

Elwyn LaVerne Simons

A Very Personal View

Friderun Ankel-Simons

This is the most unlikely story to ever have happened—a young German biologist went to Yale University in January of 1971 to work at the Division of Fossil Vertebrates of Yale University's Peabody Museum for one year—and one year only, not a day longer—and to learn as much as she could about fossil primates.

She learned much about vertebrate and primate fossils and in the bargain she unexpectedly found the man who would be the love of her life: Elwyn Simons, perhaps one of the last Renaissance men, who is the most complex, knowledgeable, caring, responsible and wonderful human being imaginable (Fig. 1). Some of his unusual qualities are: prudent consensus seeker, diplomat, visionary for the future, honorary Aye-aye—nobody else understands like Elwyn how to make a displaced lemur feel at home—*Exempla gratia*: By helping an Aye-aye, that just had arrived from its homeland Madagascar, to build its first nest in a strange new world at the Duke Primate Center, or grooming a lonely *Propithecus* named Nigel on a regular basis. Being married to Elwyn since December 2nd, 1972 I am likely to be biased. But this doesn't matter as I am trying to be realistic.

What does it mean to be Married to Elwyn?

It means continuously going to distant and daunting places where he is finding spectacular fossils. These may be expeditions to the stunning Badlands of Wyoming (Fig. 2), to the arid and overwhelmingly gorgeous and vast Fayum Desert in Egypt (Fig. 3), or to the magical Mecca of any naturalist, the island world of Madagascar. It means vehicles getting stuck in sand or mud, or running out of gas on the highway (Fig. 4); sleeping in tents (Fig. 5) in magical places and seeing more stars than one ever imagined existed; hearing

Friderun Ankel-Simons
3603 Stoneybrook Drive, Durham, NC 27705
friderun@aol.com

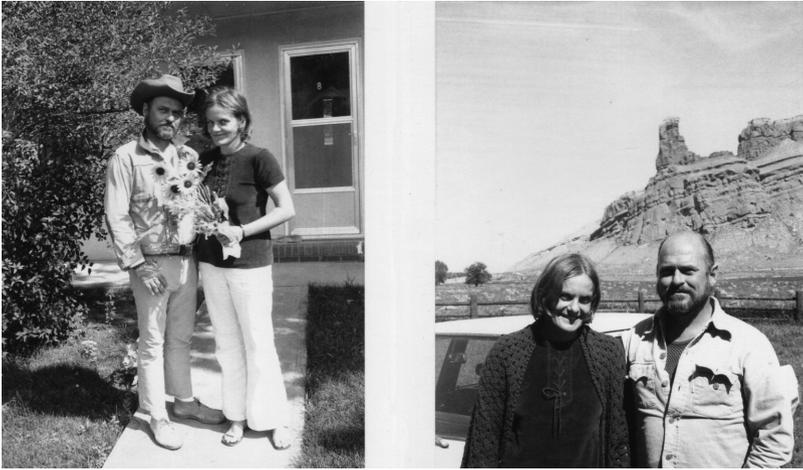


Fig. 1 Elwyn and Friderun Simons in Wyoming, 1972

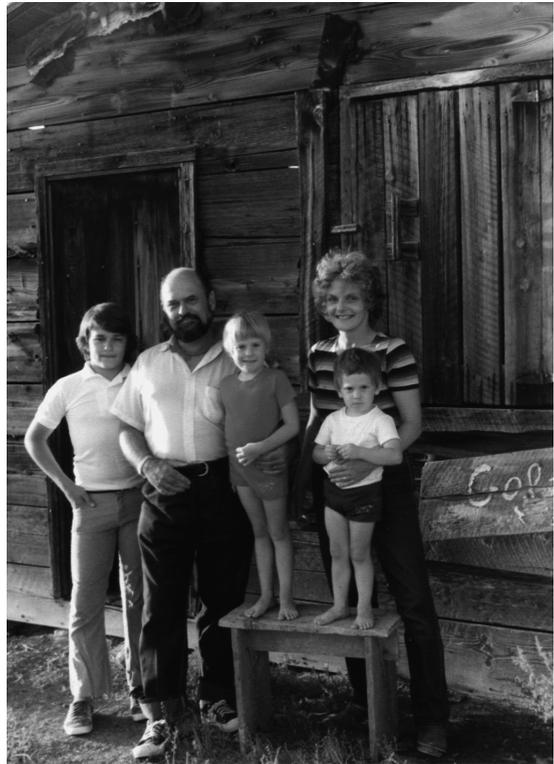


Fig. 2 Simons Family in front of Goldtooth MacDonal's Cabin, Wyoming 1979. From left: David Brenton, Elwyn, Cornelia, Friderun holding Verne



Fig. 3 The Simons Family in Sakkara, Egypt 1985. From left: Egyptian Guide, Elwyn, Verne and Cornelia on the Camel, Friderun



Fig. 4 1995, the Simons Family on the Road to the Ankarana, northern Madagascar: fun and games!

the desert fox calling or the lemurs quarrel in the middle of the night. It means long evenings of lively discussions and conversations about the world, about fossils, about genealogy, the history of Christianity, the ear region of the



Fig. 5 1995, Ankarana Camp. Friderun emerging from her tent

primate genus *Tarsius*, about students and children, the Pharaohs of Egypt, about living prosimians, primates and wild life conservation, about bee keeping, the meaning of life, art, agonizing about politics gone wrong that are more often than not based in the uniquely human dilemma known as religion. It is an endless series of fond but hilarious anecdotes about Frank Goto, the paleontology preparator at Princeton University. It is mourning the loss of family members and friends. It is sharing the triumphs of receiving scientific awards, being knighted by the country of Madagascar, or being elected to scholarly societies. It is proudly seeing students succeed in their lives.

Being married to Elwyn means wonderful meals, gardening, restoring beautiful handmade quilts and paintings, trips to India or Europe, months living in Germany and Paris, France, vacations in the Caribbean, visits to Houston, Texas, pulling weeds, planting roses and palm trees, visits to Yellowstone Park, glaciers, mountains and geysers, Simons family reunion in the Ozarks, drives through New England or Kansas, all the way across the continent to the American West. It means Art and Natural History Museums, country music, being in Colorado, Montana and taking the road over the Beartooth Mountains, singing lullabies, camp songs and telling stories. Smelling flowers and watching humming birds, washing dishes, a kitchen sticky all over with delectable honey, watering plants, going for walks. Life with Elwyn is never, ever boring.

It also means limitless trust, love, warmth, responsibility and adding the next generation to our union, David Brenton, Cornelia and Verne. It means having wonderful, loving and trusting lifelong friends and family members.

All of them true friends indeed. It means never ending support, generosity, understanding and allowing each other to grow. It means flower bouquets, orchids blooming, caterpillars and butterflies, pyramids and running creeks, picking up sticks, looking for fossils, sitting around camp fires and giving parties. It is writing papers and books, proofreading manuscripts and grant proposals, discussing ideas.

There have been complicated times, both familial and professional. There have been crosscurrents caused by envious, misleading or even devious people, uncomprehending administrators, senseless minions, misunderstandings, but Elwyn stands tall above any confusion and hurdle that life entails.

This is what it means to be married to Elwyn.



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