

Love and hunting keep Lake Linden couple together

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LAKE LINDEN — Carl and Eleanor Kilunnen didn't have a shotgun wedding in 1946, but they've had a firearms marriage.

The couple — who have two grandchildren and two great-grandchildren — have hunted and fished together in the Copper Country woods for more than 50 years. In fact one of the first gifts Carl Kilunnen, 73, bought for his new wife was a modified Mauser '98 rifle.

The German army used the

Model '98 bolt-action rifle as its standard-issue service rifle in world wars I and II. Carl Kilunnen bought the rifle from a re-tuning serviceman, modified it for hunting, cut the barrel down, and carved the stock to fit his wife's size. He has modified several of the rifles he and his wife hunt with, and said he learned gunsmithing from his father.

Today Eleanor Kilunnen, 76, hunts mostly with a muzzleloader, but the couple still has the old Mauser in the gun cabinet in the

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living room of their Lake Linden home.

Eleanor Kilunnen said the rifle's action is one of the finest ever made for a bolt-action rifle, but did have one flaw.

"I missed a lot of deer because of that safety," she said. The safety catch makes a very distinctive click that tends to get a deer's attention.

The safety may have alerted a few deer that Eleanor Kilunnen had them in her sights, but they just got off lucky — she doesn't miss very often. She has bagged her fair share of prize bucks over the last 50 years. This year she got a 12-pointer

and a few years ago, she shot a 10-point, 180-pound buck.

Of course the biggest catch of all was her husband. He recalls when he met Eleanor, he was working for the Copper Range Railroad, "shoveling snow off the crossing at the station ... for 56 cents an hour."

When he met his wife-to-be, she was walking along the tracks toward her father's business. Her father operated an ice house where she worked as a teen-ager. In the days before refrigerators, people kept their perishables in an ice box. A real ice box — as opposed to being slang for an electric refrig-

erator — kept the food cool by means of a large block of ice stashed inside it, and people bought the slabs of ice from an ice house.

Eleanor Kilunnen said she went out with Carl so maybe he'd quit pestering her at work, but the attraction continued.

"Then that summer you used to come over to the ice house and bother me so I couldn't get any work done," she said to her husband while recalling their early years together.

Carl Kilunnen remembers courting Eleanor on motorcycle — a 1939 Harley-Davidson to be exact — and that her father didn't exactly approve of motorcy-

cles.

"When I'd bring her home on the motorcycle, I'd park a block away so her father wouldn't hear the motorcycle," Carl Kilunnen said. "He didn't want her riding on the motorcycle."

Carl Kilunnen no longer owns the motorcycle. "I had to sell the Harley to buy (her) ring," he said.

Fifty years later, after a lifetime working and hunting together, the couple attributes their shared love of the outdoors to keeping their marriage strong.

"I think it probably would have been OK, but probably not as fulfilling," Carl Kilunnen said.