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*Meet the*  
**Lechniaks!**

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**JANUARY 2023**



# Meet the Lechniaks!



By Lucinda Hahn  
Photos by Highland  
Photography Studio  
and the family



**T**he Lechniaks of South Williamsport are bound together by love, kindness — and Star Wars! Olivia and Todd met through the Plenty of Fish dating site, and their first meetup was at the Moon and Raven pub on West 4th St. There, they learned a little about each other: Todd was a South Williamsport native and the proud son of former Mayor David Lechniak, while Olivia hailed from Newberry, where she was raised “with a view of the mountain and always wanting to move to South Williamsport since I was little.”

They had a shared “geekiness,” Olivia says, that paved the way for their love affair. And on April 13, 2018 — a balmy, unseasonably warm Friday — they made it official with a simple ceremony at Montoursville’s Justice of the Peace. After lunch with friends and family at The Brickyard, the two drove to Monroeville for an inventive honeymoon: They would spend it at Steel City Con — one of the largest comic conventions in the U.S.

“We had a goal to meet [rock star] Alice Cooper on our wedding day,” the couple shares. “With an hour to spare, we waited in line with his ‘Welcome to My Nightmare’ album in hand. When we finally met him, he thought we were cosplayers” — dressed up in costumes from a movie or game, like many of the convention-goers. “We told him, ‘No, we actually just got married!’” He congratulated us and signed the album, and wrote the number 42 in the corner — explaining that this was how many years he had been married and that was our number to beat. Such a nice man!”

The Lechniaks enjoyed the rest of their honeymoon weekend at the convention, hanging out with the Garrison Carida of the 501st Legion, a Star Wars costuming group that Todd has been part of for 16 years. Its members — through their love of Star Wars and costuming as characters — assist and attend charitable events and community service initiatives throughout eastern Pennsylvania. “Our slogan is, ‘Bad Guys Doing Good,’” Todd says.

By the time the newlyweds returned home, the balmy April weather had turned to snow showers, casting a magical beginning on their journey as a married couple.

*Continued on next page.*

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**LOVE 'EM FOR A LIFETIME**



These days, the couple are busy with their careers and kids. Olivia is an end-of-life doula (see sidebar). Todd, a graduate of Mansfield University, has been employed by Novitas Solutions for the past decade, working as a Medicare Appeals Representative. And for 27 years, he's volunteered as firefighter (for South Williamsport's former Station 10 and current Station 5). "He is the most selfless, loving, compassionate, courageous man," Olivia says. "I'm the luckiest woman alive."

Pittsburgh Institute of Mortuary Science with the goal of becoming a mortician. Her brother, Ben, likes history, science and video games. When he grows up, he would like to become an archaeologist to study past civilizations.

History is a shared interest among the whole family. Some of their favorite trips are to Gettysburg, especially around the holidays. Todd, who studies Civil War history in his free time, hopes in retirement to become a certified battlefield guide with the Gettysburg National Military Park Service. Meanwhile, Olivia likes to look up their family history and take walks in cemeteries with family and friends. "I have recently started a club called Graveyard Gatherers for people like me who enjoy the atmosphere of the cemetery, where we can get together, walk, discuss history, and remember the beauty of our mortality," she says. (Interested? Find out more at her website, [solacefound.org](http://solacefound.org).)

“Life is a gift, and the future isn't promised.”

The Lechniaks are raising two wonderful kids. Marina, 16, loves a variety of music styles and is interested in history and cemeteries. She also enjoys spending time with her leopard gecko, Carla Jolene. She plans to study at the

While the pandemic has affected everyone, it had a particularly painful impact on the Lechniak family. In December 2020, tragedy hit when Todd's father — and the mayor of South Williamsport — lost his life due to the virus. "My father-in-law was an incredible man, and I could spend hours on him and his legacy," Olivia says. "It was earth-shattering."

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# why i became an end-of-life DOULA

By Olivia Lechniak

**T**he word doula comes from the Greek meaning “a woman who serves.” I do so at the end of life, providing support and guidance to dying individuals and their families. Death is one of the most emotional, challenging, and beautiful transitions we experience. It needs space held so all involved can process and be present.



Key moments in my life awakened and directed this purpose for me.

During 2014, I was a caretaker for my Nana. She wasn't always easy to get along with, but I was more than happy to help. While doing so, I watched as family would grapple with stress and loss, as their matriarch declined. Roles change, children become caregivers, and I wasn't as much a granddaughter as I was the woman who washed her laundry and never warmed her food enough.

Next, I worked at a nursing home in the activities department. That was so much fun, connecting with people and giving peace and distraction with entertainment and fellowship. My appreciation for the aging, and their families, grew stronger each day. And I saw how much support was desperately needed. I wanted to help, but had no idea how.

I did know that my longing to help was ingrained in me by my mother, Deborah Young. With whatever she does, she gives all she can — and always with love and warmth. She worked as a patient care technician UPMC's emergency room, and during that time I saw her give tirelessly, and always with a smile. (Thank you, Mama!)

This left me looking for a non-medical support role to assist the dying and their loved ones. A companion who could help coordinate, organize, and give a sense of peace to a complicated time of life. I came upon the term “end-of-life doula” — and, after extensive research, was introduced to the DoulaGivers program. Its founder, Suzanne O'Brien, was a hospice nurse for 25 years, and saw where the gaps in support were. She then created community education and ultimately a certification program for end-of-life doulas.

Now, I am a certified and micro-accredited end-of-life doula. My role consists of providing support and guidance through the dying process. I also help organize and work with outside services, such as hospice. My intention is that, through my service, I can help those end-of-life moments to be experienced without a laundry list of to-dos, but instead with the added calm of my guidance through the transition of death.

In the shadow of that loss, Olivia came down with Covid. Struggling to breathe, she was taken by ambulance on the day her husband was meeting with family to plan his dad's funeral. “I desperately didn't want to disturb Todd,” Olivia says. “I knew I was in trouble, but I also knew if I called 911, Todd would see the call, as he's a first responder with an app that shows emergency calls. So I called my friend Felicia Kelly, a CRNP, and she offered to call 911 for me in the hopes he wouldn't see. But he did, and rushed home and into the house just as paramedics were beginning to take me. One paramedic was Stephanie Tempesco, a long-time friend and comforting face — even in a moon suit! Those women saved my life, and I'm eternally grateful to them.”

During her eight days in the hospital, Olivia had much time to think about her own life, legacy, and purpose. “It was at first terrifying, but it melted away to understanding that life has meaning and purpose. Now, I am all-the-more grateful now for every breath, every moment, every hug. Life is a gift, and the future isn't promised.”

The Lechniaks are particularly grateful for the people of South Williamsport. “We live in a peaceful neighborhood with great neighbors who not only friendly, but also look out for one another,” they say. “We have the best neighbors!”