

A Love Story

Kate Bernetich and John Warne

Kate Bernetich and John Warne went to rival high schools, Haddonfield and Haddon Heights. Through friends, they met on Memorial Day weekend, on the Ocean City Boardwalk, over pizza. They were 17.

They fell hard and fast, dated all summer. After dinner one August night at Oriental Pearl, a restaurant in Haddonfield, John told Kate, “I love you,” for the first time.

But then John, a year ahead in school, went off to college that fall of 1996. Each wrote lots of love letters, but Kate wanted to be exclusive, and “I was too immature,” John said. He wanted to enjoy college life. So they drifted apart.

When Kate’s mom grew sick with cancer, and died in May of 1999, John came back into Kate’s life. Both home from college, they were together all summer — tight. But soon after, Kate went off to Italy to study abroad.

He started dating. She started dating.

He grew serious with somebody else, and married. But he saved Kate’s letters, stored them beneath the back seat of his Suburban.

Kate, certain their love was never to be, threw away all his letters, fearing she would read them. She avoided going any place she might see him. Graduating from Maryland, she lived in Washington, D.C.

Years rolled along with no contact between the two.

In 2005, John, divorced after 15 months of marriage, ran into Kate’s dad, who said Kate was engaged.

Another year went by, but John kept thinking about Kate. Before he could move on with his own life, he had to know what had become of her. He emailed Kate’s father,

John had asked for her email address, “I jumped through the phone,” said Kate.

John emailed Kate, assuming she was married.



asked if he thought it would be okay to contact her, and if so, would he send along her email address.

Kate had been engaged, but called it off. One of the many warning bells in her head was that she kept thinking about John. So when Kate’s dad mentioned that

She wrote a thousand responses, before sending the actual reply. “I didn’t want to open up any doors,” she explained. “What if I fell for him again and he was just emailing me?”

Her reply was short, but contained the greatest news of his

life: Kate wasn’t married.

They emailed for two weeks. He was in Audubon, working as a funeral director for the family business. She was in Northern Virginia, working for the federal government.

They agreed to meet Nov. 18, 2006, in Baltimore’s Inner Harbor.

They hadn’t seen one another in six years.

She was so nervous, she kept missing exits.

He melted the moment he saw her. He knew right then, before they even went in the restaurant, before they ordered appetizers both were too excited to eat, that he was going to marry her, that he should have married her all along.

They talked all night.

In the summer of 1996, soon after they had first met, Kate had come into John’s house and written a note on a chalkboard by the family’s front door. “Welcome ... to our lovely home.” A decade later, when she went back into that house, to greet John’s family, that message was still there. “Some great chalk,” said Kate.

She moved back in 2007. He proposed to her on one knee in April of 2008 at Oriental Pearl. They both love Christmas, and decided on a Christmas wedding, Dec. 20, 2008.

They realize they are so fortunate to have ended up together.

“Somebody pulled some strings,” said Kate.

John’s mother says this is all the work of Kate’s mother, up in heaven.