

Two hearts began beating as one during Albany Light Opera rehearsals in 1946

It may be too late to present the director of the 1946 Albany Light Opera Company's production of "The Merry Widow" with a bouquet of flowers.

But it's never too late to award a literary standing ovation to Georgene P. Kerchner for the role she played in the love story that began to blossom between Audrey Miriam Bopp and Donald Gilbert Hauprich in the autumn of 1946.

The reason? It was Ms. Kerchner who insisted the just turned 21-year-old Audrey and the then 22-year-old Donald would look good standing beside one another during select scenes of the operetta.

The first rehearsals for the production took place in the LaSalle School Auditorium on Western Avenue in Albany on September 4, 1946 and continued until the show debuted at Philip Livingston Junior High School on November 21, 1946. A second performance took place on November 22. A third is believed to have followed at the Albany Institute of History and Art.

The group subsequently presented composer Humperdink's opera "Hansel and Gretel" at Christmastide during which Audrey sang and danced sporting a gingerbread cookie costume while Donald applauded from the audience.

When asked in July 2015 to reminisce about the early days of their courtship, Audrey vividly recollected receiving a dozen long stemmed red roses from Donald on Thanksgiving 1946 – around the time she was involved in the "Hansel and Gretel" show.

Affections between the couple deepened after Donald's childhood friend and neighbor Willie Kratz and his fiancé Ethel invited the former "Merry Widow" chorus members to join them in playing cards at the Kratz home on Second Street in Albany. A gallant Donald offered to walk Audrey home to the Bopp residence on Hollywood Avenue. Many a moonlit stroll was to follow as the couple enjoyed many a subsequent card game as well as attending concerts and other cultural events together.

Upon their arrival at Audrey's home, the couple would sometimes converse in her family's parlor – until Audrey's kid brother Len made a dramatic entrance — yawning and stretching as he poured himself a bowl of cereal as he proclaimed: "*Morning already?*"

In fairness to Audrey and Donald, it was usually not later than 10 or 11 p.m. – but little Lenny got the message across that it was time for his future brother-in-law to take his leave. Other times, the adolescent would jokingly proclaim to his sister's beau: "*You're a card and you really need to be dealt with.*"

The date the couple became engaged (March 14, 1947) was engraved on the inside of the diamond ring that was worn by Audrey when Donald slipped a gold band on the same finger on March 27, 1948.

The rest is the stuff of which wholesome Hollywood romance movies of the 1940s were made – including having Len Bopp serve as Best Man at the couple's wedding. On March 27, 2014, Len beamed as he posed with his big sister beside the gown their mother, Catherine Tiernan Bopp, had made for her 1914 wedding and that Audrey wore when she became Donald's bride 34 years later.



Donald and Audrey Hauprich are blessed with memories of a courtship that began on a truly harmonious note 72 years ago. The black and white photo of the young couple was taken by Hasbrouck "Hap" Dougherty in Kingston, NY ca 1946 while daughter Ann snapped the color portrait above after her parents renewed their vows of Holy Matrimony on their golden anniversary in 1998. Youngest Hauprich offspring Mary Hauprich Reilly later gifted them with a heavenly picture she created of their beloved St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Ballston Spa, NY. Don and Audrey joined St. Mary's Parish upon settling in the historic upstate village in 1968 and both sang in its choir until several years ago. (They also once performed *True Love* as a duet in a church musical.)



AUTHOR'S NOTE: This story took on a whole new meaning after my parents were hospitalized on the same day in November 2015. At the very time my father was being treated for a cardiac event in the Saratoga Hospital's ER, my mother was experiencing a mini-stroke on the third floor. I'm elated to report they both recovered. Reasons for celebration during 2018 included the 72nd anniversary of their first date and the 70th anniversary of their wedding. To read more about Donald ("A New Millennium Dad in a Father Knows Best World") and Audrey ("Schooling at Mother's Knee"), visit www.LegaciesUnlimited.com.