

PROFILE

Not Exactly a Train Wreck

This Lynchburg couple has found a contentment in retirement, even though it doesn't remotely resemble what they had so carefully planned. **STORY AND PHOTOS BY DAN SMITH**

CHARLOTTE AND AUBREY WILEY had it all figured out. Until they didn't. Then they solved the problem again, but life, as it tends to do, had a different plan. So now, here they are, retired, living in a comfy cottage, settled, treating each other like newlyweds, and satisfied with the way it turned out.

When they first landed on a game plan for retirement, they had been married for a long time. But not to each other. Those marriages wobbled, stumbled, then crumbled, leaving them—in late middle age—with a problem. They met each other, were immediately attracted and married 10 years ago.

Charlotte (67) was still working when they met (as a commuting bookkeeper for the University of Virginia in Charlottesville), but Aubrey's health went into the can, forcing him to retire from teaching in Lynchburg City Schools and at Lynchburg College in 2002. He was 59 then (74 now). She followed seven years later when the grant for her job ran out.

Because of the way it came about, retirement wasn't easy for Aubrey, who had already retired from his 25-year position as an award-winning photographer (and head of the department, finally) at the Lynchburg News-Advance.

"I morphed into it because of health issues," he says. The

cumulative effect of lugging around cameras and equipment for 25 years wore out his body, says Aubrey.

"I loved teaching and looked forward to do it long after I reached 65," he says. Teaching loved him, too. He was once named the Virginia Teacher of the Year.

Early in retirement, "I walked around looking out the window, thinking, 'I don't have a job,'" Aubrey says now. "But I've been active with hobbies and the things I never had time for before." He's written six books since retiring (adding to the three he had already written), all on his primary hobby, railroading. The books continue to sell well. His impressive collection of railroad memorabilia has increased and much of the house, the outbuildings and 12.5 acres of their property are a display of that jaw-dropping gathering of railroad history. Railroad buffs seek him out to tour his museum.

His three-year-old book "Virginian Railway: Memories" is generally considered the definitive work on that late railroad.

Charlotte, meanwhile, has "always loved art." She is a potter and painter and other "quirky things," like a drummer. Her creations are scattered around the property, as well, often looking like miniature celebrations of secret thoughts. There is a distinct whimsy involved. "I imagine it takes less to satisfy me," she says, smiling at Aubrey.

Retirement, for Charlotte, had meant "I'd have lots of money, there would be cruises and trips and we'd see the children (six between them) a lot. But it didn't work out that way. We walk, bike, go to the restaurant and drink beer." They eat out as much as twice a day. They are openly affectionate, joking much of the time and they seem to fully enjoy each other's company.

Both worked a long time and accumulated satisfactory retirement. Their home is paid for, so it doesn't take a lot to make them happy, though frequent cruises are not part of their plan.

"I enjoy things that don't cost a lot," says Charlotte. Aubrey's collections can cost a bit, but they result in great satisfaction for him. "A few weeks ago," he says, "we bought a Jeep off Craigslist and we use it to get out into the country."

Under their circumstances, says Charlotte, "it doesn't cost much to live." And the two of them live quite well.



Charlotte and Aubrey Wiley built this little cabin on their Lynchburg property.