I came to Reno from Los Angeles in 1948 when I was 18 to help care for my ill cousin and her children. I had enrolled in Los Angeles City College and had no intention of staying in Reno, as I was just getting established in my modeling career. I arrived in Reno on a Greyhound bus with barely any money.

I had been at my cousin's for some time when her husband said, “You haven't been anywhere. I'm going to take you to the football game and then down to the Phi Sigma Kappa house to meet this nice guy.” The nice guy was Bruno Benna '53 (political science). Unbeknownst to me, that night turned out to be Homecoming, and Bruno had a date. Instead, I joined Bruno's roommate, Ted Klimaszewski '51 (political science). I found this all quite exotic as I had never met anyone who was Polish. Even though Bruno and I didn't go out that night, we always considered Homecoming our anniversary.

Bruno called me the following Wednesday and asked me to the movies. I wasn't looking for a boyfriend, but I'll tell you this: The best thing in my life was going with Bruno to the movies that Wednesday. Interestingly, we had nothing in common. His parents were born in Italy and lived in New Jersey. My family's American roots date back to the mid-18th century. He grew up in a small town in rural New Jersey, and I in downtown Los Angeles. One thing we did have in common was that we both listened to the Metropolitan Opera on Saturdays on the radio.

Like me, Bruno arrived in Reno on a Greyhound bus. He had $50 in his pocket and a basketball scholarship, which meant his tuition and books were paid for by the University. Bruno washed dishes at the Phi Sig house to pay for room and board, and worked construction when he was not playing basketball. I went to work in the plant department at the phone company.

We married in July of 1950, two years after we had met. We had very humble beginnings but together we built a full and memorable life.

For our honeymoon, I wanted to travel and Bruno wanted me to meet his family in New Jersey. With no money, this was not easy. Now when people tell me they are afraid to travel because they can't afford it I say, "Don't wait!" Do what you can, even if you have to stay in some cheap motel or go camping, just do it. We got into our '38 Ford coupe and spent our first night in the Winnemucca Inn. Then we drove to Salt Lake City in the wee hours of the morning. We had enough money to stay in hotels for three nights. We found one motel down by the train tracks and it was horrible, and there we were, spending our precious hotel money on our honeymoon next to the train tracks.

The plan was to go to New Jersey where Bruno would work for the summer in order to earn enough money to get back to Reno. We stayed at his grandmother's house in a room she used for laundry and making wine and grappa. So started our travel adventures that would eventually take us through most of the world.

For the first six years we were married, we lived in Dr. (James) Church's stable house. We got to know Dr. Church, who was the most fascinating person. He always had time to visit even though he was very busy and quite elderly at the time. The rent was a bit out of our reach, $50, but we loved that house so we made it work. As I tell people, it had every inconvenience known to man. It was darling, though. The fireplace was made of rock that Dr. Church had collected himself.

In October 1952, I had Steve, our first son. I got a chest of drawers to divide our part of the bedroom from the baby's. Two years later we had Cathy, so in went another chest of drawers and another crib. The third winter we were there, I hung the diapers out to dry and when I went out to get them they were frozen stiff. It had never occurred to me that they would break. I took them off the line and broke about four of them. I just cried because we had no money.

Almost 10 years after our daughter was born, we had our third child, Alex, and then another, Chris. One of Bruno's teammates, Ingvart Christensen, owned a concrete business with his family. Ingvart offered Bruno a job at his company, Ready Mix Concrete Co., and later asked Bruno to partner with him in a new company, which became C.B. Concrete. Bruno and I borrowed $10,000 from Ingvart to pay for Bruno's share. We paid him back that same year. That was one of the things Bruno and I had in common; both of us had a real aversion to being in debt. We never bought anything if we couldn't pay for it, except for a house.

We got involved in fundraising for the University through the foundation. Bruno was appointed to the board but was very busy running his business. I mentioned to Dick Dankworth, who was in charge of fundraising for the University, that I could take Bruno's place in the meetings. Not too long after, I was on the foundation. We were part of the first fundraising effort for Church Fine Arts.

I'm grateful to be a part of gifting the Edna B. and Bruno Benna Foundation Atrium as part of the latest renovation of the School of the Arts. There are so many people who don't know there's a theater on campus. With the atrium, I think it's much more obvious.

Bruno and I always donated to Catholic Charities, the arts and education. It's amazing how far money goes in the arts. It's amazing the wonderful people the School of the Arts has been able to bring in.

I'm very lucky. I have a wonderful, caring family and extended family and a lot of friends, all of whom have helped me cope with losing Bruno. Bruno and I believed in keeping in touch with friends and not forgetting them. So now I just try to enjoy the sunsets. I would enjoy the sunrise but I'm not awake!

From a conversation with Senior Writer Roseann Keegan. Edna is the widow of Bruno Benna '53 (physical education). The Bennas were named Distinguished Nevadans in 1991 and are listed as Honor Court Gold Benefactors. They have four children: Cathleen Trachok '76 (speech pathology) and Stephen '75 (managerial sciences), Alexander and Christopher Benna. Edna served six terms as a Distinguished Nevadan in 1991 and are listed as Honor Court Gold Benefactors. They have four children: Cathleen Trachok '76 (speech pathology) and Stephen '75 (managerial sciences), Alexander and Christopher Benna. Edna served six terms as a University of Nevada, Reno Foundation Trustee.

For the full version of the interview visit: www.unr.edu/silverandblue
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