

Bailey is incredibly proud of her husband, and high school sweetheart, Adam Lanier, who served as a Marine in Afghanistan



“We know marriage takes work, especially after kids. We intentionally put our marriage first.”

-Bailey Lanier



# Marriage for Keeps *in Katy*

They've survived deployments, financial devastation, cancer, the death of a child, and more. Through it all, they have leaned on one another and vowed to stay together. None of these Katy couples think their relationship is out of the ordinary, but between them they have 146 combined years of unconditional love.

*Written by Meagan Clanahan | Select photography by Lindsey Shelburne*

## Adam and Bailey Lanier To Iraq and Back



Adam and Bailey Lanier first became friends in junior high school and eventually became high school sweethearts. Although they temporarily separated during their college years, they remained close friends. It was during that time that Adam, a U.S. Marine, was first deployed to Iraq. "It's hard getting off the phone with someone and not knowing if and when you will talk to them again," says Bailey. "So when we talked or emailed, it was only about the good stuff."

The couple married after Adam returned in 2008, only to face another deployment - this time to Afghanistan. "We were newlyweds, and I didn't have my husband," Bailey remembers. "My dad passed away a few months before. It was tough." After a year apart, Adam returned home safely, and Bailey describes that moment as the best feeling of her life besides the birth of her son. "Just seeing him marching in formation and the excitement in the air, then being swept up in his arms, it was just amazing," says Bailey.

These days, the Laniers appreciate the little things they missed while Adam was serving our country. "Things like holding hands, going to Target on a Saturday, playing

board games - we love all of those things because we are together," says Bailey. Their son Wyatt was born in 2012, and the Laniers are adjusting as a family of three. "We know marriage takes work, especially after kids," says Bailey. "We intentionally put our marriage first."

## Michael and Sheree Jones Through Unimaginable Loss



After noticing each other in a nightclub where he was the DJ, Michael finally scored Sheree's number by telling her it was the only way he would play her requested song. They were engaged just three weeks after that. Now 32 years later, they complete each other's sentences and consider themselves best friends. "We have the utmost love, respect, and adoration for each other," says Michael. "There are not enough hours in the day to be with her."

It hasn't always been a smooth ride. After running a successful business together in the 80s, the economy tanked, along with their store and life savings. Michael worked in the transportation industry before entering college at age 40 to pursue his dream of being an engineer. Sheree supported the family as a flight attendant, and together they raised two

children, Jessica and Chad. With his wife's encouragement, Michael graduated from the University of Houston with top marks at the age of 50.

Tragically, in 2009 they lost their son Chad in a devastating motorcycle accident (which was featured in *Katy Magazine* spring 2011). Much of their time together is now devoted to raising awareness for organ donation through Donate 4 Life and Organ Donor Hall of Fame in celebration of Chad and his own life-giving donations. As it always has been, communication remains a key in their marriage. "I can tell him when I am having a 'bad Chad day,' and he can do the same," Sheree says. "Luckily, we never have those days at the same time, so we can truly support each other through the hard ones." Above all else, they value what they said over 32 years ago. "We are in this in sickness and health," says Michael. "Till death do us part. I just hope I go before her."

**Terry and Susan Sowell**  
*Healing Together*

When Susan moved to Katy at 24 years old, the last thing on her mind was finding a husband. More than anything, she was looking for a way to grow in her relationship with God after a dysfunctional and tragic childhood. That passion led her to a Sunday night Bible



Mike and Sheree Jones have continued to keep their marriage strong despite financial devastation and the tragic loss of their son

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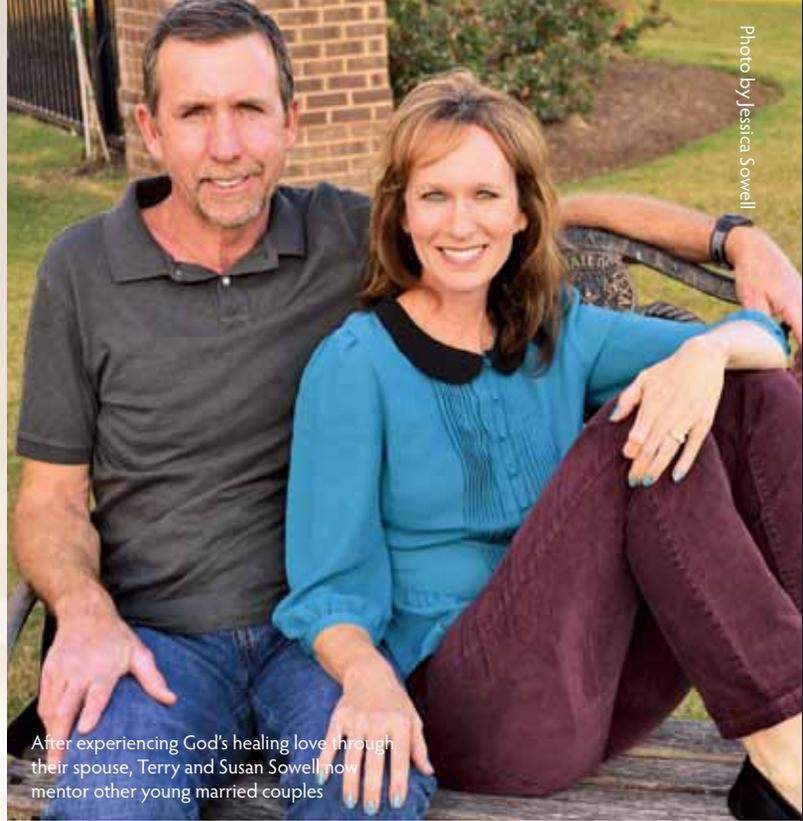
study at Kingsland Baptist Church - the same Bible study Terry was attending for almost the same reasons. After a few casual encounters, they both knew God brought them together.

**“We truly are each other’s best friends and we have a great romantic relationship.”**

*-Susan Sowell*

The first year was rocky. “I didn’t have the first clue how to be a wife,” Susan says. “I was still healing from my previous hurts and I had to get to a place where I knew my value was in God. I spent that first year in therapy,” she explains. “Terry could have just walked away, but he was so committed to the marriage - so good to me.” Together they have spent the last 23 years not only working to break the generational cycle of darkness and dysfunction they both experienced, but also ministering to and mentoring other couples. “We tell them if God rescued us, he can rescue anybody,” she says. “We both had so much brokenness.”

Terry and Susan find joy in the everyday things, whether it’s two-stepping around their living room late at night, fishing together, or going for a walk. “We truly are each other’s best friends and we have a great romantic relationship,” says Susan. “He thinks I am beautiful and adores me, and I adore him. He is the man God used to show me the love of Christ.”



After experiencing God’s healing love through their spouse, Terry and Susan Sowell now mentor other young married couples

### Dirk and Kathy Smit Through Sickness and Health



Dirk and Kathy Smit recently commemorated 40 years of marriage. They’ve come a long way from their college days, when Dirk first caught Kathy’s attention by pouring a bucket of cold water over her head. Early years of marriage found them living in a miner’s shack on a dairy farm, and since then they’ve lived in 15 other places while raising four children.

Dirk recalls thinking early on, “We’re married, so magically everything will just work out.” As he matured, something his grandpa said finally made sense to him: “Marriage is 100/100, not 50/50.” Kathy also remembers her “ah-hah” moment. “I finally came to the realization that Dirk couldn’t be my god to make me happy. I had to find my own worth in God first.” This change in perspective helped smooth the path as they faced two frightening cancer diagnoses: Kathy at 38 with colon cancer and Dirk in 2006 with two different forms of Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma. While Kathy’s cancer has never



After 40 years of marriage, multiple moves, and ongoing bouts with cancer, Dirk and Kathy Smit still adore one another

returned, Dirk continues his battle. He successfully underwent chemotherapy in 2007 and 2008, but still requires frequent check-ups and may require more chemo in the future. "I couldn't have gotten through it or come this far without Kathy," he states. "She comforted me. She was my advocate."

The Smits have learned that life is a precious gift. "We want to make it more fun, have more joy, and deepen our bond with each other and with God," Kathy says. Dirk agrees, "We know that God gives you the grace to get through whatever season," he says. "True peace comes from grabbing that grace." It also comes from grabbing his wife's hand as they gaze adoringly at each other, just like newlyweds, only 40 years later.

### Ron and Linda Richards Beating the Odds



Thirty-six years ago, not many would have predicted Ron and Linda Richards would have made it this far. Married at 16, they have defied probability and have found immeasurable joy in their union. However, their life together has not been without tragedy. When their daughter Chrysta was 2 years old and Linda was eight-and-a-half months pregnant, the couple was in a terrible car accident. Ron suffered serious injuries, but the most heartbreaking loss was that of their unborn son. Another miscarriage followed. They finally welcomed their son Erik in 1991.

Through those dark times and the years that followed, Linda says, "We've always been able to talk about everything. Ron is my rock and best friend." In a time where spouses may not always communicate about everything, they believe honesty and transparency are the keys to a successful marriage. "We work together on everything and consult

each other on everything," Linda says. It doesn't hurt that Ron is wonderfully agreeable, even tagging along during her shopping adventures.

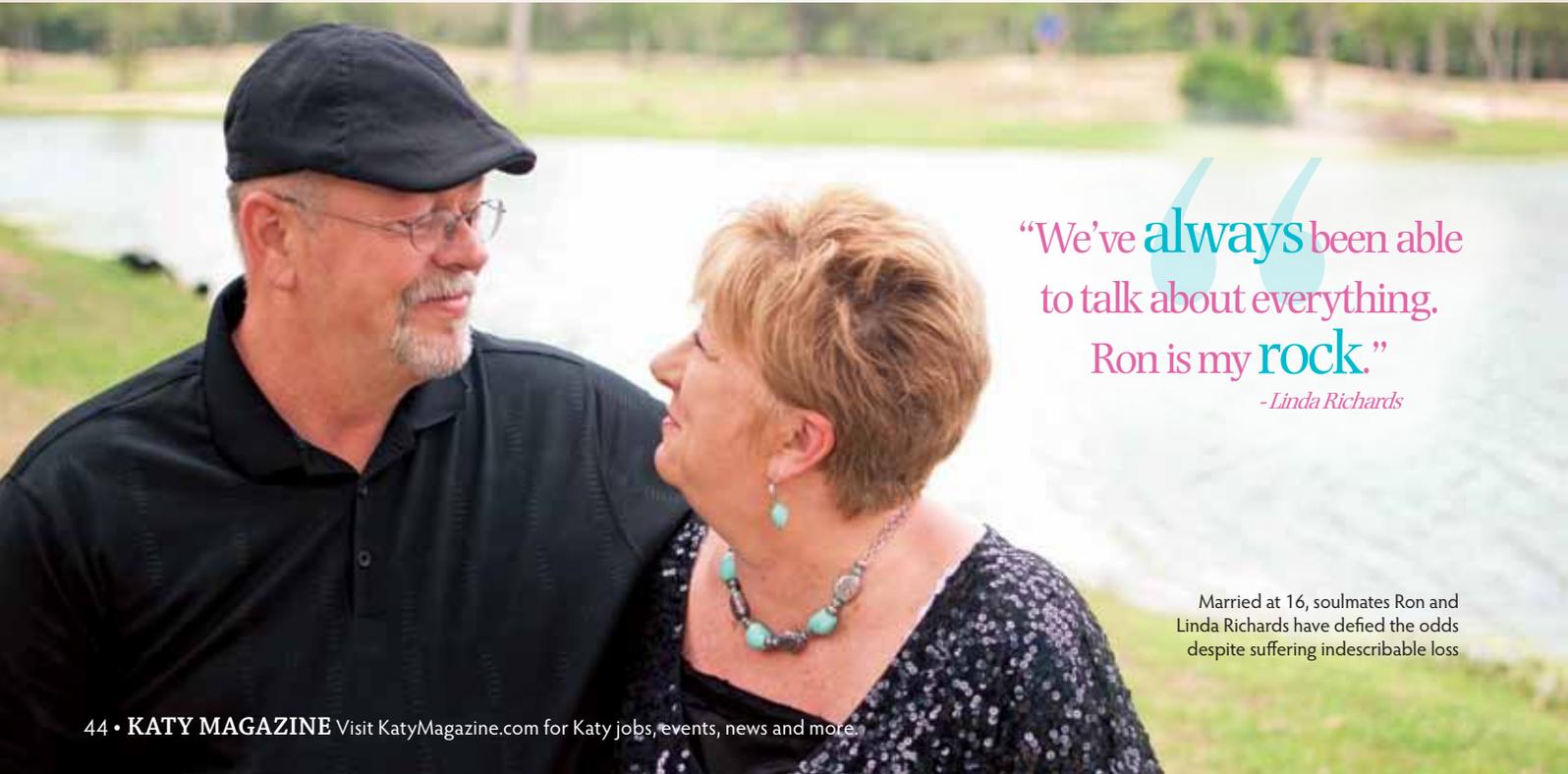
"We both found our soulmates young," Linda says. "It hasn't always been easy. But the good times have been so much more prevalent than the bad." **KM**



*MEAGAN CLANAHAN married her soulmate 10 years ago and found inspiration in each one of these extraordinary couples' love stories.*

### Keeping Romance Alive Our Couples' Favorite Activities

- **Adam and Bailey Lanier** •  
Exploring "dive" restaurants, playing board games, and exercising
- **Michael and Sheree Jones** •  
Volunteering together to promote organ donation and attending car shows
- **Terry and Susan Sowell** •  
Outdoor fun such as walking, riding four-wheelers, and fishing
- **Dirk and Kathy Smit** •  
Traveling the country by RV and frequenting local Katy eateries
- **Ron and Linda Richards** •  
Hitting up small towns for antiquing and shopping



"We've always been able to talk about everything. Ron is my rock."

- Linda Richards

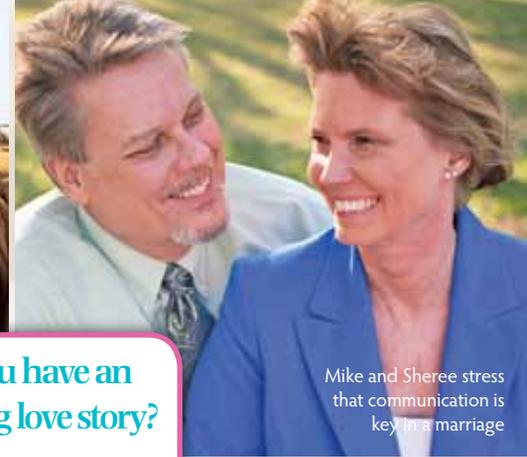
Married at 16, soulmates Ron and Linda Richards have defied the odds despite suffering indescribable loss



Ron and Linda have been married for 36 years



Bailey and Adam reunite after a long deployment



Mike and Sheree stress that communication is key in a marriage



Dirk and Kathy feel blessed by their four children and their families

Photo by Joanna Stewart

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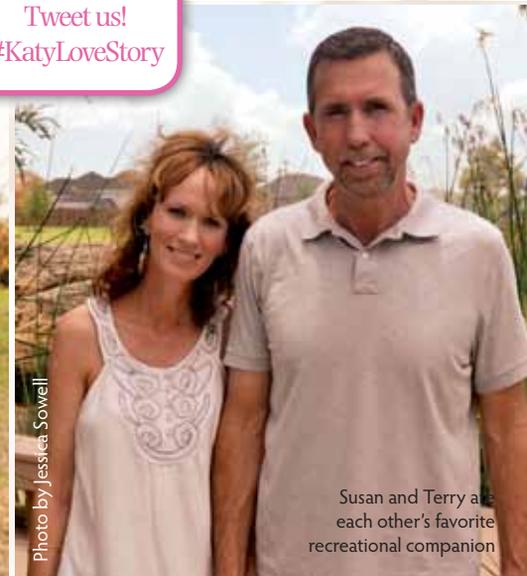



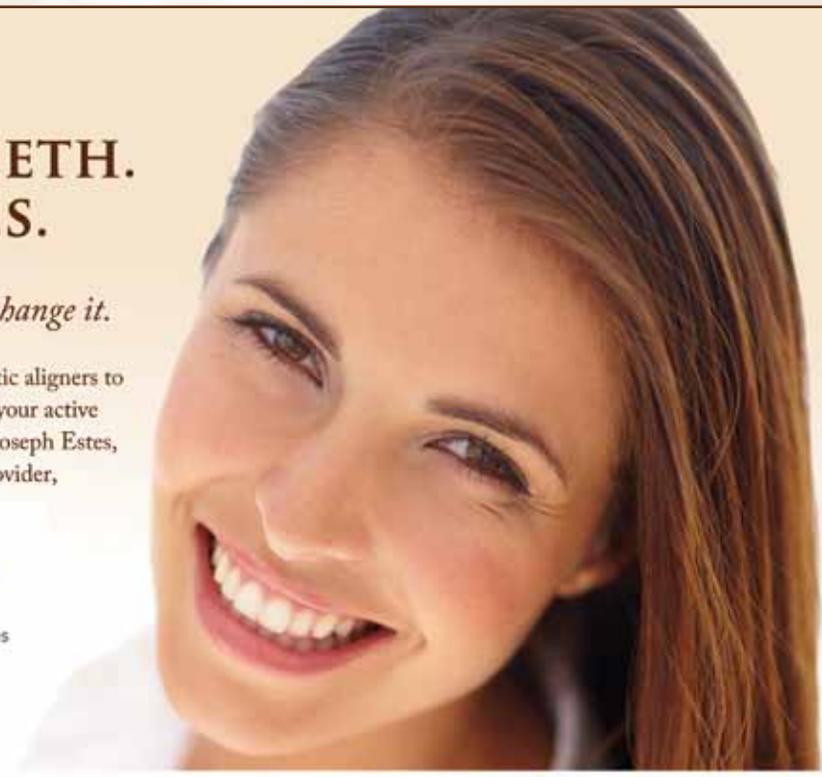
Photo by Jessica Sowell

Susan and Terry are each other's favorite recreational companion

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