

## Love Letters: From High School to 50 Year Marriage

*By Emma G. Jackson*

When I think of "love letters" I immediately think of my boyfriend, John (called JD by most others and me), my eleventh-grade classmate. Not my first boyfriend, for I had had several before then. Back in the day, around third grade and certainly by fifth grade, if a boy sent a note, bought a soda or candy bar for you, or touched your shoulder and hid behind others, they were called by other classmates your "boyfriend." I would call those notes and behaviors expressions of "puppy love."

However, with JD, a junior in high school, it was different but somewhat the same. A friend of his came to me to say that he (John) liked me – still childish laughter accompanied delivery of that message. No dating at this stage, mostly group mingling and talking.

A month before high school graduation, during senior class activity John decided to ask if he could visit me. We began seeing and calling each other.

That summer {1956) he worked in Chicago and I assisted my father by paying his farm workers. Love letters were shared by both of us. Messages were simple on how we missed each other and about happenings in our working lives. Fall, and we went to our respective colleges. He to Tennessee State in Nashville and me to Tuskegee in Alabama.

That next summer John joined the Air Force and was off to basic training. Letters were few. I responded. Same messages – missing and thinking about you – can't wait until we get together.

Basic training was finished, John was in Texas and I returned for my second year at Tuskegee. The letters began and did they come! The mail list, posted on the window of the resident manager's office each day, listed who had received mail. I received a love letter from JD each day, sometimes two! My classmates couldn't understand what John could say every day in a letter. What they didn't know is there was repetition – reassuring repetition about our love, the past, present and our future.

The love letters kept coming through his tour in Alaska and his return to me during my internship in New York, junior year, senior year and graduation. The letters became more serious and romantic as we planned our engagement and picked the ring. We were married a year after graduation in 1961.

While visiting JD's mom, two years after our marriage, by snooping under the bed in John's old room I found a box. Inside were dozens of my letters to him. I can't imagine who may have read my letters! His family members visited often and slept in that room. I thought, where are my letters from John? Well, I was more careful!

John and I celebrated 50 years of marriage on July 11, 2011. He was a great writer of love letters and chooser of great greeting cards. I have kept them over the years and read them when I get the urge to reminisce. They are gushing with words of love and memories. Special is the last Valentine given February 14, 2012:

Everything you do / Everything you are / Everything we have together / That's what I love, My

Sweet Valentine, My Wonderful Wife. Still Love You, JD.

John passed away August 4, 2012 of cancer but the love letters remain!