

**Linda:** Several years ago my daughter, Karen, and I were shopping. On a whim she asked me if I had a true love who got away. Without a thought, I answered, "Tony." I had been divorced for a long time by then. I told Karen, as we walked, that I felt that if I were to meet someone again, God would have to bring him to me. And God did. He gave me more than my family or I could ever have imagined.

I was a senior in high school in my hometown of Franklin, a small lovely place in northwestern Pennsylvania, in September of 1958. A boy named Tony had moved into town that summer and enrolled in my class. In the second week Tony asked a mutual friend to introduce us and we started dating. We saw each other every day and every evening for the next ten weeks, then Tony's family moved to Houston.

A few months later, Tony's father was hired to work in Tehran and on his way there, Tony was able to spend a very few days with me, then he was gone again. That was the pattern of our lives until early 1963. When he was close enough to hitch hike or catch a bus or borrow a car, he came to see me. If parting is sweet sorrow, we sorrowed greatly and sweetly over and over.

**Tony:** In 1963 I came to a bitter crossroad in my life and did not know what direction I was going. I broke off with Linda. It was a terribly painful thing for both of us.

**Linda:** I was devastated. I tucked away a few things I treasured and moved forward with my life. I moved to San Diego and, in the fall of 1965, married.

**Tony:** I was heartbroken without Linda in my life but there was little I could do because I was stationed on Kauai for two years. Upon returning to the mainland, I immediately drove from my family's home in Hampton, Virginia, to Franklin to "casually drop by" for a visit with Linda's family. When I entered her parents' home my heart fell into a pit, physically it seemed. A wedding picture of Linda and her husband sat on a table. I was too late. I was in despair. I tried to maintain my composure for Linda's family, for whom I cared deeply. Still, I owed her an apology and sent her a letter with an explanation and a deep apology for what I had done and a sincere wish for her happiness.

Years, decades, passed. I eventually also married and have a fine son.

**Linda:** I raised three terrific children. Then, in 1990, I was divorced. It took time but I rebounded and lived my life enthusiastically and fully.

**Tony:** My marriage ended in 1985. I moved to Nashville and later opened my law office close by. Almost every day, four times a day, I drove through a tree-lined, peaceful residential area between home and office. Each time I passed the corner of Linda Lane and Linda Court. And every time I thought of Linda and I wondered how she was doing.

When the internet phenomenon had become commonplace, I began to use search engines looking for Linda. The search was hopeless, especially since I did not know her married name was Gibson. But I tried. I had long given up hope of finding anything about her and did not want to contact her family since I felt it best not to intrude. At some point I happened upon Classmates and as a last hope that, even though Linda was not a member, perhaps one of our high school friends would see me and tell her, I listed myself with Linda's class.

**Linda:** One of my friends did. The news spread to me that Tony had surfaced.

For a long time I did nothing but finally, at the encouragement of Karen's husband, John, I sent Tony a letter.

**Tony:** I recognized Linda's handwriting from the return address immediately. Before I opened the letter I saw her married name and knew I had known it for years. Every day, a block from Linda and Linda, I stopped at Linda Lane and Gibson Drive. Often I noticed the street sign - Linda at the top and below, Gibson. Something marvelous had taken place.

I wrote back almost by return mail and asked Linda to set up email so we could correspond more easily with each other. As four years passed a gentle friendship grew. Over the internet, taking time to consider our words carefully, our reconnection grew and we became relaxed with one another. I would ask Linda, a nurse, about medical issues that arose in my law practice. It was an internet dance but we never mentioned the word love.

In 2009, I went to Linda's fiftieth class reunion and we walked through town and talked together at a park bench for a magical few hours.

**Linda:** I still was guarding my heart, though. A few months later I had a question about jury duty and Tony responded and offered to help if he could. Through God's loving grace, Tony's reaching out brought down walls I still had standing.

**Tony:** Finally, in December of 2009, I could no longer take the 2,400 miles that separated me from Linda and began making plans to move to Washington. I began to wind down my practice, applied for a license to practice law in Washington, packed my things, and drove two and a half days to Linda.

**Linda and Tony:** For several days we talked, laughed, and danced and discovered our love had remained true. It was a fine wine that lain in a dark, quiet cellar, and had matured and grown more delicious and rich over the years. The treasures saved from the past were a connection to the future.

**Linda:** Tony had given me a ring that had been given him by his father and was very precious to him. I could not have disposed of it and I brought it out and gave it back to him. He wears that physical connection between his father, him, and me.

The second day he was in Washington, Tony proposed to me; he said it was open ended to be accepted or rejected whenever I chose.

**Tony:** A few months later, out of the blue, Linda quietly said, "I will." We told our families on Christmas Eve that there would be a July wedding to plan.

**Linda and Tony:** God has shown the two of us that great love does not grow old, or diminish. The story of our so clearly timeless love has affected so many in our families and friends. It is a story of hope, resilience and grace. God's love and caring for us has manifested itself the past few years in many ways, so often tangibly, like putting the sign at the corner of Linda and Gibson. We thank him for his gracious and tender mercy. We would never have realized our deep, unchanged devotion

without His loving guidance. This day, we thank Him for this great blessing.