

## Childhood Sweethearts

### True Story

It was the beginning of my freshmen year in junior high. I was fourteen years old. I walked into my homeroom class, found a seat, and sat down. Students gathered in homeroom for the teacher to take roll and send us to our classes. The teacher called out our names alphabetically. After answering “here” to my name that ended in “G,” she continued to call out the next letter of the alphabet with last names ending in “H.” Just a few rows down was a very nice looking fourteen year old girl with the last name Hardee. Her name was Barbara Hardee and she was really cute with dark brown hair, green eyes, and olive skin. This was her first time at public school after attending a parochial school through eighth grade. She was a new girl at the school and I noticed. Neither of us were old enough to date or drive a car. We were kids, but I definitely knew I liked her. We got to know each other at lunch, meeting in the hallways, exchanging notes, and sitting together on the school bus home.

At 14, I would ride my bike over to her house and ride up and down the street, calling out to get her attention. She would talk to me from her upstairs bedroom window. Her family had no air condition, so they left the windows open. She ate ice to stay cool and crunched the ice when we talked endlessly on the phone. One time I rode by and yelled her name and upset her dad. He

actually got in his car and chased me down on my bike to a nearby park, got out of the car, and threatened me to never come around his house again. I understand better now why he reacted.

Barbara was the oldest of eight children in the family and her mom was pregnant with her ninth.

He was trying to raise his oldest daughter in her early teen years with a lot going on in the household—seven kids less than 13 years old. Adding my antics to the situation was irritating. I

was afraid this incident would end any prospects for seeing Barbara again. I had to get the courage up to call her dad and apologize for being a nuisance. I did, and we never stopped seeing each other.

She could not date until she was 16—that is, go out on a date with a boy in a car. I didn't have a driver's license anyway. We could meet at different places and we did. We rode the city bus to downtown Houston and to Hermann Park to be together. We made it to the Thanksgiving parade held on main street. We loved to go downtown to walk the streets and through the large department stores. A special treat was paying 25 cents for a slice of pizza topped with oregano at Woolworths. The circus came to town with carnival rides and attractions. We loved the rides that went into a dark tunnel, and watching the circus from far back in the last seats in the Coliseum. We went to movies at the Lowes and Metropolitan Theatres downtown. They were large, carpeted theatres with ornate and heavy wood features, and balconies with seating very high and far away from the screen. I don't remember the movies, but sitting close together way up in the dark balcony seats was wonderful. I discovered her perfume, *Heaven Scent*, and it was intoxicating.

She turned 16. *In an instance*, she could now go out on a date in a car. I had my driver's license. Having a girlfriend in high school and dating was wonderful. I actually thought she would be a great wife, but at 16? We were too young for marriage, but not too young to see

each other.

I went to college an hour away from home my freshmen year. She remained at home and got a secretarial job. It is true, "absence makes the heart grow fonder." We got back together after my first semester away. As much as we understood love at 18, we were in love. When we turned 20 we decided to get married over Christmas break, and our true love life began. Our lives

together started as childhood sweethearts in a junior high homeroom. We celebrate 50 years of marriage as all grown-up sweethearts.