

## The Love of My Life...

*What a grand thing, to be loved! What a grander thing still, to love!*

Victor Hugo

Tenth grade was a banner year for me. Something else happened that year that would forever change my life. I met a girl. Not just any girl, but Sandra O’Gwynn, a friendly, vivacious blond who always had an opinion about everything. In amazement, I watched the ease with which she flowed like a brook from one social pool to another. I was smitten. At the time, many people thought the relationship that Sandra and I had was a simple teenage romance, but to me it was a seismic event that could be measured on the *Malcolm Thomas Richter Scale*.

Perhaps because I was a year older than Sandra, she spent time with me; by the winter of my sophomore year, I took pride in calling her my girlfriend. However, she was too young to date, and I had neither a driver’s license nor a car. Our romance was restricted to sitting near each other in the school cafeteria and talking while waiting for classes to begin each morning. Occasionally, there

might be a quick rendezvous “hello-goodbye” after school on the way to the school bus. Young love was simply beautiful and electric!

The romance continued to blossom until the end of the school year. Then in a telephone conversation during the summer break, she told me she did not want to be my girlfriend any longer! I was devastated.

The break-up, however, taught me a valuable lesson: never lose hope. This was a pivotal moment when I realized a critical life lesson that would influence all of my major decisions for years to come. Events alone cannot dictate the outcomes for your destiny. Instead, your responses and reactions to events shape the course of your life.

I maintained a friendly and respectful relationship with Sandra. My reaction paved the way for a chance encounter three years later that reignited the romance.

I still remember proposing in the Mariner Mall parking lot. Many people reading this book will not remember that Pensacola had a mall at the corner of Fairfield Drive and Mobile Highway. I do not remember if she ever answered the question – I do remember that she

immediately began to make plans for a wedding. On June 8, 1973, Sandra and I exchanged vows that we continue to keep. This year marked our 35<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

There is an old adage that “Behind every successful man is a successful woman.” Sandra’s version of that old saying is that “Behind every successful man is a **worn-out** woman.” I could never have experienced my successes without her. She has been both a rock to lean on and my greatest cheerleader.