the third year of an 11-year stint with the U.S. Navy. Because the sailor had only a weekend pass, the newlyweds had to leave their wedding reception early to return to Fred's base in Little Creek, VA. It would be six months before they could open wedding presents.

In 1999, the Larges decided to simplify their lives, and with a map, a van and a tent, embarked, with a cockatiel named Buddy, on a cross country trek that they today call the most memorable six months of their lives. Their journey began in the Okefenokee Swamp which straddles the Georgia-Florida border. "We stepped into Mexico," Yvonne recalls, "climbed up to San Francisco, crossed the Midwest and went back to Ohio. That tent was like a magnet pulling us up to the east coastline all the way to Maine."

Fred, who had retired from Caterpillar Tractor, was with the Mentor Ohio Fire Department for many years. A supporter of many veterans' organizations, he became the first commander of an Amvets post in Mentor Headlands, later attaining the titles of State Commander and national 4th District commander.

Of the many hats that Fred Large has worn, the one of circus clown may have been most colorful and fun. He started out in parades, doing an imitation of Emmett Kelly. Discovery by a circus producer led to frequent performances with the International Circus throughout the northeastern United States. With a trunk full of circus props and magic, Freddie the Clown became well known, and the whole family got into the act, eventually claiming three generations of circus clowns including grandchildren, children and spouses. Yvonne made all the costumes and did the book work; sons-in law played in the band. The Larges got to know Karl Wallenda of the famous daredevil family, the Great Wallendas, who fell to his death in a tightrope walk in Puerto Rico at age 78. It wasn't unusual for the Larges to explode canons in the house in planning performances. Their frequent backyard experiments made life interesting for neighbors.

Yvonne, too, has enjoyed multiple and interesting roles. Having studied at Central School of Practical Nursing at University Hospital in Cleveland, she found most fulfilling her position as a healthcare provider at an assisted living facility. She was also a Hospice volunteer. In retirement, she has had an incredibly good time serving as Queen Mum of a Red Hat group for 10 years. At Ranch Mobile Park, she started the first Red Hat chapter and then added four more, initiating visits to local thrift stores, a bus trip to Mt. Dora, an annual champagne brunch and even a cruise. As a Mason, Fred has been president of Square and Compass groups for the past 10 years.

During their camping sojourn, the Larges made a map of Unity churches and each Sunday would wear their one church outfit to a different Unity church. They also visited Unity Village and walked around the large sacred labyrinth. Members of Unity Church of Clearwater since 1998, they "love the freedom to be 'thinkers' here. We know the church has had a special blessing with Leddy and her family leading us."

The Larges hope to do more camping, to take more cruises and to spend much more time with family. Their three biological children have given them three granddaughters and three great-grandchildren, but, through the strengthening of their blended families, a total of nine grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren call them "Grandma" and "Grandpa."