

THE NECKLACE

By Fred Hobbs

In the early 1960s, I lived in an east Denver apartment house inhabited primarily by singles, a mixture of young males and females, mostly in age from mid to late 20s. The guys understandably took note of the relative virtue of the various residents of the opposite sex. But the girls had that process much more refined. They had their own information and opinion network trading notes on subjects such as who was dating whom, what male was eligible, who was “cute.” Actually, the network extended beyond my building to others nearby.

I had my eyes on a teacher named Nancy who lived upstairs above the apartment I shared with two other guys. But by chance I also got a glimpse of a slim dark haired beauty with gorgeous blue eyes, who was shopping at a nearby drug store. Mary Ellen. Turned out she lived in another building, but knew buddies who lived in mine. Later, we met at an impromptu New Year’s Eve party my roommates and I threw in our apartment. I was conflicted. Who to pursue? Nancy or Mary Ellen, Mary Ellen or Nancy?

Mary Ellen’s birthday was coming up. I decided to buy her a present. I knew she was Catholic, so I bought her a relatively inexpensive gold chain with a small cross attached. I continued to date both girls, until one day when an envelope came in the mail. Inside was a piece of cardboard with the gold chain wrapped around it. The gossip network was in full force. Mary Ellen had found out I was also seeing Nancy!

My immediate instinct was to call Mary Ellen in an effort to retain the comfortable situation of having both girls still in my social sphere. That’s when my roommates stepped in with the best advice I’d ever take. Don’t call now. They pointed that in the dating game this was a positive development. Obviously Mary Ellen liked me. So I did nothing at first. I busied myself with my job, occasionally seeing Nancy.

A few days later, I traveled to San Francisco to visit relatives. While there I chanced to read an article about JFK’s courting technique with Jackie. He had sent her a post card from Hawaii signed simply: “Cheers, Jack.”

Realizing now that it was Mary Ellen I really wanted, I bought a picture post card and sent it to her with a brief greeting. But I decided to push my luck one step further. I told her my return flight plans and said I’d like to see her and could she pick me up at the airport? When I arrived, there she was. On the ride to my place, she told me she’d like to have the necklace back. I agreed promptly. Three months later we became engaged and shortly after were married. Oh, and Nancy? Turns out she had a serious boyfriend back in her Midwest hometown all along.

Mary Ellen wore the necklace for years. Somehow in one of our travels, it was lost. I offered to replace it, but she declined saying it could never be replaced.

But when she passed away nearly two years ago, I bought another chain and cross that was similar. She wore this symbol of our love and 47-year happy marriage as she was laid to rest.