

# AMELIA

## NEIGHBORS

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*Attitude is  
Everything*

SO PICK A GOOD ONE!





# Attitude is Everything

SO PICK A  
GOOD ONE!

Chris and Deb Boelkes met in 1987 while working in the same organization at IBM in Southern California. Married in 1990 in Honolulu, Hawaii at the HaleKulani Hotel, Chris and Deb have been married for 32 years. They have three sons (Randy, Kenny, and James), and four granddaughters.

They have so many wonderful memories together, it's impossible to pick one. But Deb shared their first "attention grabber", which caused Deb's then co-worker (now husband) to realize they had something very special going on.

In their respective positions at IBM at the time, they each had a responsibility to support major accounts across the southwestern US, including Hawaii. Chris was a Consulting Systems Engineer, and Deb was responsible for account development, which included coordinating major events and

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conferences across the region. One such event was in Honolulu, where Chris was asked to be a speaker. After this multi-day event, their entire team went out to celebrate their success at one of the Waikiki hotel bars. When Chris and Deb's co-workers decided to drive to dinner, Deb was too exhausted to join them and bowed out in preference of walking down the beach to the Hilton Hawaiian Village where they were all staying. Chris (who like Deb, is not into late-night partying) offered to walk back with her so she wouldn't have to go alone in the dark. Deb accepted his gentlemanly offer.

Mind you, Waikiki Beach was well-lit by numerous tall streetlights at night. As they walked down Waikiki beach together, headed to the Hilton Hawaiian Village, one-by-one, each of the streetlamps along the beach went dark just before they reached each one. Then, after they passed each dark streetlamp,

each would go back on. It was the strangest thing, but it certainly got their attention. Chris said something to the effect of, "I think God's trying to tell us something." That was the beginning of their truly wonderful relationship as soul mates.

But an even stranger thing was that the "streetlamp effect" continued to happen nearly everywhere they went for years afterward, from Hawaii and California to Arizona, and beyond. In fact, just the other night a light went out unexpectedly in the yard. Chris immediately said, "We've still got it, babe!"

Deb took a rather circuitous route in college. As a college freshman, she attended the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) with a double major in Math and Computer Science. But she quickly discovered that while she was very good at Math, she did not enjoy



spending hours in the basement of the UCLA computer lab, typing up hundreds of keypunch cards to compile programs. As Deb says, looking back, "I couldn't imagine spending my life doing anything as boring as that."

So, Deb very quickly made a stunning left turn. She changed her career plan and obtained an Associate of Arts (AA) degree from the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising (FIDM) in Los Angeles. For the first five years of her career, Deb was a Fashion Designer and loved it.

Unfortunately, the owners of the firm where Deb worked were a husband-and-wife team who rarely agreed on anything. They either yelled at each other constantly, or they wouldn't speak for days. To keep operations humming, Deb deliberately got involved in running various aspects of the business, from the factory floor and quality control to sales. When she eventually got involved in the installation of the company's first computer system to automate accounting, she realized she loved running the business.

Determined to run her own company, she went back to school to obtain a bachelor's degree in Business Administration and an MBA in Management Information Systems. While doing so, Deb took a paid internship as a programmer at Raytheon Missile Systems Division and ultimately spent nearly 30 years working for Fortune 150 technology companies, from AT&T and IBM to Arrow Electronics.

Deb eventually led worldwide business operations, consulting, and professional services organizations that developed technology solutions to address global business challenges. Deb loved every day of her corporate career.

Eventually, Deb found she was usually the only woman in the room where the major decisions were made. Deb came to realize that many otherwise capable women weren't understanding how the game was played and therefore failed to achieve their potential. That led to what Deb refers to as her calling as an entrepreneur and author dedicated to the advancement of high-potential



women (and men) to the top of "best place to work" organizations.

"I must admit, my husband and I truly enjoy doing most everything together. Over the years, we worked together at three corporations. We still share an office at home, and we even go to the grocery store together. It's more about enjoying our partnership than efficiency."

At this stage in their lives, Chris and Deb very much enjoy walking together. They walk three to six miles just about every day. You'll likely see them walking just about anywhere, from the beach and downtown Fernandina to cities and suburbs abroad when they travel. That's how they both keep slim and trim.

Within and beyond their neighborhood, people recognize them by the hats they wear. Deb has a favorite bolero-style straw hat that she has worn for almost 30 years. The only thing that has changed about that hat over time is the ribbon. When their boys were in school, it was adorned with ribbons in their school colors. For the last decade, it has been bedecked with a patriotic red, white, and blue striped ribbon. Some people refer to Deb as "the hat lady." Some don't recognize her without it. New passers-by will often say to Deb, "I love your hat!" In response, Chris will jealously say, "What about my hat?"

Besides walking, another of their favorite hobbies is traveling to new places. They have had so many interesting trips, all around the world. They especially like to live like locals, so they tend to travel for weeks or months at a time—typically renting homes or flats for at least a week or

two in each village, so they can get to know the people, the customs, the food, and the history. They essentially try to understand and appreciate whatever makes the local culture what it is. They have come to learn so much and have made so many friends wherever they happen to go. "It's a wonderful life," says Deb.

Since moving to Amelia Island almost 10 years ago, Deb has served as the President of the Newcomers Club, and more recently as President of the local JH chapter of P.E.O. International (Philanthropic Educational Organization)—one of the oldest women's organizations in North America—dedicated to helping women reach for the stars through educational scholarships, grants, awards, and loans.

Eight years ago, Deb founded—and still chairs—a local civic organization called We the People, which meets monthly and currently has over 800 members. She also currently serves on the Nassau County Supervisor of Elections Advisory Committee. She is a member of the Amelia Island chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and Plantation Ladies. She also serves on the Advisory Board for the Women in Leadership Executive Program at the University of California at Santa Barbara PaCE Extension.

Both Chris and Deb are licensed volunteer members of the Nassau County Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES), which sets up and operates communication networks for

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along the Atlantic, they would just keep traveling around the world until they found the right place!

They started their search in Charleston and Kiawah and worked their way down the coast from there. What they found is that Amelia Island met almost all their criteria. The home they selected in Long Point was precisely what they loved about Low Country architecture. Now, after nearly ten years here, they can't imagine a better place to live.

"One of the best things about living here is that we are close to my parents, who live in Osprey Village," says Deb. They feel truly blessed to be able to see them as often as we do. They make special efforts to spend Sundays together and enjoy quick drop-in visits, a cadre of special celebrations, and so many other fun family times that they missed out on when they lived in the west.

Even Deb's cousin Tom has moved to Fernandina from Kansas, and her sister Carolyn and her husband Kyle moved here just last year from Connecticut. "It's just great having so much family here, especially when all our kids come to visit," says Deb.

The Boelkes' have always traveled quite a bit. When their kids were young, they took them on trips all over the world, from Alaska and Europe to Australia and beyond. It must have made a favorable impression on them because one son is now an airline pilot, and the others have careers that have moved them across the globe—one to Switzerland for seven years and the other to Singapore and Thailand for seventeen years. Happily, their moves gave Deb and Chris reasons to travel even more.

Perhaps one of the most surreal trips they ever took was right here in the

USA, just last year. Both Deb's maternal and paternal great-grandfathers fought in the Civil War. One was killed in the Battle of Shiloh (also known as the Battle of Pittsburg Landing) in southwestern Tennessee. Deb wanted to see the Shiloh National Military Park and possibly learn more about her great-grandfather's final day.

When they arrived at their B&B (called the Shiloh Chennault in Ramer, TN) the innkeeper, Jonathan, suggested they take a personally guided tour with a knowledgeable historian. Jonathan promptly arranged a tour for the next morning, which was outstanding. The historian drove them all over the Military Park, focusing on the places where Deb's great-grandfather's regiment staged various battles.



Following their guided tour, a park ranger at the museum mapped out a footpath for Deb and Chris to follow the exact battle journey of Deb's great-grandfather's regiment. It was perhaps one of the most moving experiences of her life. While she never knew the man named Milton Augustus Calhoun, a little piece of her heart will forever remain in Shiloh.

Deb and Chris have developed some very special friendships with many of their Long Point neighbors. Some they even travel with, some are involved with Deb in DAR and P.E.O., and many are members of Deb's We the People civic organization. Because many of their Long Point neighbors own dogs, and some are simply avid walkers, Deb and Chris enjoy lots of impromptu chats while they are out walking.

To these very special friends, Deb and Chris would like to say, "Thank you for blessing our lives with your love and friendship."

local and county government agencies, fire battalions, and emergency relief shelters.

Chris and Deb live in the Long Point subdivision of the Plantation. They have lived there for 9 years. Born and raised near the beach in Southern California, Deb never expected to live in Florida, but life is full of wonderful surprises she says.

Their last home was on Balboa Island in Newport Beach, CA where they lived for 17 years—just three blocks away from where Deb lived while in high school. When they moved into that house, Deb told Chris, "I want to stay here forever. You're going to have to take me out of here in a box." When they moved, Chris asked United Van Lines if they had a box big enough for Deb.

Their move was preceded by Chris being diagnosed with late stage 3 breast cancer. After a tough several months battling that, he decided to retire. Chris wanted Deb to do the same. While they both loved life on Balboa Island, they no longer loved the traffic, or the taxes, or the state government's chokehold on businesses and citizens in California. Yet, they still wanted to live on an island because there is something very special about island life.

While in the process of moving to the big island of Hawaii, they discovered that the only hospital on the Big Island—at the time—was not licensed for surgery. That surprise made them realize Hawaii was not the place for them. So, they flew back to California, bought a new car, and drove across the country to check out islands in the southeast. They figured if they did not find what suited them

