

From *Remembering Margene*

## **A Chance Encounter: How Margene and I met**

If not for a Chinese foreign exchange student named Abel Ching Nam Sheng and a book called *The Ugly American*, I would never have met the only woman I ever loved, the best thing that ever happened to me, the woman I was married to for the forty-three best years of my life. Our chance encounter occurred within a narrow window of less than five minutes, an ever so brief opportunity that almost never happened.

Abel was a member of a small fraternity at Georgia Tech that was headed the way of the dinosaurs. With only twelve brothers and one pledge who had quit, Theta 3-Bar had launched a desperate recruiting drive.

As Abel's dormitory counselor and classmate in the electrical engineering department, I was a convenient mark. Even though I'd told him I had no interest in the fraternity scene, he pestered me for weeks to "come to fraternity house, meet brothers". I politely turned him down each time.

But after reading *The Ugly American*, I wondered if I might have been inadvertently hurting his feelings by declining his offers. When he invited me at the beginning of summer quarter to go to a Saturday night party at his fraternity, I relented and told him that I would go just that one time.

On the night of the party, I was at my desk studying for an exam in an EE class that was giving me fits. Even though I'd promised Abel I'd show up at the party, I really needed to hit the books, and was within a whisker of renegeing on the commitment I'd made. But around 10:30, I decided to make a token appearance, solely to avoid disappointing Abel.

Just as I arrived, two young women were on the front steps of the fraternity house about to leave. Margene McCarthy, who had flown to Atlanta for a job interview after having just graduated from Texas Tech, had come to the party with her cousin, Dotty. As Dotty was saying goodbye to the fraternity's housemother, I struck up a brief conversation with Margene. She and Dotty started to leave no more than two or three minutes later. Acting on impulse, I asked her for her address in Texas. She gave it to me, and I wrote to her twice over the next two weeks. When I didn't receive a reply, I figured I'd never see her again.

In early September, Abel told me he'd heard that Margene had accepted a job in Atlanta and was staying with her aunt and uncle at their home in Buckhead. I asked him to see if he could get a phone number for her, which he did.

She was quite surprised to hear from me when I called, maybe even slightly embarrassed since she didn't reply to my letters. But she accepted my invitation to go to a football game, and gave me the address of her aunt and uncle. When I picked her up, my eyes were wide as saucers. I remembered from seeing her at the fraternity party three months earlier that she was quite attractive, but not *this* attractive. Never before or since have I seen a more beautiful woman. At that moment, it was hopelessly-in-love-at-second-sight, at least for me, and the rest is history.

When I think back on how close I came to never meeting the best thing that ever happened to me, I just say a prayer of thanks, because a chance encounter like that doesn't happen in real life without help from above.

*On that first date, Margene was wearing the same hairstyle, blouse and pearl necklace shown on page 6.*