

Well Traveled



Avid travelers Phil and Elaine Schlosser have been married for more than 60 years, and in that time have visited at least as many countries together. However, when an old hip injury threatened to derail their adventures, Elaine decided it was time to take action. She called on the experts at Eisenhower Medical Center to get her on the road...to wellness.

In the spring of 2007, Phil and Elaine Schlosser traveled to the south of France. In the fall they took on Sicily, Malta and the Amalfi Coast. "We try to be world travelers," laughs Elaine. Actually, Phil and Elaine, at 83 and 80 years old respectively, have seen an impressive amount of the world and don't shy away from adventures, including taking the Siberian Express from Beijing through Mongolia to Moscow and riding on a nuclear powered Russian icebreaker to the North Pole.

Phil and Elaine met in March 1946 in Wisconsin when Elaine, a college student, was working in a drugstore. Phil had served in the Pacific with the Navy and had recently returned home. "Phil's sister and I both worked in the drugstore. Phil came in, and his sister introduced us. That's how we met," says Elaine. They began to date and found plenty in common — including an interest in seeing the world.

The Schlossers were married on October 12, 1946. They worked hard and saved their money, allowing them to open a forging company in Rancho Cucamonga, California, where Phil also served as mayor. The couple eventually moved to Redmond, Oregon where they opened their second company, Schlosser Casting Company. "It was a titanium foundry," says Phil. "We made jet engine parts as well as ankles, shoulders, knees and hips out of titanium for the medical industry."

With three grown children, the couple began to explore hobbies, including travel, golf and horseback riding on their ranch in Oregon. However, one day Elaine gave up riding because the horse threw her off. "I was no horsewoman and the horse knew it," jokes Elaine. However, she knew she had sustained an injury that day. "I was never the same after that."

As a result, Elaine began experiencing pain in her hip and it grew progressively worse, although she lived with the pain for more than 15 years. "It wasn't that bad at first. I just dealt with it," Elaine recalls. Phil was concerned but knew his wife could take care of herself. "I knew she would take care of it when she was ready," says Phil.

That day finally arrived in 2006 during one of the couple's adventures. While on a cruise to the South Pacific, Phil and Elaine were exiting the ship via the ship's steps and Elaine was in a great deal of pain. "It was more like a ladder than steps; it was really very steep. The whole task was just so difficult for me. My hip pain had just become too difficult and I couldn't put up with it anymore. When I got home I called my son-in-law Stephen, who is an orthopedic surgeon."

Stephen O'Connell, MD, who specializes in hand surgery at Eisenhower Medical Center, arranged for his mother-in-law to meet Adrian Graff-Radford, MD, a colleague who specializes in knee and hip replacements. "Stephen and Dr. Graff-Radford told me they'd take care of me and I trusted them," recalls Elaine. "I felt like I was in good hands. Someone else had control now."

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Phil also felt confident about his wife's surgery due to his experience with the manufacture of the castings that would be an integral part of Elaine's hip replacement. "I know how they work. We were quite aware of many people who had some of our company's parts in their body, and they were now pain-free and up and around again," says Phil.

"Elaine and I discussed the amount of pain she was experiencing and the fact that the pain was affecting her quality of life," explains Dr. Graff-Radford. "I felt comfortable that a hip replacement would give her relief of her pain and therefore allow her to have improved mobility, allowing her to lead a more normal life."

Elaine's surgery was uneventful, but she noticed something surprising immediately following surgery. "Before I had the surgery, I hurt quite badly when I was lying in bed," recalls Elaine. "When I woke up after the surgery, it didn't hurt that way anymore. The post-surgery pain hurt, but that's a different kind of pain. The pain in my hip area was gone. It was really unbelievable to be free of that so quickly."

Elaine spent a total of five days in the hospital. Elaine treated her hospital stay like any new travel destination. "My experience at Eisenhower was wonderful. I thought they treated me just great. It was a nice vacation," she says with a smile.

"Elaine rehabilitated very well and went back to full activities very rapidly," says Dr. Graff Radford. "This is in part because she was a good surgical candidate, allowing me to use a minimally invasive surgical technique, which interferes less with the muscles and speeds healing. This allowed her to return to regular activities much quicker."

Elaine went out to dinner with the assistance of a cane in a few weeks and was back to normal activities in less than a month. "I feel 20 years younger," says Elaine, who now walks five to six mornings a week for 20 to 25 minutes. "It's difficult when you have constant pain. It affects your whole body. Now, I'm not limited. I can do just about anything."

Elaine and Phil both focus on being active. Phil's golf game is proof that age is more than a state of mind sometimes it's a measure of success. "I'm the only one at our club who was in World War II who is still golfing, and it is a rare thing that people can shoot their age or better on the score of golf, so they gave me a party for shooting my age or better 311 times as of May 1."

The Schlossers sold their companies and their ranch a few years ago and made the desert their full-time residence. They recently made a substantial donation to Eisenhower Medical Center for the purchase of state-of-the-art radiology equipment. "We thought it was important to support the community we call 'home,'" says Phil.

"We feel fortunate to have this equipment available for our stroke patients," says Brian Herman, MD, Section Chief of Radiology. "It has the best imaging capability available, allowing us to create a 3-D map of the brain while we are treating the patient."

"I've been an engineer all my life," says Phil. "And I think when people have the right equipment and the right machinery, they can do the job well."

So what's next for this busy couple? Why another trip, of course. Their fifth visit to Russia will be a three-week trip on a special 757 with stops in Latvia, Lithuania, Mongolia, Krakow, Krygstan, Belgrade, Moscow and London.

May there be many, many more adventures for them both.