

When the heart wo

For most, the first blush of love is fleeting. But for these two couples, that early passion (with a breakup and makeup in between) led to a lifetime of happiness.

Can you ever forget your first true love? The excitement, the butterflies, the magic every time he said your name? And how, when it ended, you felt a physical jolt whenever well-meaning family and friends said, "There are plenty of other fish in the sea" or "Time heals all wounds." You two were joined at the heart, and you dreamed that somehow, someday, the world would know it. For many, it's a dream that really does come true.

"Believe it or not, first loves reunite all the time," says Nancy Kalish, Ph.D., author of *Lost and Found Lovers* (Morrow), who has spent a decade researching the subject. "And those who *do* find their way back to each other usually end up living happily ever after: The divorce rate among reunited couples is just 1.5 percent compared to more than 50 percent among the general population."

Here, in their own words, the stories of two couples who followed their hearts back to their first—and forever—love.



"It's a marriage 10 years in the making."

Lana, 34, and Rick, 35, married four years

Once upon a time...

Rick: Lana and I met in college in Little Rock, Arkansas. We were friends first, but my feelings changed. I started getting nervous around her—I even left love notes on her car. It was wonderful for a while, then I transferred to a school in Florida. I couldn't handle the distance, so I broke it off. I thought we were too young to be serious, but let me tell you...there were *lots* of tears.

Lana: Once Rick started leaving love notes on my car, I was hooked. My favorite said, "You're special, and someone knows it." How could I *not* fall in love? We were together for eight months. Rick even went on vacation with my

family before he transferred. We had so much fun making sand castles. As I watched Rick play, I thought, *I'll never love anyone like I love him.* Then suddenly it was over. He sent me a poem about how sand castles are temporary and get washed away. I wrote back telling him how much I loved him, but it didn't matter. I couldn't eat for weeks. I had no idea how I'd go on without him.

And just when they thought it was over...

Rick: Ten years passed, and each day I'd wonder if Lana had met someone new. I dated, but there was never that feeling of knowing this person was made for me. I even had a name for my state of mind: "Soul Mates Syndrome." When I moved back home I had to call Lana

n't forget

"Our movie should be *When Ira Met Randi*."

Randi, 30, and Ira, 29, married four years

Once upon a time...

Ira: As a teenager, I only cared that Randi was pretty. But she was also nice and smart. Then on our first date we saw *When Harry Met Sally* at my house and had our first kiss—amazing!

When we went to separate colleges everything fell apart. She called one night and said she liked some other guy. I'll put it this way: I was more than upset about it.

Randi: I liked Ira from the start. He was smart, athletic, cute and funny. People used to say that we were the perfect couple. When we watched *When Harry Met Sally* on our first date I just thought, *This is so us!*

We went to different schools, and I didn't handle our separation very

well. I got interested in someone else. It seemed breaking up with Ira was the right thing to do.

And just when they thought it was over...

Ira: The breakup really shook me. We'd been in each other's lives since childhood, and suddenly it was over. That empty feeling never went away.

Four years passed, and I felt like I could handle being just friends, so I sent Randi a birthday card. Then she called, and I knew we were meant to be. When I saw her again, I said, "I'm worried about getting hurt, but I can't deny my feelings. When I'm with you, I feel like I'm me again. Let's just go for it!"

Well, we got married four years ago. I thought I was in love as a teenager, but I'm more in love now than ever!

Randi: I thought about Ira nearly every day. He was still in my life even though he wasn't.

When I got his card I was thrilled! I had hurt him, and I thought he'd never forgive me. But when I called and heard him say hello, it was like nothing had changed. We were still us.

I invited him to a party, and when he walked in, he held me, then gave me his "go for it" speech. It felt so right. Whenever I looked at my life, it always came back to Ira.

We just celebrated 12 years together—we don't count the time we were apart since we never *felt* truly separated. I can't wait to tell our daughter our story. I want her to know that the key to a successful relationship is a strong friendship. When you have that, you have everything!

Who carries the torch longer?

"Definitely men," says Nancy Kalish, Ph.D. "Often their first love becomes the standard-bearer. Look at Prince Charles—he was married to one of the most beloved women in the world, yet he never got over Camilla, his first true love."

three times to get her to meet me. When she did, I knew this was it! I pulled out the letter she wrote when we broke up and said, "Look, I remember."

I'm kind of glad about our time apart. We grew up and realized that we'll never let go of each other again.

Lana: I forced myself to stop thinking about Rick. I even got engaged to another man, but I called it off. I wasn't devastated—not like I was with Rick.

When Rick called, my heart started pounding. "I want to see you," he said. But I was afraid of being hurt, so I told him I couldn't. He called again... and again... until I gave in. When our eyes met, I was hooked all over again. Then he pulled out my letter, and

I nearly fainted! I was even more blown away when he said, "There's something else I have to show you."

He opened a book and said, "Read this." It was the sand castle poem he'd written for me—he had it published! "I made that mistake once," he said. "I'll never do it again."

We were married in 1999 on the beach in Jamaica. And today we never hang up the phone without saying, "I love you." I know it's sappy, but our love gets better every day.

Stoke your soul mate's fire

"Even the closest couples have to make some effort to maintain that intimate connection," says Susan Perry, Ph.D., author of *Loving in Flow: How the Happiest Couples Get and Stay That Way* (Sourcebooks, 2003). These tiny tweaks can reinforce your just-us-two togetherness:

■ **Reconnect in an instant** by calling each other by names that have secret meanings only you two share. "Nicknames can be surprisingly intimate," Perry explains. "You feel special when the person you love calls you by a private name."

■ **Renew his trust in you** by being honest about unimportant things, like admitting you're not in the mood for takeout even if he is. "It signals your ability to be honest when life's big deals roll around," says Perry. "Your mate then knows when you say something, you mean it."

Find that special someone

Here, Debra Johnson Knox, author of *Find Anyone Fast* (Military Information Enterprises, 2001), shares her low-budget people-finding strategies:

Just look them up

Listed phone numbers are available on the Web (try switchboard.com, anywho.com and people.yahoo.com) for no charge. If the number is unlisted, do a search of the last name in the state. "You may locate a relative—then you'll be just a few phone calls away," says Knox.

Search by profession

If the person holds a state occupational license—an accountant, doctor, lawyer, therapist—the state may list a business address. For more information on licenses, log on to govspot.com/ask/occupation.htm.

Pore over public records

Knox also suggests buying "satisfaction or money back" software to access public files. Softspy.net has six packages for about \$30 each. Or use a "no find, no fee" search firm. Try freereality.com or locatpeople.com (from \$37 for a phone number; up to \$200 for more extensive data).