

Meet Lou & Pam Watson



by Sharleen Nelson

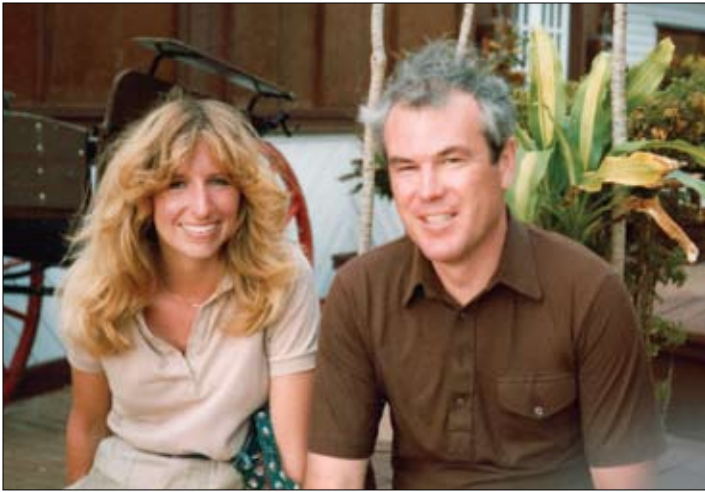
He likes to do the driving, she likes to ride. He plays tennis, she prefers golf. She's an artist, he's into the stock market. He is a gourmet chef, she makes the cuisine look pretty. Even though Lou Watson, the Marathon club's newly elected president, and his wife Pam may seem to have divergent interests, enjoying the RV lifestyle in their Marathon coach is a passion they both share.

The Watsons have been actively "busing" since the early 1980's; however, it wasn't until 1995, when Lou retired from being an orthopedic surgeon, that busing became a "lifestyle" for them. After purchasing a Marathon in 2001, Lou and Pam became active in the Marathon Coach Club, attending numerous rallies, as well as traveling throughout the United States and Canada. "Over the past six years we have probably been through every state in the union, plus a little bit of Canada," said Lou. Most of the year, the couple resides in a golf, tennis, and boating community in Jupiter, Florida, but for four

months of the year, they travel in their Marathon coach. "We usually leave the middle of July and don't return until early October," said Lou. "We try to leave Florida before the hurricane season begins," Pam added. Although the couple has a basic overall plan and a final destination in mind, how they get there is up for grabs. "That's one advantage you have in a coach; that if you want to make a diversion, you easily can," said Lou. "You don't have to be rigid about where you're going and what you're going to do."

Married for 27 years, Lou and Pam have 3 grown children and 2 grandchildren, which means that every road trip includes a stopover in the Chicago area to visit family. The past couple of years, California has been a destination of choice. Although the grandchildren are too young to go on extended trips with them, they do have a traveling companion in Bogey, their 1 1/2-year-old Shih Tzu.

One of the many pleasures of traveling by bus for Lou is it provides opportunities to explore



Pam and Lou in December, 1982; they were married in January, 1983.

different cities at a more leisurely pace. "A lot of people don't realize that when you have a coach and you travel through the same cities, you begin to know the cities really well," said Lou. "On the other hand, if you just fly to Nashville, for example, for a few days you don't feel like you know your way around, other than to and from the Nashville airport. But if you're in a coach, within a few days you sort of feel like you belong to the city." Busing also provides an opportunity to really experience the country. "When you're driving from Florida to California, you get to watch the terrain constantly changing," he said. "People who don't take long trips in their cars don't get this experience."

Another wonderful experience for Lou is driving the bus, and he has a theory about why. "I used to be a private pilot; quite a few pilots have buses," he said. "I think there's a corollary there because a bus is a little different, and a little bigger, and it has complex systems, similar to a plane. It keeps you interested and it keeps you busy. I know a lot of other people feel this way; you just really enjoy getting behind the wheel... a lot of couples fight over who gets to drive." "We don't," Pam interjected.

Traveling in the coach has a slightly different appeal for Pam. "Not only do you have expanded shopping opportunities," she said, "but you can accomplish a variety of things while going down the road: computing, reading, craft projects, cooking, and of course, sightseeing."

Still, apart from driving, exploring the landscape, and shopping, the Watsons concede that the best part of the Marathon lifestyle is the opportunity they've had to cultivate innumerable friendships with other coach owners. "I call our traveling 'a friendship tour' because



quite often we plan our journey based on visits with friends," said Pam. Indeed the expansion of their social network can be attributed to attending Marathon Coach Club rallies. So much so, in fact, that Lou has signed on as club president for the next two years. "The rallies form a social focus from which tentacles grow out, so you meet more and more people," he said. "One person leads you to another, and pretty soon you've got a considerable number of people that you're involved with. It's great."

Forget Facebook or the myriad of networking Internet sites, this lifestyle allows people to meet in person, yet entertain one another, from the comfort of their own home-away-from-home. "The coach becomes your second home," Lou said. "Just like in our home in Florida, in the coach our clothes are in closets and drawers and we sleep in our own bed every night, which is so much better than living out of a suitcase, in and out of hotel rooms. The coach is not just a means of transportation, it's a home." Pam agreed. "It's like having a moving condo, and it lets us take Bogey with us wherever we go," she said.

Last year's annual expedition brought them to Marathon in Coburg, Oregon, which was home base for the club's "Extraordinary Oregon" rally. Before leaving Florida, they had their old TV replaced with a larger, flat-screen model in the salon and had started making plans to have their coach remodeled. Then in Coburg, after the rally ended, they had a new marble floor installed that has a lightweight, yet strong, aluminum honeycomb backing. They also recovered the sofa and dinette back, recarpeted the bedroom, and had new backsplashes installed in the sink and shower band areas. "The floor is just yummy...everything turned out beautifully and we feel like we own a new coach," Pam said. The Watsons were extremely pleased with Marathon's above-and-beyond service. "The people at Marathon couldn't have been nicer to work with," she said. "They made the expe-



Pam creates unique, one-of-a-kind purses from cigar boxes, and is a talented oil painter.

rience enjoyable, taking great care and doing very high-quality work.”

Though they ended up staying at Marathon longer than anticipated—through November—Pam was sad to leave. Marathon’s headquarters had begun to feel like their “west coast” home. While they were there, Lou and Pam spent time exploring Coburg and Eugene. “This area is very different from where we live in Florida, and was really a kick to experience,” Pam said. “I loved the local antique shops, the college atmosphere, the topography, and our trips to Oregon’s incredible coastal areas.” Lou and Pam also attended some University of Oregon womens’ volleyball games during their stay. “The games were really fun, and we have become serious Duck fans,” she said. Lou wears his Oregon Ducks sweatshirt proudly.

The Watson’s extended stay also gave Lou the opportunity to spend time with Deb Johnson, the club’s office administrator. “The time Lou spent with Deb was invaluable. He got to know many of the key players in the club and was able to work through some important issues that came up last fall. Lou now has a good feel for what needs to be done as club president,” said Pam.

Likewise, Pam was able to make some contacts for her burgeoning purse business while in Coburg. In addition to being a talented oil painter, Pam creates unique purses from cigar boxes. “I buy the boxes from stores after they’ve sold the cigars out of them. If you want a certain box bad enough, you end up buying cigars, as well!” she said. “I replace the hardware, upholster the interiors, and make the handles using different types of beads.” Each purse receives seven or eight coats of varnish to give it a beautiful, polished-glass appearance. Like a Marathon coach, no two purses are alike. Pam said she initially made one for herself, and then all of her girlfriends wanted

one. The demand just kept growing from there. Her purses have been sold in a high-end Palm Beach boutique, and in stores in Chicago, Florida, and North Carolina. They are signed with her name, Pamela, using a palm tree for the “L.” She also makes jewelry and tile mosaics, does needlepoint, knits, crochets, and enjoys gardening, reading, and sewing. In November, Pam took a jewelry soldering class in Eugene to learn how to make glass charms. She plans to apply that technology in different crafting areas. Since retiring from her position as an insurance company negotiator, Pam has spent much of her free time exploring her creative side.

Besides driving their coach, Lou is an avid tennis player, playing singles and doubles three or four times a week. And after he retired, he discovered a passion for cooking. “The Florida Culinary Institute offered community courses on Saturdays that were taught by a master chef,” said Lou. “I was probably down there every Saturday for two years!” he laughed. “I learned all sorts of things. It started out with a basic course, and then the second year we did more specialty cooking.” Lou learned how to cook everything from regional Italian cuisine, fish, and outdoor dishes, to sauces, appetizers, pies, and tarts. “I got far enough along that I don’t use recipes very much,” he said. “You just use a little of this, a little of that, a pinch of that, a dash of that.”

When they are home, the couple enjoys hosting dinner parties with others who enjoy gourmet cooking and dining. Both Lou and Pam do the cooking, but when it comes to presentation, it’s Pam’s creative side that comes out. “I love a beautiful table setting,” she said.

Whether it’s cooking, computing, crafting, or traveling, it’s apparent that whatever Lou and Pam (and Bogey) are doing, they genuinely enjoy doing it together. •