

My True Love

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Published by Heritage Circle, www.heritagecircle.org

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Introduction

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You can listen to each story as you read by scanning the QR code at the top of the story. The code links to the original audio recording in Archive.org.

So, remember as you read, that these stories were spoken and not "written."

There is natural rambling as the storyteller recalls things. Imagine you are sitting on a porch listening to them tell you their stories over a cup of coffee.

We have smoothed out hinderances to reading and corrected grammar and self-interruptions wherever they distract from the story. However, we have also taken great care to not change

details or facts. And we have kept the speaker's tone and unique wording intact as often as possible. Our goal in transcription is authenticity.

Heritage Circle Publishing

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Red Fingernail Polish



I met the girl with the red fingernail polish in speech class my freshman year at Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina. And I hated red fingernail polish.

I had traumatic memories—and I'm kidding when I say that—of family reunions growing up in Southern California, where all my great-uncles drank too much and got really loud. I was a little boy. To compound that, my great-aunts all wore bright red fingernail polish. I vividly remember that.

I only remember two or three get-togethers. My mom says we actually got together quite often as an extended family. My great-aunts, who

were ancient, of course, to me, would always come running toward me, running and screaming, “Oh, little Kenny, little Kenny, little Kenny!” They had these long, very long, bright red fingernails. Then they would squeeze me to death, laughing, because it was funny as heck.

But there it is. To this day, I just don’t like red fingernail polish on women. I was traumatized. I’m kidding. Anyway, I did have kind of a visceral feeling about red fingernail polish.

And this girl I met, who was also a freshman in our very small speech class of maybe a dozen eighteen-year-olds—that’s what I first remember about her. Now, her memory is that she seldom wore red fingernail polish then, though she does now quite a bit. So we disagree on the memory, but that’s what I remember.

I remember thinking, “Oh, she’s okay-looking.” Actually, she was quite attractive, but she had red fingernail polish. And the girls I had always been attracted to and had crushes on, including my first girlfriend from the previous story, all

had dark or brunette hair. So I guess I had a preference: no bright red fingernail polish, and dark hair.

Well, the woman who would later become my wife, the person who would become my very heart and my very life and my very soul, had blonde hair—poofy, big, blonde, curly hair—was Swedish, and had bright red fingernail polish. Definitely not the person I would have imagined spending the next forty-nine years and five months of my life with.

As of the telling of this story in 2026, we met forty-nine years and five months ago. Who knew, as they say?

That's how Mary and I met, and we've been married for forty-seven years. Like I said, she's my very heart and my very soul. I don't want to get all mushy, so we'll just leave it at that.

She'll tell her version of the story in her book. She has not yet told her stories like I'm doing, but she will. And I can promise you her

memory is more accurate than mine, so I'm sure there's a different telling of this story.

What we do agree on is that we all became very good friends in this small speech class. I wish I could remember the young teacher's name. She was a brand-new teacher, and there were maybe a dozen of us. We became very close because we gave public speeches to each other. It was speech class, and that's what you do in speech class. You prepare a speech, then stand up in front of your classmates and give it.

It was life-changing for me. I was a ministerial student at the time. We called them "preacher boys," and we were required to take speech class because of that. I took some other preacher-type classes to practice preaching in public, but truthfully, I think I learned more about speaking in public there than I ever learned anywhere else in life.

I'm a very comfortable public speaker now. In spite of the fact that I'm an introvert, I'm very

comfortable once I stand up and give a speech. I credit that to that class and that excellent teacher.

We all became good friends, and the year went by. We had class either two or three days a week. I forget if it was a two-credit or three-credit class, but I think it was three.

During that year, Mary and I kept what I would call a very casual, once-in-a-while-we-bumped-into-each-other-and-talked friendship, like we did with everybody in that class. There were maybe four thousand students on campus at the time, and it was four hundred acres, so you didn't see people all the time. It was not a small college. But we'd bump into each other, stand, and talk.

Nothing in my mind was crush-like or even remotely like, "Oh, I could fall for that girl." She was very attractive, but she just wasn't in that "I'm going to fall for this girl" category. You know how it is. And I'm pretty sure she felt the same way about me.



I had already had a rebound summer fling, which was essentially just a girl to make out with all summer. I broke that off when I became a preacher boy at Bob Jones. I sent her a Dear John letter and apologized for being too physical and using her as a rebound romance.

As I remember, she sent me a pretty blistering letter. So, Dear John letters—you better expect to get a “Dear Dude, you’re an idiot and I hate you” letter back in return. I got that.

Then I dated somebody a few months into the year. She was a senior and I was a freshman, and we really liked each other. It was more than casual, and we were kind of falling for each other. But she had red hair, and I had a thing about red hair and curly hair. Didn’t like red hair or curly hair, and she had both.

I really liked her, and we got dating privileges at this strict Bible college based on the class of the girl. Senior girls got a lot more official

dating time in—I swear to you and I kid you not—what was called the Dating Parlor.

It was the size of a football field, upstairs above the student commons and community building, where there was a café and a bookstore and all kinds of stuff. A football field full of furniture, and it was called the Dating Parlor, or the DP.

So I dated this redheaded senior—man, I cannot remember her name—and we really liked each other, but we both realized it wasn't going anywhere. I don't remember who broke it off because it was never serious. But I liked having extended dating hours, and she was my second rebound. I kind of got the rebound out of my system, I think, by then.

Later I dated Sherry. She had long, straight black hair and did not wear red fingernail polish. She was right in my category, and we actually fell in love. We were really falling for each other. We dated for maybe two or three months, and it was quick because you're eighteen and you fall in love so quick at that age.

Then I had a dream.

This is a true story, and Mary laughs at this story, but I wouldn't be married to Mary now if I hadn't had a dream. Of course, at the time I attributed it to God. Though I'm a deep, devout, intimate follower of Jesus, I look back now and realize it was just my subconscious protecting me. But you may listen to it and say it was God. I don't know, and it doesn't matter.

Everything was going great. Me and Sherry were in love and talking about marriage. Two or three months into this relationship, the big M word had already come up. She was from Kansas. That's all I remember—a small town in Kansas.

I had this dream that turned into a nightmare, where I walked down the aisle with her. It was one of those vivid, videotape-type dreams that you just totally think is real. I was standing at the altar with her, and we were holding each other's hands just like in the movies. I said, "I do."

And I screamed inside my head.

In my dream, I didn't scream out loud. I screamed in my head, "No, no, no, no!" I couldn't stop screaming no. I was panicked and horrified.

I woke up in the middle of the night, probably four or five in the morning. I don't know if I was shaking, but it was a horrifying dream. I realized, "I can't marry this girl." And I don't even know why. I can't tell you why. I probably knew it then.

But I broke up with her that day. We went out for lunch, like we always did, and I broke up with her right over the lunch table. Oh my gosh, it was traumatic. She cried and cried and cried, and I felt like crap. I felt so guilty.

I broke up with Sherry, and that was not fun.

So I have been dumped, and I have dumped. If this is my great-grandkids listening to this, there's part of Great-Grandpa's life story. If it hasn't happened to you, it's happened to a close friend. It's the universal human story: being

dumped and dumping someone else. It's just life. I look back and laugh now, but it was deadly serious at the time.

That was my last girlfriend.



Meanwhile, I had known Mary, the girl with the red fingernail polish, all year. It was getting to be the end of the year, and I didn't have a girlfriend or anybody to go to a social function with.

Now, Bob Jones University was just rigidly fundamentalist. They had a "you cannot touch a member of the opposite sex" rule, except for the once-a-year dating event for the fraternities and sororities. So there were two chances to hold somebody's hand, because you were allowed to hold your girlfriend's hand on that official dating outing.

They weren't called fraternities and sororities, but that's what they were. They had the Greek-letter alphabet nonsense, just like fraternities and sororities, but they called them something

else because, of course, fundamentalists can't be like the world and be worldly. I don't remember what they were called. Whoever's reading this story who went to Bob Jones knows.

You could take your girlfriend, or your date, and hold her hand only during hold-your-hand-type activities. It was very weird and strange.

Which is funny, because then they sent you off on Christmas break and summer break, and they would let a boyfriend and girlfriend get in a car alone. I swear to you this is true. With all the "you cannot touch a member of the opposite sex" rules, they let you get in a car on summer break with your girlfriend, alone, the two of you, and drive halfway across the United States.

Now, I don't know what they thought was going to happen. I'm glad you can hear the story while you're reading it, because it just makes me laugh still when I think about it.

There were actually a lot of unplanned pregnancies and kids getting expelled from school

because of it. I don't know if they ever figured out, "Gee, we're so strict, maybe we should have a rule and not let boyfriends and girlfriends get in a car alone and drive to California for three days after they're let out of school."

But whatever. I digress. I'll get back to the story.

I had nobody to take to a dating event. Bob Jones believed in people dating and getting married. They pushed marriage. They were huge on that. They also pushed staying in school, so you couldn't get married until you were a junior. There were exceptions allowed, but essentially you had to be a junior, and I forget the exceptions.

They were so big on staying in school, even though they pushed relationships and marriages, that you had to go to premarital classes if you were a full-time dormitory student and were going to marry your girlfriend in your junior or senior year, or afterward. They required premarital counseling, first separately and then together, as I remember.

The girls' version of the counseling, Mary tells me, pushed the birth control pill—hugely pushed it. Which is funny, because so many very, very pro-life Christians, even during that time, believed birth control could cause accidental abortions. That's irrelevant to the story, but I find it ironic that, with the pro-life movement embedded at Bob Jones University, the counseling for fiancées was to go on the pill right away so they didn't get pregnant. They wanted them to graduate.

Anyway, I digress again.

Everybody dated all the time. It was kind of the societal expectation on that campus of four thousand kids that you went to functions with a girlfriend or boyfriend, even though you couldn't hold hands. I had nobody to take to a function, and I forget what it was, but Mary would remember in her story.

So I was looking around, thinking, "Well, who do I want to ask out?" I knew a lot of girls. I didn't have a crush on any of them, and I'd just

broken up a month or so ago with Sherry. I couldn't go alone because that wasn't cool.

Then I thought of Mary. I don't know why I thought of her, and she'll probably remember better. She actually has a memory that I'll let her tell, where I think I accidentally asked her out. But that's a separate story.

They had a communication system that's going to make you laugh. This was 1976, '77, '78, in there. No cell phones. One public phone on each dormitory floor. No phones in anybody's rooms. Four thousand—two thousand men, two thousand women—kids, let's call them. We were just kids.

You were not allowed to call a girl across campus in the girls' dorms. You couldn't call your girlfriend. You could call home. You could call your mom, but you couldn't call your girlfriend.

There was no cell phone. No email. We lived in the Stone Age.

So they had a system called the mail system. You handwrote letters to members of the opposite sex, and the men would pick these letters up on a mail run. It was a really tight, slick-operated system. They would go into all the men's dorms, pick up the letters, and put them in these long, maybe twelve-foot wooden boxes with cubbyholes for the different floors and dormitories of the girls.

Only the men did this. It was a guy's job. They ran mail both ways between five men's dorms and five women's dorms—I think there were five of each. It was complex, and they'd do that whole thing in about forty-five minutes because they would literally run. They didn't get paid for this. It was a prestige thing to do.

If you wanted to talk to your girlfriend at night, you didn't email her, text her, or call her. You wrote her a letter, a note. Boyfriends and girlfriends wrote a note every night. Even casual boy-and-girl relationships would write a note once or twice a week, even if they were just friends.

That's how we texted each other: handwritten notes and letters, some in envelopes, sometimes just postcards. We'd throw them in the bin as the guys ran down our hall. I would address mine to Mary at whatever dorm, room 302, and Mary would get it. Meanwhile, she'd send me back a letter.

That's how we communicated after we started dating. But I asked her out face-to-face.

Now I'm remembering this. I'm glad I'm remembering it so she doesn't have to correct me in her version. I was so afraid she'd turn me down—not because I had a crush on her, but out of embarrassment. I was just afraid of being turned down. So I asked her face-to-face to this dating event coming up.

You have to understand, and we still laugh about this: that was never done.

If you wanted to date a girl, and she knew you liked her and was expecting to be asked out, you never did that in person. It was culturally

taboo, an unwritten rule on our campus. You didn't do that. You sent her a note and asked her out, and then she would send you a note back. Never respond to it to your face. You had to wait until the next day when she sent you a note back and said yes, and then you could talk about the event you were going to.

I'm not kidding.

But I was afraid she'd turn me down, so I broke all the rules because I was a bad boy and a rules breaker. I think that's part of what eventually Mary grew to like about me. I think she always had a thing for bad boys, but that's my version of the story. She gets to tell it.

I asked her out face-to-face, and she was shocked because that didn't happen.

And she said yes.

Then we started doing the notes back and forth, but just platonically. We were just friends. There were a few notes about the event coming up and what she was going to wear, so

I'd wear something that matched, I think, or whatever.

All I know is we went on this date. She wasn't dating at the time, and she'll tell her dating life story on her own if she wants to. I had just broken up with somebody. She knew about that. That was all public. Everybody knew.

We were just going as friends.



We went to this thing and had a really good time. No chemistry on my end. As I remember she's told me over these years, none on her end either at the time. But we had a good time, so we set up a lunch date a day or two or three later.

We went to lunch together and had a really, really good time.

Then we went on a third date to a dating thing with a bunch of people. It might have been Bible conference, which they do in the spring. I don't remember. Everybody takes a date to all

of that. It's like a nonstop dating event while you get preached at three times a day. They take a few days off and call it Bible conference. Couples sit together, listen to the preacher, then go hang out and sit on the lawn together and get snacks or whatever. That's as I remember it.

That third date—and she might say it was the second, but I think I'm remembering this correctly—I had this epiphany. I still had no crush on her, no physical attraction to her, no romantic feelings at all.

And I knew during the date, “This is the girl I'm going to marry.”

I never even felt that with my first love in high school. She knew we were going to get married. I never knew that, but she knew it, which is why she dumped me.

With none of the rebounds had I ever thought I was going to marry, except with Sherry, and she did all the marriage talk.

I was nodding my head while she did the marriage talk, and, as I've told you, I had a nightmare about that.

But on this third date with Mary, I just calmly thought, "I think I'm going to marry her." And it felt very weird.

I went back to my dorm after the date. I had four other roommates. We were packed, five of us, into a small room with a triple bunk and a double bunk. I walked in, and two or three of my roommates were there.

I said calmly, "I think I have met my future wife."

They laughed me to scorn, because that's just something you laugh at and mock your roommate over.

But it turned out to be prophetic.

We did not stay in touch that summer. That was completely my fault. I think she dated another guy back in Chicago when she went home, kind of pissed off at me. We had no

romantic feelings for each other, but we had dated several times. Then summer came, and I went off and lived my life in Plymouth, Minnesota, and did not contact her.

I think near the end of the summer I finally sent her a letter or called her. I don't remember which. I was like, "Hey, how's everything gone this summer?"

She tells me now she was really pissed off at me. Like, "What the heck? He leads me on and then goes silent." They call it ghosting now, right? She got ghosted for the summer.

I managed to fix that, because I was an idiot. We got back, I made it up to her, and we started dating heavily our sophomore year. Very heavily.

My memory could be wrong—it could have been the next summer—but I'm pretty sure we carpooled back with friends, because I lived in Minneapolis and she lived in Chicago. This is what the students did back then. They'd pile

five or six people in a car to save gas and drive home during winter break and summer break.

We carpooled back with a bunch of people, and we were holding hands in the back seat. That was the first time I had held her hand, and it was electric for both of us. Not that we had never kissed or held hands with other people, but for us it was becoming electric because we fell in love pretty quickly.

I remember walking her to her door. I think she has told me she was thinking, “Is this idiot ever going to kiss me?” Maybe she’ll tell me in her version of the story this didn’t happen, but I remember her telling me that.

We were standing there lingering at her front door, and there were people in the car waiting on us. I finally got the courage, and I think I asked her, “Is it okay if I kiss you?” That’s my memory of it. I’m laughing now.

I think she said, “Okay,” and we kissed goodbye.

Yeah, it was a pretty good kiss. We were both experienced kissers, but it was pretty electric.

We dated heavily all through sophomore year. When we broke for the summer, we were passionately in love, so we were calling nonstop. I drove to visit her in Chicago several times from Minneapolis for weekends when I wasn't working at my job.

I surprised her once at the Mexican restaurant where she was a waitress or hostess—I don't remember. I walked in on her totally unannounced, all the way from Minneapolis, and she was having a fight on the telephone with a Mexican busboy who was calling in sick.

Her Spanish was so fluent. We had both taken Spanish for years, but she had dated some Mexicans prior to meeting me. Her Spanish was fluent. She was having a fight in full-speed Spanish on the telephone as I walked into the restaurant.

It was pretty cool. It was kind of hot.

We planned for her to come out in August that summer after sophomore year. She stayed at my Aunt Bea's house, a mile from my house, and we dated basically nonstop. If we weren't asleep, we were together. We slept in different places, of course, but we were a mile away, and if we weren't asleep, we were together for, I don't know, three, four, five days. Passionately in love.

That's where I proposed.

We went for a midnight swim. The lake was right down the street from my aunt's house, and it had a floating swimming platform about a hundred yards out in this small lake. [Hidden Lake] We swam out. It was all very romantic, ten o'clock at night or whatever. I think there was even moonlight.

I had not planned it, but it was so romantic. We got back to my aunt's house, and I proposed. I don't remember if I got down on one knee. She would remember all this better than

me, but I think I said, “Will you be the mother of my children?”

It’s that corny.



We were crazy mad in love. We went back to Bob Jones at the start of our junior year, and we had planned to get married the next summer.

Yeah, well, the best-laid plans of mice and men, as the saying goes.

We were just too hot for each other, and you couldn’t touch. We had done a lot of touching, of course, in that week we were together before school started. Now you couldn’t touch, couldn’t hold hands, and we were crazy, passionate, hot for each other.

So we did what a lot of young couples do who very rigidly and religiously believe in no sex before marriage. And I still believe that. I do think that’s the best way.

We did what Bob Jones University students do when they can't keep their hands off each other: we moved the marriage date up.

We got married December 22, 1978, during our junior year.

My mom planned the whole thing. We got married at Parker's Lake Baptist Church. My mom and her friends arranged it all, and we had a hundred people for the wedding.

Chuck Hervis, one of Mary's very closest friends from high school, who is now a successful full-time attorney in the Chicagoland area, walked her down the aisle because her dad could not be bothered to come to the wedding. These may be stories that never end up in her stories, but you can read between the lines on all of that. Her dad could not be bothered to come. Chuck gave her away.

One of my best friends, Bill—oh my gosh, I can't remember your name, Bill [Lee]. Either

my brother or Bill was my best man, but Bill was in the wedding party.

It was beautiful. We had a great time afterward. We did a cheap honeymoon at a hotel that night in the Twin Cities area. That was our honeymoon night. Then we headed back in a car to go to school full-time, because the semester wasn't over until mid- or late January, as I remember.

Boy, did we like showing off the fact that we could now, as a married couple, walk around campus in front of all our friends holding hands. I was terrible about that. I would flaunt it.

The chaperones were everywhere, like secret CIA chaperones. You never knew who they were. They were like dormitory mothers, grad students whose job was to be kind of a mom in a dormitory. And they were all freaking single, right?

They would glare at us when we were holding hands and start heading toward us. We would hold up our wedding rings, and then they'd get

that disgusted look, like, “Fine, whatever, you can hold hands. You’re married.”

I’m not kidding. These are true stories.



That’s the story of meeting and falling in love with my very heart and soul.

We just celebrated our forty-seventh anniversary. We have eight beautiful children and twenty-two absolutely adorable grandchildren. We have been through thick and thin, and I would say, honestly, most of it thick and very difficult. We have been through hell and back together, over and over, many times in our lives.

And we are deeply, deeply attached to each other.

It’s what Jesus and the Apostle Paul alluded to. Jesus quoted, “And they two shall become one flesh.” I love that term, “one flesh,” because that’s not a physical thing. That’s something deeply beyond any explanation of what a marriage can be and should be.

I have been blessed beyond words to have the most loyal, closest friend and wife that a person could ever have. I may be biased, but I think she is the greatest human being I've ever met. Of all human beings I have ever met, she's it.

She is truly the all that and a pack of gum.

So that's my story of the girl with the red fingernail polish. I hope you enjoyed it.

Online Archives

Here is the link to the audio recording saved in Archive.org.

Audio

<https://archive.org/download/red-fingernail-polish/red%20ofingernail%20opolish.mp3>