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I Just Knew: Love Stories from Westminster Village

Allison M. Sutton

Illinois Wesleyan University, allisonmariesutton@gmail.com

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I Just Knew
Love stories from Westminster Village
Devised by Allison Sutton

Sarah: The wedding day was an interesting day. I woke up and it was spitting snow. But because of that my husband's golf friends all came.

Kate: So I see John over there by himself, so I go over and uh get his attention, and and I say, 'Move over I'm going to drive!'

Sam: 'I thought oh my gosh (intake of breath) how does he know me?'

Ambria: That's kind of the way we did things... Just.... Go.

Annie: one summer, my son who was an athlete was playing baseball and there was this really good looking man who kept coming to the games late in the afternoon.

Elizabeth: Everybody assumed that we were gonna get married and... everybody but me!

I didn't know him before the war, I met him after. I was kind of involved with uh, someone that'd I'd gone to school with, but.. I knew I didn't want to marry him, but uh, it was a little bitty town, and everybody just assumed that we were gonna get married and... Everybody but me. I just knew I didn't spend my life with him. We had fun in high school, and all that, but, it was somebody to date, and you always had to date. Kinda selfish, I suppose, but it was fun. But uh, even my mother, -whispers- oh she didn't like it at all. -voice returns to normal- She didn't like it at all because she thought I should marry him. But I didn't. -laughs- and I didn't mind a bit.

Mm hmm, very distinctly, it would've been sixty... eight years ago, because it was on Thanksgiving in November. See, now that's another thing my mother didn't like, had my first date with him on Thanksgiving -whispers- and married him. It was too fast, too fast! -voice returns- but anyway, my boss was editor of the newspaper, and I was his secretary. But he took me and, and a reporter, a girl who didn't have family here either, so the two of us went out there, and, out in Normal, and so that, that's the first date, and we dated, I saw him every night from then on until we got married.

New year's eve, forty five. We were um... At the moose, and uh that night, and we were dancing, and that's when he asked me. See, that was only thirty some days after we started dating. So... As I look back on it, it my daughter, if my daughter had done that... Mm! -whispers- I'd probably have had a fit. -voice returns- But uh, that's, that's wh- yeah, that's when we were married in May after

that. The big band, yeah big band, that was, that was our music and that's what, that's what they were playing. But uh.. I'm trying to think, there was one song... But he didn't ask me while we were dancing to that song... it was Sentimental Journey, and I remember it was either playing, or playing just before, but I can just remember Sentimental Journey. He just stopped in the middle of the dance floor. Just stopped and just stepped back and he said "Pugs, will you marry me?" He called me Pugs, because of this Pug nose. Oh, I eventually said yes, but uh. - laughs- I was so shocked. I really was. But I, I think, I eventually said yes. That night, I said "what did you say"? -laughs- But that's when he asked me.

Sarah: Another thing that happened, um, I didn't know he was going to give me an engagement ring. And, (sigh) I got a phone call from a fella I had gone with all through high school, and in the afternoon before our family was going to Florida for Christmas and he called-Fred called me and said "Congratulations." And I said "What for?" and he said "well I saw Mark in the jewelry store picking out an engagement ring." (Pause) Wasn't that nasty? (laugh)

So I, feigned innocence when he gave me the ring. And but, ohh ages later, I did tell him that I had known.

I was out on campus, as he says he "saw me, (pause) uhh, rushing across campus in my bobby socks" (laugh) and uhh so he called and asked me for a date (pause) and I turned him down a couple of times for I don't remember what the reasons were.

One of them my folks owned the drive in theatre and restaurant at, Killanas was the restaurant, and drive in theatre, and umm, my sisters and I had to work there. We worked in the ticket booth at the drive in theatre and then in the snack bar. So I had to work one night when he called and then another night I had-I was in the snack bar and I picked up the coffee carafe and the handle broke off and the hot coffee went all over my foot. And it smarted and I had to be off of it off of the burn for a week or so, uhh, and so, he thought that was a pretty lame excuse to say I poured coffee all over my foot (laugh) and anyway it was the truth and umm so then we started dating and I was in the community plays umm and we would have play practice. I was in Jenny Kissed Me and I was Jenny. So he would pick me up after play practice and we'd go to the luca grill for supper and so my mother thought that was terrible, he was taking me to the tavern

Ohh, he, he just kind of had always (pause) assumed we'd get married I guess. And he said, "Now will this make it official?" So that when you go to Florida all those guys down there will know that you're taken. (laugh) so, so, then he wrote me a lovely, lovely letter, while I was gone, he couldn't mail it because he didn't know where we were staying or anything, but just (pause) said nicest things about how he knew we would raise good children and have happy lives and ohh, I get tears just thinkin about it. (pause) It is saved and uhh I showed it to him on our 50th anniversary and he didn't know that I had kept it all that time. (laugh) so

he was surprised to see it.

Sam: Ok he's sexy, yeah that was what attracted me in the first place and I keep telling him he still is and he keeps looking at me and saying ok. I said yes you are you kiss me, you hug me once in a while you know its not like it was in the beginning, but what to do I love about him, I love that he is a smart cookie.

Elizabeth: My mother always told me, "watch how a boy treats his mother." And then, you know. And and he was, he he was very kind to, and uh, and just fun. Just had, just fun to be with and I thought the guy I was dating, I liked him, but I thought he was a stick in the mud. And everything we did, you know, I had to, I was the, and it got kinda old. He was just very sincere, I thought. And I don't know, I liked that. -laughs-

Kate: you know he was a good guy he never had any kind of a questionable reputation or anything like that he was in college that was pretty big stuff back in 19 well we actually met in 48 but anyway uh polite, um good natured,

His mother always said, John, if you ever meet a girl, and her father owns a farm, you marry her! Well, we were all home for the spring break party, and we stopped by Jenn's house, and there were, two or three cars of us, but anyway, while we were waiting, uh, I looked across, and John Nagel was in his Dad's car by himself parked in the- parked across the street, and, the fellow –the fellow who was sitting in the front seat wanted to sit by Jenn, and he said uh, 'oh, let me drive. Jenn can get in and sit with me or whatever'. So I said – oh, ok, So I see John over there by himself, so I go over and uh get his attention, and and I say, 'Move over I'm going to drive!' then we played ditch it, which you could do in a small town. The policemen had gone to bed by then, so whatcha did, you turned lights off and you went down allys and you didn't turn your- use your breaks cuz you didn't want the ones behind you to know where you, so anyway. We played 'ditchit' a while and then had to take another friend of mine who lived out in a country home, so, we did our follow the other cars trip to the farms and uh, took donna home, came to where I live, so, of course John found out that I had lived on a farm. And somebody probably told him that my father owned the farm, and um, that was uh, Saturday night, and Sunday he called and asked if I wanted to go to a movie. So that started things.

He bought a diamond ring, and um I don't know whether kids park anymore we had parked at the northern most street of Clay city and uh he what did he say you know he said I have something for you and he gave me a diamond ring and asked me to marry him... that I would say yes...yes, yes..so, okay.

So it ended up it was July 30, 1950 and one of the hottest summer days you could imagine we were uh to be married in the Presbyterian Church cause we were both Presbyterians. So anyway we were going to se-, how were we going to send invitations my mother had six brothers and sisters my father had six

brothers and sisters everybody in Gibson city knew everybody else and uh so we thought well we'll just put something in the weekly paper and tell them that if they'd like to come to the wedding that it's going to be at 4:30 on July 30th. Tell 'em join us at the Presbyterian Church. So um.. it was a hot day and the church sanctuary was full the overflow room was full. And we had lots of friends and relatives that came to the wedding. And then uh so many that my aunts ran out of punch and cake but anyway... this was our wedding, yeah it was.

My father was uh..he loved me,but he ruled the household and if he said, asked you or told you, more like told you to do something you did it and you did it to the best of your ability. And he could be pretty critical Anyway. So it..One of the things that went through my mind was as I cried all through the receiving line I really never thought that anyone that I'd be good enough that someone would to want to marry me that was rather interesting and he was a town kid I was a farm kid and the the guys from town you know those were a notch above anybody that grew up on a farm I guess I don't know so anyway it was a happy time but the people at mine that was crying probably wondered what was going on cause I really thought it was such a it's like crying at a happy experience you know that you have yeah, okay so anyway

Sarah: At the altar? (pause) Yes, I was thinking this is going to last. This is going to last.

Ambria: -sigh- I don't know why, I just fell in love with him! Without too much... Uh, we didn't spend too much time fooling around. -sigh-

Sam: Pretty amazing man. Can't, can't get over that I'm married to him.

Annie: Well, the first time I got married, I felt like I was making a mistake. I truly did, but I thought, it's really too late.... So, that was kinda what was goin' on in my head. 'How am I gonna get through all this' But then the second marriage, I mean, I was so overjoyed I mean I was just thanking God over and over again. This is really happening to me? (laugh) one of my friends said later, she said, we never saw you smile before, now you smile all the time (laugh)

We were married for eighteen years and had two sons. And it was not a happy marriage and we were finally divorced. The only thing that I, it was kinda funny, the first wedding, in a Methodist church also. A very small church. And the groom and the groomsmen and the pastor came through this door, and following them was the town prostitute. (laugh) I could not believe it when my mother told me that later. I could not believe it when my mother told me that later because in a little town everybody goes to the weddings, I guess, and here she came, in front of everybody and took a seat in the front row (laugh!) I didn't know it until, you know, a couple weeks later when my mother mentioned it to me and said how embarrassed she was about the whole thing.

One son was getting ready to go to college and one was in high school and was an athlete and I was involved in their lives as mothers are, (sigh) and um one summer, my son who was an athlete was playing baseball and there was this really good looking man who kept coming to the games late in the afternoon and I was sitting with all the LHS people and he would sit there too, and he started calling me Pattye because everybody else called me Pattye, and I thought well yea well I don't know who this is 'n that was the end of that. Well a couple three or four days later, my son came home and he said Mom! Do you realize that that nice man that wears the hat is Don Benson's dad, and, and, he's a widower. And I said 'oh!' (giggle) and that was the beginning of just the most wonderful wonderful wonderful love story that could have ever happened to me. And um it was not until the middle of fall that we actually started seeing one another and he was very shy about it and um but our children were so happy so this made it great and two years later, we were married.

I remember one Sunday afternoon he was going to pick me up so we could go see a movie, and on the way to the theatre, I guess there used to be a theatre at the mall-I don't know, but anyway, um, he said, 'I wanna make this very clear to you, I have no intention of ever marrying again.' And I said 'oh. Oh. Well, I said, 'I'll love you forever, and it doesn't really matter. But if that's the way you feel , then I guess that's the way it's going to be... ' and um. That was uh, kind of the end of winter. And in May, I took the train to Missouri um to go for a long weekend because they were having some sort of a festival, I don't know. And when I got back that that's when the depot was still in Bloomington—way over on the west side-I get off the train and there he is. I dunno, I don't know how he knew I was going -I don't know. And he took me home, and he proposed right then. He said 'I found I just can't possibly live without you'. So. Talk about being happy and overjoyed and overwhelmed because I never dreamed it was gonna happen! (laugh) No, he really didn't get down on one knee, but he did say all the right things.

Oh absolutely, oh my goodness yes! My parents were thrilled. After my parents died, I found a letter from um my dad's brother and uh his wife, written to my parents saying, I know that that had to be the happiest day of your whole entire life, when Pattye was married. And it was! Oh, they just they just they just thought he was perfect. So did i. So DO i. yes, well.

And um we'd been married um (sigh, hits thigh three times) about six years and the lung cancer, hit and so um he died about a year and a half later. it was very-hard. still is and that's been such a long time ago, well anyway. (sniff)

So uh about eight years later and uh well I've been running this bed and breakfast called Pattye B's and it was very successful, but I had a widow friend in Phoenix and she wanted me to come out in February and spend a week or two and so I did and um I got on the airplane, and we still weren't in the air. I was in the back of the plane and there was a woman sitting next to me with a very

young child who threw up all over me. Right. (giggle) so, that was not good. Um when the flight attendant came back by I said well could you possibly uh find another seat for me. Cuz this kid just kept climbing on me, and the mother said nothing and well this lady said there's only one empty seat on the plane and I said ok well I'll take it. So I sit down next to this, man, and, I said down and I said, look. I know I smell. But I can't help it because this kid threw up all over me and he looked me up and down and around and he said 'well, with your gray hair you're probably a grama and it shouldn't bother you that much should it' oh well I didn't respond to that. So, we're in the air and he says 'so, where you from?' and I said 'oh, a little town west of here', an' he said 'well does it have a name?' an I said 'yes', and I handed him my business card. And he looked at it, and this is amazing, he said 'Oh! Well you just live down the street from where Dr. Long used to have his Dental office!' an I said 'yes' and I'm thinking who on earth is this? He said later he said I knew I had ya right then (ha ha ha ha) But it, it was an amazing coincidence, and are there coincidences? I don't know. Maybe it was fate, I dunno.

And then two years later we were married. And it was not a romantic love affair, it was very good companionship and we had a lot of fun and we travelled an, and, so, um, five years into the marriage, um, he developed cancer. So, that was another short marriage.

Was there a reason it worked? Yes, respect and love. But respect was number one. We both respected each other. Um in every way. And if I had just realized that when I was twenty, but see by this time I'm 40, big difference.

Sarah: (pause) The old golden rule I guess. (pause) you know I treat him like I'd like to be treated and he treats me like he likes to be treated. We just uhh (pause) just have a meeting of the minds I guess. And we go to sleep every night holding hands. Mhmm. And when I had to have the two stints in my heart I, I couldn't go to sleep because he wasn't there. And he came the next morning and said "I had the hardest time getting to sleep" (laughing) 'cause we are just never apart for overnights,

Kate: Okay, what breaks up 50 percent of our marriages today?..I have thought about that as that figure keeps seeming to come up I really don't know couples have children together they're finding a lot of dissatisfaction and discord in a marriage situation and I just never had that..so to give somebody that's going to get married..uh golly...Have the have one another support know that you can move together as a team...really care for one another not looking for different goals it seems that this divorce rate as women have become more independent so that did it/at lasted a long time we have three wonderful children.

Elizabeth:Oh I think number one, you remain two individuals. He's a person, and I'm a person, and you have got to respect that, and you are not gonna agree on everything. And I don't even try, and like I said, I didn't marry you to change you.

I would hope that I could, you'd like some of the things I do and vice versa, but we didn't get married to change each other. and I, I, think that's respect him as a person even though I don't always agree with him. And you don't think that he he maybe he should do that or she should. But you know, they're still a person. I know all this deal about eh the two become one and I ... oh, sure. That comes into play – really comes into play. The two of you one, when you have children.

Sam: And so I think that good premarital counseling is probably the best thing I would offer to people

I went to, I went to Illinois State University ummm in 1940 as a 17 year old, never dated in my life and umm I lived in a um self help house, we did our own cooking and everything, and on Sunday morning my roommate and I would walk down to church in our pink crepe dresses and a couple weeks after we had been there, the telephone rang and this man's voice said I want to speak to the girl one of the girls that walks by in the pink dress, the one with the big nose, so obviously I had a date with Bill. And for the first time he took me to a dining room where the people sat down and were served a wonderful meal. And umm He umm kept calling me and I said Bill, and I I, you're so stubborn I don't wanna go out with you and he, so then, I had a little note in my scrap book that I got a dozen red roses and it said "not stubborn, just enchanted" and I kept thinking you've no idea how much that has added to my self esteem umm that somebody thought I was... worth. So any how that same, that same time in 1940.

Umm I had just arrived at Illinois State University. It was overwhelmed by everything, so a group of us girls walked down the, on campus town if you know ISU and we met a bunch of boys from Aurora in, somebody knew somebody and we all started talking and Bob Jobe and I looked at each other n... it was it. I guess it was what you call love at first sight because about at lets see 12, 24, 26 months later we were married and then another two yearrr two and a half years later he was killed because he was a navigator on a B 17 flying fortress flying bombing raids over Germany and I was a pregnant widow.

So mother who was 62 and Charlie who was 3 and Martha who was 24 all decided to go back to the University of Illinois we lived in one room and suddenly umm somebody called me and asked me for a date and I knew the Smith boys were very well known on campus Joey and Tommy and when Joey called me for a date I thought oh my gosh (intake of breath) how does he know me?

And so we started dating in in January 16th he asked me to the registration dance and then we were married in august, so guess we knew that too, well I mean we were in love it was fun.

Annie: It was in the 50s. It was very tricky. And I I often said to my mother, you know if, if the pill had been around, I wouldn't have gotten married cuz I would have known what it was all about but I didn't know and in the 50s you don't have

any kind of HA – anything –any kind of sexual relations, and um, wasn't all it was cracked up to be *laugh*.

Sam:Well this is an earthy thing again, but sex is in the loving communication that we have with each other. Sometimes it's not so loving because we both have busy lives, involved in things, but its still kinda listening to eachother. Umm sometimes I think the sexual was overplayed anyhow. Having been to a lot of movies I think... but their not communicating!! So ok they have good sex but they're not communicating

what's the nicest thing umm...Ask me to marry him. Absolutely he was, he was, he had was getting a kid. A four year old in in connection...

Sarah: And he bought me a Betty Crocker cookbook. Reality set it. (laugh) I could make fudge, and pop popcorn, and heat canned soup and that was about it. So he decided he wanted more than that so he bought me a cookbook

Annie: He was wonderful you know, he said, you know, you're a member here at this church and I'm a member at 1st pres, and I'll be happy to join your church, and I said, no, um, I had met so many of his friends, couples, and they were all active in this little Presbyterian church in normal and I said, I really would like to be in your church,

Ambria: Well, he was a sweetheart, that's for sure. And he was uh... Very romantic and uh, attentive. And he knew how to please me -laughs-. -sigh- We didn't have too many arguments. Well, we just got along, that's all.

And when my, I had met my husband, uh... I had uh, had my hair done by the same woman all the time, and he was an insurance salesman for beauticians, he was her insurance salesman. So she introduced us and we, uh, got, Yeah. Yeah, uh, at the beauty shop, my friend's beauty shop, when she was doing my hair, and then he started like, I getting my hair done on saturdays and then he started coming over here every saturday at the time of my appointment. And that's how we... Hooked up. Well... No, I, I don't know that we ever had a date. We just, we just... I don't know. We just went places, so I know.

One, I was at the beauty shop one day, and he came in, he said, and that's when he, uh.. the greek meal cafe used to be across from the beauty shop, and he said "let's go have a drink," that was the first time we did anything together, I guess, we went over there and had a drink. Yeah. Oh, right away, oh yeah. Yeah, he was a charmer. Yep. Well, he was really different from anyone around here, you know -laughs-. Fun guy. I don't know... I think, I think dating is a lot different now than when I was young, (laughs) it seems like.

We just clicked. He had been married before, of course, and had his family, and I had been married before, and uh... So we were happy to meet each other and... Have somebody. It, it's... Hard to be alone... Yep.

Uh, we didn't really have an, uh, my second marriage was not a big wedding. We

went to Peoria, and we got married by a justice of the peace.

Married! We just left, uh, drove to Peoria and got married. My mother didn't even know it. Oh, she fina-, she finally found out. And when we came home she had a cake bake for us, and some friends over and... yeah. She was happy. For us.

Well, I guess you'd call it that. I don't know. It was just time, it was just time.

Yeah, we used to get a new car every year, 'cause he's travelled a lot. And he, we had a new car every year. And he would get, the old one, and I'd get the new one.

Well, w-we left right after we got married and drove to... Elizabethtown, Kentucky. Got a motel room we st- spent the night there. I don't know why there, but that's where we ended up... That's kinda the way we did things... Just... Go.

Annie: I remember um having a conference with the pastor at the church my second marriage, and, and this is right before the wedding, it's the same day, and he said, he's saying, I don't know if this is such a good idea that you're getting married because of the age difference. He was 15 years older than I. and we were both uh uh kind of horrified and I don't know how I responded. So that was kinda a downer

Elizabeth: Oh oh my mother was just furious. Furious! She did not come to the wedding. If it didn't teach me anything else I think it taught me a lot of patience and try to see the other side of it. I was very hurt and uh, it was not much fun. But I really do understand now. I really do. And that's all that matters.

Ambria: Well, the only thing I ca-, I would advise most anybody is, who is alone, is to move in a place like this. Mm hmm. You make a lot of friends, and uh... And you ea-, you can either be alone or be with people, however you feel that day.

Sam: This is a nice place to live, its just a delightful place, but you've got to get out of your room and you gotta go down and get in touch with people.

Sarah: There's a woman here whose husband recently passed away. He had cancer and fought a great fight but he was (pause) just a great person and they moved in here just eight months ago (pause) and his wife said last night, I walked her back to her apartment after dinner and we held hands, she's holding my hand, and uhh, I may cry, and anyway uhh, she said she is so glad she's here instead of in their house. She said we loved our house, but I would have been there all by myself. I wouldn'ta had anybody to hold my hand. And she said this is just such a much better place.

Kate: John passed away in 08 for a year and a half was with my son and his family and I needed to decide what I was going to do and I said Lord what do you want me to do with the next 15 years of my life and I said okay Lord what am I to do? And he said just go back to westminster and get acquainted with people if you see somebody that needs something why fit the bill so here I am and it's good and God has provided all of that.. It's awesome..yeah it really is

Ambria: He died very suddenly and it was... Unexpected, so... He had been sick, but... Not, we didn't expect that...

he died in August before the september 11th thing, so about ten years. I think that's been, about ten years. I, we all said "thank god George isn't here, he would've had a fit if he'd known all this was going on."

Every friday. We'd go shopping, and everyone in there got to know George. And after he died, a few weeks, I was in there getting my groceries, and I had this ring on. And one of the clerks tha-, one of the cashiers that was checking me out, she says "oh, you're wearing his ring!" She remembered he had that ring, isn't that something? They really, they all got to know him, well he knew everybody, he just, he was a salesman, he just knew everybody. And... They uh... She remembered him wearing that ring.

Annie: Well, as I said earlier, I... I became very independent and very sure of myself. Um, I've certainly learned to live alone, I've changed in that way, and when I was a young woman I always thought there'd be someone to look after me. Doesn't always happen that way. Maybe, it shouldn't but um, so I guess... I'm not afraid to be alone. In fact, I'm not afraid, period, and I think that's a good thing. As a young woman, I was afraid of everything. (laugh) well, I mean I didn't have any brothers and sisters and and I yea I was I guess you could say I was timid. In a way. But I've overcome all that. An I guess you can tell that.

Sam: I dunno but I guess I was ready to fall in love when I met Bill because it was just love at first sight an I knew him for three n a half years and I thought boy I'll never do that again I'll never fall in love that hurts and then of course I'd forgot that I was gonna get older, that Joe was gonna come along and umm... I forgot all the pain of it. I think love is worth pain. Now that I'm the age that I am. Well umm... That's what I said though when I was in my umm... early twenties and widowed, I'll never fall in love again. But then my heart forgot that... and why do I think it's worth while? Ooh I think there is a lot of value to being in love. You can be in love with a person, you can be in love with life, you can be in love with the things you do

Sarah: If we have an afternoon where we're both alone. He stretches out on that couch and I stretch (laughs) on the love seat, and we read until we doze off and then we wake up and say, 'isn't this living'. So. It really is. You know.

Kate: there's a verse in Genesis I'm going to have to go back and read Genesis because it talks about um a wife is to fit in with her husband's plans anyway um I had fit in with Dick Kemple's Plans but God had blessed me and here I am

Annie: (sigh) well I just remember every day was sunny and beautiful and uh, we were together. It was it was like a dream – that's what it was like, and I sometimes, I still wonder did it really happen? Well I know it happened. (laugh)

Elizabeth: No, no. I really wasn't scared uh and that's unusual for me because I'm not one to make rash decisions. I don't, I don't do that. I think about things a long time before I... do it. But I, I don't know, it just seemed very right to me, so.

Ambira: You'll know. Then you'll know what I mean when I say I, how I felt when I met George. You'll know. I hope, I hope you do, I...

Sam: And so we started dating in in January 16th he asked me to the registration dance and then we were married in August, so guess we knew that too.