

An Incredible ACC Valentine's Day Love Story

How long should someone wait for their true love? "In my case, as long as it takes!" said Dr. Christopher Benton, 52, a math instructor and Director of Institutional Research at Alvin Community College. Fortunately, he only had to wait 30 years. For anyone who doubts the existence of fate and destiny, which seem to always defy the laws of probability, the string of events that led up to Benton's marriage on Feb. 8 in Scottsdale, Ariz. should soften even the strictest of skeptics and hardest of hearts.

In 1973, Benton met Susan Garrity while working in Austin and attending the University of Texas. "From the moment I saw her, I knew my relationship with her was unlike any I would ever experience again," Benton said. "I saw a place where our souls were already, and had always been, together, forever and ever." "She is my soul mate," he added. Coincidentally, they discovered they only lived a few blocks away from each other at the time.

Despite their mutual feelings at the time, life and youth sent the two on their separate ways. Five years later, while in graduate school, Benton wrote to Garrity in care of her parents. She called to tell him she had moved to Alvin and went through the nursing program at ACC. "We got together for awhile and we caught up on where the flow of reality had taken each of us, but this was a time in Susan's life when she needed her independence and to establish her own sense of identity and power, and thus, I respected her wishes," Benton mentioned. The two went their separate ways – again.

A couple of years later, Benton was struck by an overwhelming feeling that Garrity was very ill and near death. "I called her up, and sure enough, she was recovering from a serious bout with viral encephalitis," he said. At that point, she was literally taking life one day at a time and still not ready to leave her solitary journey. Benton asked her when she might be ready. "She replied, 'Twenty years,'" he stated. "I then asked her to give me something I could use to help me find her again, and she said, 'My mother's maiden name is McIndoo.'" Garrity would

later say she had no idea why she said that to Benton, but he was overjoyed. He stored that information away in his mind and waited.

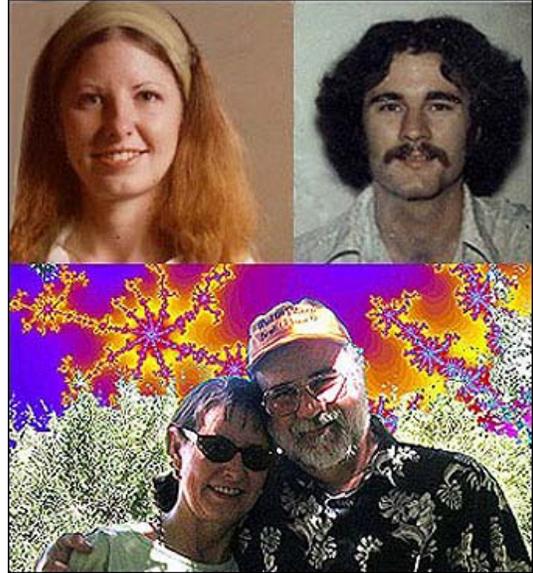
Last spring, just over 20 years after he last saw Garrity, Benton decided to look up his family tree on the Internet. "I was doing some online research on 'Varnado,' one of the surnames in my family tree," Benton mentioned. "I suddenly came across a posting in a BLOG (short for 'web log') about a Varnado that had married a McIndoo. I immediately recognized that as Susan's mother's maiden name and before long, I had found the branch that contained the woman I have always loved."

After locating her in Scottsdale, Ariz., Benton said, "I wrote Susan at the end of the summer to let her know what had happened to me over the years." She was elated that Benton had found her again and immediately wrote back. The two began to tell their two decades of stories over the telephone. "As we talked," Benton said, "we discovered many coincidences, big and small, that told us we were meant to be together and have never really been apart."

Unknown to each other, the two had been moving in parallel and crisscrossing paths between Austin, Alvin and Houston. At times, they were only a few hundred feet apart. During those years, Garrity gave up nursing to become a lawyer and moved to Houston. "Without realizing it, she wound up putting a bid on a condominium in my mother's complex and when that didn't pan out, she rented an apartment just around the corner from where my mother lives," Benton said. Benton went to work for ACC in 1984, where Garrity had received her nursing education. "The bottom line is in the larger scheme of things, there's a place where Susan and I have always been together and I always knew that our orbits would eventually coincide again – either in this life or the next," Benton said. "It was only a matter of time." "It is likely that each of us had many things to accomplish on our own before the universe would allow us to come together as one," he added.

Before the two even saw each other again after all these years, they knew they were going to get married. When they finally did meet in person again, Benton mentioned, "It was like we had never been apart." "I now see that from the greater perspective of the universe, all separation is really just an illusion," he added.

In a world that seems so starved for love, a man who never stopped believing and was willing to wait for as long as it takes made the improbable happen. That's why the power of true love always defies the odds - and conquers all.



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