

Jackie Boss



Fortitude, faith and family. That is Jackie Boss. Through trials and tribulations most of us couldn't fathom, Jackie not only persevered, but thrived.

Overcoming the early death of her mother and the temporary displacement of living quarters when she was a teenager, she nurtured a marriage that is 63 years young and raised five daughters.

Jackie Boss (nee Griffioen) was born in September of 1936 to Henrietta and Arie Griffioen in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Her mother passed when she was only six years old, and she entered her teenage years living in a "guardian home" (what we would now call a foster home) for three years.

In her late teens she worked at a local supermarket-meat department, where her father was a butcher; however, Jackie learned how to butcher chickens and turkeys. There, she met the man with whom she would end up spending the rest of her life. Clarence "Clare" Boss also worked in the meat section. He said he was terrified of her wielding that cleaver and thought the safest route to survival was simply to marry her. So he did.

Clare was in the lumber business before he retired almost 24 years ago. The money was good enough to allow Jackie to stay home and raise their children: five amazing daughters. Laurie, Cindi, Kathi and Amy are Jackie's biological children, and they adopted Rena when she was very young.

After Jackie had Amy, she and Clare embarked on a mission that would change not only their lives, but the lives of dozens of young people over the course of the next 25 years. The foster system helped her, so Jackie wanted to become a foster parent as well.

"I want to be a bridge in their life from where they are coming from to where they are going in the future," she says. Never more than seven but always with several kids around, Jackie and Clare became that bridge for more than 50 children over their years together.

Not all of the kids were well behaved. Many of the children that the Boss' took in had some deep rooted problems that often manifested in "bad behavior". But Clare and Jackie were patient. "I couldn't have done it without Clare," Jackie says.

She made the hard decisions: whether it was to call the police on one of her foster kids or give some tough love. The reason she was able to deal with the troublesome kids is the same reason she says—with a wink—she has been able to tolerate her husband for 63 years: “tolerance”. She learned this, as well as many of her other defining characteristics, via her faith. Jackie is a member of the Reformed Churches in America in Jenison, where she and Clare worship once a week most of the year and attend services on Wednesdays during the winter months.

They’re also members and worship at Rosewood Reformed Church. Jackie’s faith has influenced her musical and entertainment tastes as well. While she admits she loves a good Nicholas Sparks book and some non-fiction (no sci-fi, thank you), she also enjoys hymnal music and faith-based books and film.

Although they can’t do it much anymore, Clare and Jackie used to love camping. And they’ve traveled all over the world: Europe, China, the Caribbean, Hawaii and Alaska. Sometimes they went alone, and sometimes with friends like Roger and Harriet Sikma or Pete and Irene Andringa.

The bigger trips are harder now, but smaller ones are still on the books: the Creation Museum in Cincinnati, Beaver Island in Lake Michigan for a couple of days. But Jackie never had the desire to move away from the Grand Rapids area. It was always home.

One of the defining characteristics of Jackie is her inability to give up. She wanted to go to college after high school, but it was the 1950s, and women who married didn’t go off to school. They stayed home and raised a family. So Jackie did. When her youngest daughter decided to go Grand Valley State to pursue nursing, Jackie decided she would as well. They are the only mother-daughter pairing to graduate at the same time from Grand Valley State.

Jackie went on to practice nursing for 18 years after she graduated, fulfilling a lifelong dream to graduate from college and continuing in the professional realm what she had been doing at home for years: caring for others. Jackie now helps care for her 21 grandchildren and 29 great-grandchildren. And she’s eagerly awaiting the great great grandchildren to come!