Happy in Harmony

By Amy Morgan

The his-and-her desk shared by Ed and Kathy George in their apartment home at Independence Hill Retirement Community illustrates their 58-year life together. On the left side, Ed pursues his passion of composing and arranging music; on the right, Kathy quilts. Either can spread their projects along the arm connecting the middle of the desk. They work separately, yet together - differing activities, yet beautifully in harmony.

The Georges moved to Independence Hill last March from Abilene, when Ed retired as director of orchestra for Abilene Christian University. He and Kathy met when they both played in the university’s band. They were engaged just two short months after their first date in 1959. Ed taught music in public schools, then joined the faculty at ACU, later earning a PhD in music from the University of North Texas in Denton. One of his responsibilities was to oversee a small, student musical performance group. He realized their potential to reach far beyond Abilene, so Ed sent a Rock and Roll performance audition tape to the USO.

“I thought the kids needed something to sink their teeth into,” Ed said. The initial tour in 1972 was so successful the USO called them back five times from 1974-1981. Ed led the group across the world – visiting 30 countries including Taiwan, Wake Island, Korea, spots in the Mediterranean and Middle East, and the Philippines. They entertained every branch of the military and on two aircraft carriers – performing hits from the Eagles, Doobie Brothers, and Neil Diamond.

“Everybody in the group had more than one task - they could play instruments, sing, set up the sound system,” Ed said. “We could be out of the bus and ready for a sound check in eight minutes.” They traveled by military transport - cargo helicopters, Navy planes, even landing on the Midway’s moving deck in the middle of the ocean. Ed keeps a stack of commendations and photos, including one from George Morrison, commander of the base in Guam and father of The Doors’ Jim Morrison.

Ed wrote a letter every night to Kathy, who was holding down the home front raising their three children, Glenna, Melinda and Greg, and working as the office manager in a family-owned jewelry store. She was able to join Ed in Hawaii at the culmination of two of his Far East tours.

“His letters were great!” Kathy said. “They were a travel journal of everything they did every day.”

“I poured out my heart to her at the end of each day,” Ed added. “It didn’t matter what time it was or how early I had to catch a transport in the morning.” The couple has saved every piece of their correspondence.

Ed’s own musical talent did not go unnoticed. He played saxophone and conducted, backing up well-known performers like Tony Bennett, Andy Williams and Bob Hope when they visited the West Central Texas area.

“The Abilene Philharmonic is a very fine orchestra,” Kathy said. “When they needed a guest conductor to do a pops concert or a hot-rocks sax player – I was the go-to guy,” Ed added. “Those were heady days!”

Ed is currently arranging music for the Independence Hill Hilltopper Choir. He recently performed with them on his soprano saxophone. Kathy is quilting a collection of T-shirts from Ed’s performances. She connects each square with “musical score” fabric. They both enjoy the freedom from chores their move to Independence Hill has afforded them. They join new friends in the dining room, and Ed heads to the rec room to sharpen his pool game. They also attend men’s and women’s Bible studies, Kathy at Sunset Ridge Church of Christ, which has become their new church home.

Another unexpected perk of their move - more time together. They both voiced how much they enjoy spending time just talking or working side-by-side at their separate-but-equal desk.