

GRAFTON *Record*



Jim and Kathy Kehoe
Thankful and Blessed

NOVEMBER 2021

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By Yvonne Wolfe • Photos by House Wren Photography

Do you believe in miracles? For one Grafton couple, “miracle” is the only word that can explain the welcome unexpected events that unfolded in the days, weeks and months following a frightening evening in August 2020.

In 1977, Jim and Kathy Kehoe met on a blind date. They were introduced by a mutual friend who believed their common love of teaching children was a connection that could lead to friendship.

Jim was teaching physical education at Grafton Elementary School and Kathy home economics at the middle school in Portage. It was great to have teaching in common and friendship turned into dating. The commute to see each other was easy. Kathy came often to Grafton to watch Jim coach football and share time on the weekends; Jim went her way to cross country ski and just do fun things together. Kathy eventually changed jobs and began teaching at Bayside Middle School.

After three years, the couple became engaged and they married on 8-1-81. The Kehoes bought their first home in Cedarburg and started a family right away, welcoming son Matt. Nineteen months

later, second son Steve joined the family. Kathy left teaching to stay home and care for the boys. The Kehoes soon moved to Grafton, Jim’s hometown, and daughter Sarah was born. For 32 years they lived on Northbrooke Drive by the Grafton pool.

Kathy loved teaching and continued to do so, in a new way, as she took in teacher’s children each school year. “A new baby a year was great,” Kathy admitted. “Our three kids enjoyed having them as well. Jim loved coming home to see how many kids were at the lunch table!” Kathy also worked 10 years as a sewer for window treatments for her two best friends. She loved all of her jobs and felt fortunate to be able to work and be home to raise their children. Last November Kathy retired from a 10 year career at Aurora Medical Center as a Patient Service Representative.

In 2008, Jim retired after teaching 35 years in Grafton. Reflecting on his career, Jim appreciated being able to develop his own teaching program. "There were also good hard working kids involved in all sports and the head coach was knowledgeable coming from college coaching experience," he explained.

Having coached a total of 42 years at Grafton, Concordia and various area high schools for one year each, ending at Concordia, there are several highlights of Jim's coaching career. They include being added to the Wisconsin Football Coaches Hall of Fame in March 2011 and the Grafton Gridiron Hall of Fame this past summer. On October 16, Jim and the entire coaching staff were inducted into the Concordia Hall of Fame for their NAIA national championship game. Jim's passion was and still is coaching and teaching kids, no matter the age level. "I tell him to enjoy football games but I know he is analyzing each play...can't take the coach out of him," Kathy shared.

Retirement has allowed Kathy and Jim more time to enjoy each other and their hobbies. Kathy loves scrapbooking, having completed six albums per child, Jim's football career, trips to Germany, babysitting kids and heritage books - it is all documented! Her new love is making hand stamped greeting cards. "It's my therapy to just unwind downstairs in my card studio! Jim teases me that the basement isn't his but he is so into working out that there is space for both of us," Kathy said.

They both love walking, biking, working out, music and spending time with friends. Kathy played piano back in the day and Jim just loves to listen to music of all kinds. He tried to play the guitar but his son showed him up! The couple also enjoys evenings spent playing *Name That Tune* with friends.

Having done most of the cooking the past three years while Kathy worked, Jim is quite the culinary wiz in the kitchen. He also loves to make meat or fish on his smoker. This outlet allows Jim to get quite creative and be open to new foods!

For the past forty years, the Kehoes have been members of Grace Lutheran in Grafton. They have been involved on council, ran Vacation Bible School, been part of bible study groups, taught Sunday School together and separately for years and enjoyed doing outreach activities (especially serving at St Ben's in Milwaukee).

Three years ago Jim and Kathy moved into a condo in the Hunter's Crossing Subdivision. "It is the best decision yet," they explained. "We have great neighbors, great friends, one-level living and no more yard work. God knew that this was what we needed!" They have loved living in Grafton during their married life and Jim loves what it offered him as a child and as a professional.

Today the Kehoe children are grown and off on their own. Matt, 38, is an assistant district attorney in Oklahoma; Steve 36, is a consultant presently commuting weekly to New York. Married to Kat, they live in Missouri with their two children - Kai and Teo;



Family photos by Jack Mathney
Middle photo: Siblings Matt, Sarah and Steve Kehoe



Bottom photo: Jim and Kathy with grandsons Kai and Teo



Sarah, 34, is a senior media planner/buyer in Milwaukee. All of the children are very successful at their careers and Kathy and Jim are so proud of all of them.

As you would expect, Jim and Kathy love their grandchildren very much! Jim loves to tell the little boys jokes and for his last birthday, Kai made him a book of those jokes. Jim also loves playing kickball with the boys in the basement, as it seems they always come when it's cold or rainy.

Life was full of all the Kehoes could expect in retirement. Then, on one evening last August, an unexpected event changed their lives forever. Kathy explained it in her own words...

"It was August 19, 2020. Jim had a severe cardiac arrest in our home that evening. The police and EMTs were here in 3 minutes and performed CPR. Jim was transported to the ED at Aurora and was transferred to ICU after he was more stable. Jim had two codes in the hospital and the doctors gave him a 1% chance

of a meaningful life after viewing an MRI - it showed the lining of the brain to be white or dead. We decided to have Jim taken off life

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support as we knew he did not want to be a vegetable. We were told in minutes he could be gone, then hours and then days.

We moved Jim to Lawliss Hospice in Mequon that Monday. Wednesday they cleaned him up, shaved him, dressed him and he sat up and said, 'Hi. How are you?' We immediately notified the nurses. We put on his Pandora station to the Association and Jim began singing along. We were thrilled! We didn't know what to expect but the nurses told us that patients have rainbow days to say goodbye to the family. Wow, that was hard to hear.

The next day Jim was very tired and not very responsive. Sarah and Steve stayed with him that night, as I went home to try to get sleep and to get the support from Matt. Jim was awake every 15 minutes to clear his throat.

The next morning when I came, Steve left to go back to his boys because they were having a difficult time with the thought of losing Grandpa. We called Steve mid trip to wait as dad was coming around again!

Coaches came to visit Jim and he responded to them as well. We videoed Grandpa so the grandchildren could see his progress. By Sunday, many family members came from as far as California to see Jim. On Monday the hospice doctor released him back to the hospital.

EMT's said they had never done this before! We were happy to give them that 'first time'.

When back at Aurora, they dwelt on Jim's heart condition, did a cath lab and found that he had blockage. Doctors went in days later to put in 5 stents. A former Sunday school student, now mom,



texted me some wonderful songs to listen to during the procedure. I shared them with my family and as they say 'singing is twice praying'. Prayers went up and were pleased with how they were answered. That's when the doctor appeared with a grin from ear to ear. I never saw a doctor smile through a mask before, but I did that day! Without those songs shared it would have been difficult for me. A fellow coworker and church member came also and sat with me. I felt so lifted up that day.

Jim recovered and was introduced to the doctor who would arrange his stay at St Lukes in Milwaukee for Inpatient Rehabilitation. It was amazing to see Jim's progress from not recognizing us to knowing us, recognizing people from pictures and talking on the phone to coaches. He was at St. Lukes until September 28th.

When Jim came home he had at home care from Speech, Physical rehab and Occupational Therapy. He then continued his rehab at the hospital in town with fabulous therapists.

It has been a long journey and Jim has come a long way! He has difficulty with short term memory and time concepts but enjoys working out and having conversations with many visitors. Covid did not help to make anything easier but Jim is a strong and determined person. I remember him feeling bad in the hospital one morning when I came because he felt he had no friends. I explained that because of Covid friends could not come to see him. It just shows how important it is to have that actual presence of family and friends in medical recovery. It was so helpful that when he did get home that friends, one or two at a time, came to see him and reminisce and just be there. That was so important in his recovery. Even phone calls to this day make a huge difference when friends check in on him directly.

Through all of this, the support we got from the community (through emails, texts, facebook posts, etc.), our church family (prayers, meals and foods), coaches and friends (with phone calls and visits) lifted us up. We so very much appreciate everything.

While Jim was in hospice, we were working on funeral arrangements and a memorial service, even contacting the Grafton school superintendent to use the football field for his service. We were just overwhelmed by all the support we got. Neighbors brought meals, cookies, books to read, help with our garden, etc. I could just go on and on.

There was a misunderstanding about Jim's condition from our daughter's facebook post and the responses were overwhelming on how much people in the community loved Jim as a friend, teacher and coach. We have a drawer full of cards to lift us up through all this. We look back at those and pray for all the people who prayed for this miracle. We have truly been blessed!

Our pastors were amazing with their hospital and hospice visits. It was fun to see the wonder of this miracle on their faces, as each time they came, Jim had improved. The prayers, the hugs, the cards, the texts, the comments, the food, blankets made just for him, all the support - we were and still are overwhelmed.

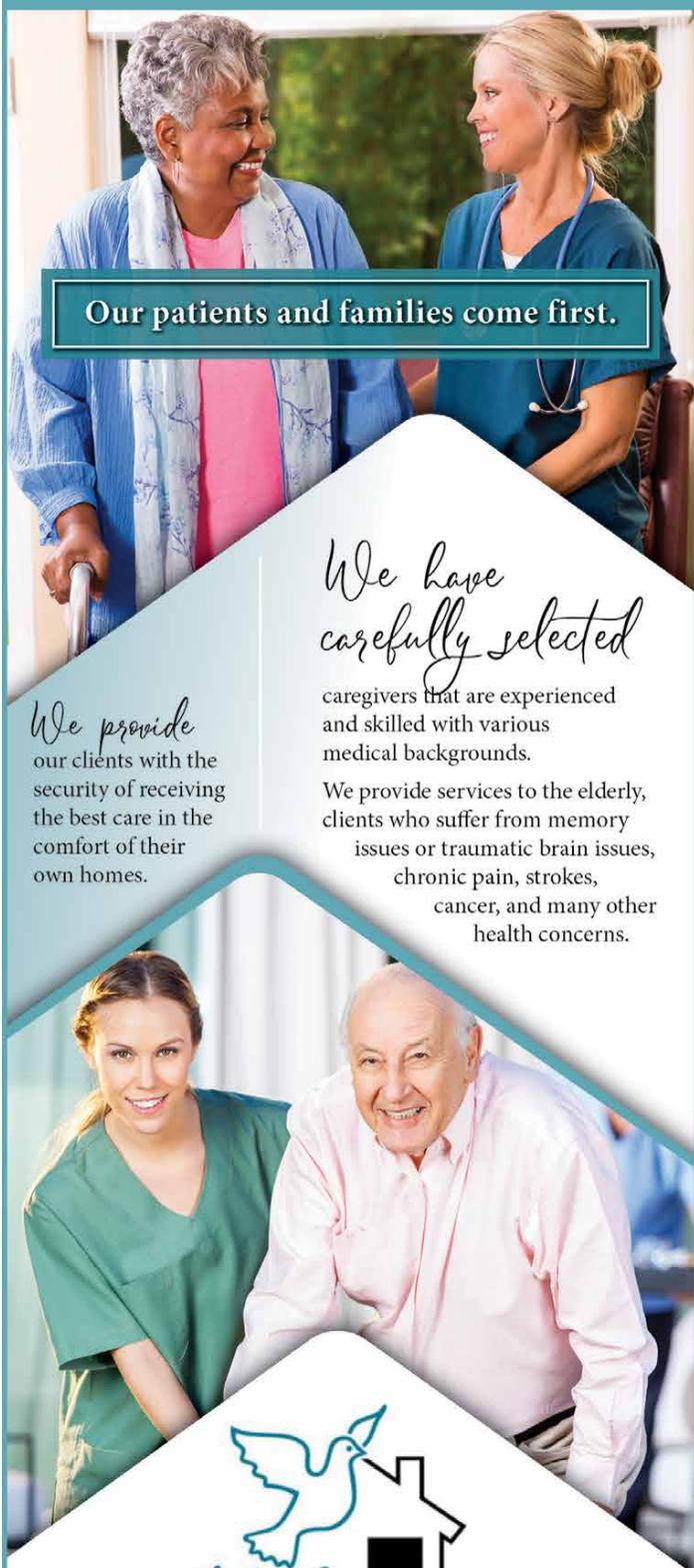
The care we received from the medical staff both at Aurora and Lawliss was beyond words. We are so grateful for every doctor, nurse, therapist, and all staff that made an impact on Jim's health. We also appreciate the quick response from the police and fire departments in town. We would not be where we are at without their efficiency at their jobs. We love going back to treat them. We are neighbors with an EMT that worked on Jim and she stated he is her only 'save' that survived. When she shared that with me this past month, I was brought to tears. So happy to have that label!

We want to thank the community for everything they did and continue to do to help us through this. Jim is not 100% but boy he has come so far. We work on word searches, exercises, reading (he reads aloud to me, inspiring books like *Tuesdays with Morrie*), biking, walking (he would love to run but his knees say no!), helping in the kitchen with food prep, and talking on the phone. It all just amazes me. His sense of humor is still there too. Jim tires easily but so do a lot of 71 year olds! God is not done with him yet. He still has plans for Jim."

Before the event in August 2020, Jim did not have any major health issues. He did feel the need to do his best at whatever he was doing, be it teaching, coaching or as a person. Sometimes Jim took that to the extreme and it could affect him physically. He learned to work through that, even taking up running to help with weight issues. After Jim's hospital stay, he learned that he has a family background of heart problems. "It is important to know your family's health history and get health screenings early," Jim stressed. "Keep on top of things. Don't let them get out of hand."

Crediting his recovery to not only the excellent and knowledgeable experience of his healthcare workers and help of his wife and family, Jim believes in the true power of prayer. "What has really inspired me throughout my life, and definitely during the miracles of this past year, is summed up in Philippians 4:13 - *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,*" he said. Prayers came from not only family and close friends but from this whole community, old neighbors, past students and parents, past football players and coaches, and friends from around the world.

"God is good all the time; All the time God is good. That's my mantra," Kathy explained. "God is awesome. We witnessed the power of prayer and a miracle in the making. Miracles do happen and Jim and I have been so blessed to see that in our lives!"



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