

A LOVE STORY

The Luckiest Boy on the Planet

I was just three weeks into the eighth grade when my parents transferred my brother and me from Myrtle School to the old school in Dallas. My father had accepted a call to pastor Community Baptist Church on the Dallas-Stanley Road. This was the seventh school I had attended in less than eight years, so I was accustomed to meeting new people and blending into new environments. I was initially assigned to Mrs. Smith's class, but when my grades caught up I was transferred to Mrs. Hoffman's room.

When I joined my new classmates, they were at morning recess on the playground across from the school. I quickly found some boys with whom I had played baseball and football. As we stood talking, I noticed a very pretty girl standing on the girl's side of the red clay field. She was tall with brown hair and wearing a navy blue dress that buttoned up the front. My heart leapt in my chest.

**MICK AND CARLA MCMAHAN**

She was the prettiest girl I had ever seen.

Since we were seated in alphabetical order, Mrs. Hoffman assigned me to a desk right behind that pretty girl. Her name was Carla McGinnis. I could barely breathe as I placed my books beneath my desk and sat behind her. It was clear, however, that the attraction wasn't mutual. I was nearly six feet tall and weighed just 130 pounds. I had thick eyebrows and a face that hadn't caught up to its nose and ears. My curly dark hair was well-oiled with Vaseline hair tonic and swept back at the sides in the fashion of the day. Carla smiled politely, but I could see she was just being nice.

**M. McMahan****M. McMahan**

Two years and forty pounds later, a little less hair tonic and a lot of persistence convinced her to go on a double date with her cousin, his girlfriend and me. I kissed her on the lips in the back of a 1954 Ford. Holy cow! Wowee kaloosa! That was it! My world changed forever.

We both lived in the country, separated by the entire length of Kiser Dairy Road. On Saturday evenings, I walked two miles down the narrow, winding blacktop from my house to hers. We sat on the side porch in a swing, talking about everything imaginable, holding hands and snuggling when we were sure her parents weren't paying attention. Her mother usually called her in around 10 o'clock. I walked

back down that old country road singing Elvis and Dean Martin songs to the cows and a few stray dogs (this was before the Beatles). I was the happiest and luckiest boy on the planet.

We married at 19. I was a soldier on my way to the Army's Officer Candidate School at Fort Sill. She joined me in Oklahoma a few months later. The rest is a blur. We had two children, a girl and a boy; a year of separation when I was in Vietnam, college, and graduate school at Chapel Hill; one job after another; a business we built and managed together; months when we paid everybody but ourselves; hard times, good times, struggles, prosperity, sickness and health; and four amazing grandchildren.

She was diagnosed with breast cancer when she was 40. I remember telling our 15-year-old son that his beloved mother was scheduled for surgery and probably chemotherapy. He went to her with tears in

his eyes and in his clumsy, teenage way showed her he loved her and that his heart was broken.

She nursed me through my bout with cancer, holding my hand and giving me a reason to fight through the darkness. She has done the same for so many others, speaking quietly to friends and strangers on the telephone, encouraging them, writing cards, driving them to their therapies, cooking meals for their families. She is the rock of our family and still just as beautiful as she was on the playground when we were 13 years old.

On Dec. 18, we celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary. I love her more now than I have ever loved her. She is the best person I know, and I am a better man because of her. I thank God every day that she loves me. I'm still the happiest and luckiest boy on the planet.

—Michael "Mick" K. MaMahan is a businessman, author and motivational speaker.