

JIM AND BERNIE WRIGHT

Members since 2010

Jim Wright

Birth Date:

April 26, 1949

Place of Birth:

Shinnstown, WV

Military Service:

U.S. Army

Bernie Wright

Birth Date:

April 24, 1949

Place of Birth:

Elkins, WV

Did You Know?

Bernie was voted “Miss Sweetheart” of her high school junior class.

Jim’s grandparents had an enormous height discrepancy. At 4’10” his grandmother only came up to his 7’2” grandfather’s waist.

Favorite Hymns

Amazing Grace

Here I Am, Lord



Jim and Bernie have moved extensively throughout their lives, living in a remarkable number of places. As children, they both remember moving for their dads’ jobs—Jim’s dad was a head butcher for the A&P Company and Bernie’s dad was employed by the C&P Telephone Company. While both of their mothers stayed home to raise their children, they later returned to the workforce. Jim’s mother purchased a donut shop with one of her friends, but they eventually decided that one partner needed to buy the other partner out because their friendship wasn’t going to endure the difficulties of co-ownership. Jim says the decision was made by coin toss. To this day he doesn’t know who won the toss. but his mother ended up with the shop.

Jim and Bernie met after Jim’s family moved to Elkins, WV. Bernie’s grandparents lived in the same neighborhood, and she got to know Jim during her summer visits, having been introduced to him by one of her girlfriends. They entered into a long-distance relationship at the age of 13, and they have been committed to each other ever since.

When it came time for college, Jim changed his original plans to attend WVU in order to go to Marshall University with Bernie. They were married at the chapel on campus, just before finals of sophomore year. Jim was in ROTC, and joined the Army immediately after graduation. His first assignment took him and Bernie to Fort Hood, TX. Over the next twenty years, the family lived at 19 different addresses in Georgia, South Carolina, New Mexico, Seattle, Omaha, Washington D.C., and Germany. During this time, Jim held a variety of positions, from infantry to basic training to research & development. Jim helped to train the first group of female Army recruits to undergo the classic male basic training at Fort Jackson, SC. He remembers it being an eye-opening experience and jokes, “I couldn’t believe the budget in Kleenex and toilet paper. It was absurd.” Later, he worked as an Operations Research Analyst, doing research and development in Artificial Intelligence at Los

Alamos, NM. Jim says he always felt most purposeful when he was problem-solving, especially when he was able to determine the root causes and work toward systemic solutions.

As they moved around from base to base, Bernie worked at various office and customer service jobs. After their first son, Corey, was born, she took a job managing a cross-stitch shop because she was able to take him along to work with her. After their second son, Matthew, was born and the boys got older, Bernie did a lot of volunteering in their schools. She feels that her most purposeful work was raising her boys but also feels a deep sense of pride in the later work she did with special needs preschoolers. Bernie says it was a job in which she felt like she was able to make a big difference.

Whenever the family was able to get away from work, they took camping trips around the country in their pop-up camper. They visited the Black Hills, Mt. Rushmore, Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, and Bryce Canyon. Bernie adds that one of the perks of camping was that Jim liked to do the cooking—some favorites were burgers, tinfoil packs of goulash, and bacon and egg breakfasts.

Jim and Bernie both grew up around different faith traditions. Jim lived with his Southern Baptist grandparents when he was very young and remembers learning an attitude of self-sufficiency from them. Having lived through the Great Depression, they were careful not to waste anything. Jim remembers that when they would hear of anyone who was tearing down an outbuilding, they would scavenge the wood to burn and painstakingly pull and straighten all of the nails so that they could use them for other projects. He said he learned a “Don’t bother God with that. Handle it yourself” kind of attitude from them. Bernie’s maternal grandfather was from Italy and was a serious Catholic. She remembers attending Catholic Mass when she visited them in the summers, and remembers the services deeply impacting her, even though they were conducted in Latin. She says there was something sacred, almost magical, about her experience in the Catholic Church.

Bernie talks about a time when she felt a deep sense of God’s presence in her life. Their grandson, Tristan, was born with hypoplasia of the heart; one side of his heart had not developed. Within hours of his birth, Tristan had to be flown to Children’s Hospital in Washington, D.C. for emergency open-heart surgery. Bernie remembers praying in the hospital’s chapel when she felt this overwhelming sense of peace: “God told me everything was going to be okay.” Tristan made it through the surgery and has lived a miraculously healthy life. By wearing specially-made protective gear over his chest, he has even been able to participate normally in activities such as hockey, wrestling, and lacrosse.

Tristan’s condition is not the first challenge that Jim and Bernie have had to face over the years. Bernie contracted polio at the age of 4, along with her 1-year-old brother (Lou Duckworth). Because they were both partially paralyzed from the disease, they had to be admitted to a treatment facility that had been set up in a repurposed recreation center. Although she remained in the facility for 4.5 months, Bernie says she hardly remembers the experience, other than being able to picture the long rows of metal cribs that had been set up in the auditorium of the center. But her mother tells stories about visiting on weekends, during the 2-hour visitation period each Saturday and Sunday, and about how their family reached out to another little girl whose parents were never able to visit. By contrast, Bernie quite clearly remembers the aftereffects of her illness, as each summer she would have to undergo reconstructive surgery on her leg. She remembers being unable to participate in many of the activities that other teenagers were involved in, but says that her love of crafting probably started during that time.

Bernie remembers another painful time in her life, when she and Jim struggled to have children. They endured an excruciating nine year wait until the arrival of their first child. And now, Jim and Bernie face a new set of struggles, as they adjust into a caregiving role for Bernie’s 92-year-old mother and figure out their new purpose in retirement. Jim says: “Retirement is kind of a weird thing. I’ve always been so busy that I’ve never learned how to relax and have a hobby.” But, having spent a lifetime practicing the art of adjusting to new circumstances, Jim and Bernie will surely soon adjust to the blessings and challenges of this new phase of life as well.

Based on their years of experience, they give the following advice to younger generations:

“Embrace life because it is fleeting and uncertain. Appreciate what you have. And cherish every day.”