

This couple met at Philly’s Masterman school in 1962. They just celebrated 50 years of marriage.

Jane and Michael Gilmore have dedicated themselves to their family, their faith, their community, and each other.



Mike and Jane with their children in a 50th anniversary portrait. They will travel to Egypt later this year on a second honeymoon.

by Kellie Patrick Gates, For The Inquirer Updated Oct 23, 2022

Jane M. Gilmore and Michael D. Gilmore

In 1962, Jane Murray scanned the name tags of the new Julia R. Masterman School students in her tour group until she found Michael Gilmore — a favorite cousin of her friend Ethel, who had asked her to look out for him.

Jane introduced herself, mentioned Ethel, and offered a friendly, “Welcome to Masterman.” Mike said nothing.

Assuming he hadn't heard her, Jane tried again. "He didn't open his mouth. He just looked at me," she remembered. She was irked.

Mike doesn't remember the Masterman meeting but he doesn't doubt it. "I was very shy and introverted," he said. "I would have been so nervous that I wouldn't have said anything."

Even though they were both sopranos in the school choir, Jane didn't speak to him.

Masterman had no high school then, and in 1966, Mike was a senior at Overbrook High. He had a tux, a corsage, prom tickets, and a problem: His date had the flu. Mike spoke to his cousin Ethel, who told her mom, who asked her dear friend if her daughter Janey could be her nephew's prom date.



Mike and Jane on their first date, the Overbrook High senior prom.

“I hope it’s not that Michael again,” was Jane’s first thought But her practical side prevailed: Her parents had agreed to this one and only exception to their strict no-dating-until-you’re-16 rule, and going to the Overbrook prom would mean bragging rights at Girls’ High.

Mike remembers this meeting: His father drove him to Jane’s house, which was packed with curious family, friends, and neighbors. “I was extremely nervous. Then Janey came down the stairs and into my life in an empire waist gown — red velvet with white brocade. And she wore a tiara,” said Mike, now 72.

“Mike looked very handsome. And he was smiling — that was a big plus,” said Jane, now 71.

Dancing and fun at the Hotel Philadelphia were followed by coffee and apple pie at the Harvey House, then a reinstatement of Jane’s parents’ dating rules.

Through her friend Ethel, who has since passed away, Jane knew that he graduated high school and attended Howard University in Washington D.C. “When I had my 16th birthday party at the Y, I invited him,” she said. Knowing that Jane was classically trained in organ, piano, violin, and clarinet, Mike brought her a recording of Brahms’s concertos. From then on, they wrote weekly letters. Whenever Mike was home, they went to dinner, the movies or bowling. “I was still so nervous and enraptured by this beautiful young woman. I would dial six numbers and hold the 7th on my finger, afraid to let it go,” he said. “But whenever I called, she always said yes.”

1968

At Howard University and in Philadelphia, students were among those holding rallies and protests advocating for civil rights and against the Vietnam War.

Mike returned to Philadelphia temporarily when Howard students took over the administration building protesting mandatory ROTC. Then “when Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated, the school shut down again,” he remembered. “My dad came down to get me during the riots.”

contest. “They announced that Dr. King was assassinated and ended everything,” Jane said. Jane estimates that 20% of her classmates at Girls High were Black, but few teachers were. That made Jane and her friends feel like they had few adults at school they could really talk to about civil rights and the loss of Dr. King. She later coauthored a book about these experiences.

Mike transferred to what is now West Chester University, where he studied English. He later served in the Army Reserves and earned a law degree at the University of Pennsylvania. Mike became a corporate attorney, working 32 years with Cigna before retiring in 2011.

Jane earned a bachelor’s of music with a double major in organ and vocal performance from Boston University. She later earned a master’s degree in music from the University of the Arts, a second master’s degree in education from Antioch, a doctorate of musical arts from Combs College, and a doctorate in education from St. Joseph’s. Jane served 39 years in the Philadelphia School District as a teacher, counselor, and principal before retiring as a district administrator in 2013. She also had a second career in music performance and private instruction.

Family bonds

While Mike and Jane were both in college, both sets of parents moved from West Philadelphia to Overbrook homes, just one house away from each other.

By then, Mike and Jane were in love. “He was such a charmer,” said Jane. “He was nice looking, he spoke well, and he was a Christian gentleman. He was like a prince, and I was proud to be around him.”

“She made me laugh,” said Mike. “She was bright and beautiful and talented, kind, gentle, and a Christian — everything I was looking for in a mate.”

Mike joined Jane’s church, Tindley Temple United Methodist, and the Gilmores and the Murrays soon began having huge, holiday-caliber Sunday dinners together, rotating from Mike’s house to Jane’s to Mike’s grandmother’s.

In April of 1971, Jane spent a day with her dad. “When Michael asks you to marry him, I want you to say yes,” he told her. “Has Mike talked to you?” Jane asked. He had not. Jane said she wasn’t focused on marriage yet — she had school to finish. Her father repeated his wish and Jane assured him her answer would be yes.



The happy couple on their wedding day.

Jane was surprised when her mom called to ask her to fly home from school the weekend before her last final. When she arrived in Overbrook, Jane learned her father had died from a cerebral hemorrhage at age 59.

Both Mike and Jane still take solace that Mr. Murray gave them his blessing.

On July 31, 1971, Mike made a complete dinner using recipes from a *Good Housekeeping* magazine, invited Jane, and popped the question.

They were married Aug. 5, 1972 at Tindley Temple and had a reception for 500 guests in the church reception hall. Jane and Mike spent their wedding night at New York's Plaza Hotel before honeymooning for a week in Quebec.



Jane and Michael on their wedding day.

‘The Golden Week’ and Family Life



Mike and Jane Gilmore with their daughters Jacquelyne (front right), Janet (center), and Michael D. Gilmore Jr. (in his father's arms) at baby Michael's christening.

What the couple call “The Golden Week” began on a Sunday in May 1975 with Mike’s law school graduation. That Thursday, Jane graduated with her University of the Arts masters in music degree. A celebratory dinner with parents was capped with even more exciting news: they

were expecting. Daughter Jacquelyne Michelle was born later that year, followed by daughter Janet Nicole in 1979 and son Michael David Jr. in 1984.

The couple shared their love of traveling with their children, taking them to California; the Alamo; Roanoke, Va.; and Little Rock, Ark. They've been to Disney seven times and visited 37 states.

Empty Nesters



Mike and Jane at their 50th Anniversary celebration.

Mike and Jane now live in Springfield Township, Montgomery County. They attend White Rock Baptist Church in West Philadelphia and Grace Baptist Church of Germantown and sing in both choirs. She is a Diamond Life member of Delta Sigma Theta sorority and he is an active member of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity. Through these organizations, both work to prepare young people for college and foster social action through voter registration and education.

The couple enjoys family time with their children and grandson, Michael David Gilmore III, and continue to travel. They have been to 27 countries.

Celebrating 50 years



Mike and Jane dancing together at their 50th Anniversary Celebration.

On Aug. 13, 2022, the couple celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary at the same church where they were married. They exchanged new rings and new vows — this time, writing their own.

Jane asked Mike to give her his hand. “We still walk hand in hand in life and look into each other’s eyes,” she told him. “Those eyes and these hands say I love you.”

Mike told Jane that he fully believes she is God’s gift to him. “You are more than my better half, you are my better 99 percent,” he said. “I couldn’t be where I am now without you.”

Published Oct. 23, 2022

KP Kellie Patrick Gates, For The Inquirer