

11-2-2016

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Recommended Citation

University Relations, "Alumni Relations: Christensen '76 and Benson '75 Reconnect and Find Love" (2016). *University Relations News Archive*. 2279.

http://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/urel_news/2279

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Alumni Relations: Christensen '76 and Benson '75 Reconnect and Find Love

Like many alumni, Paul Christensen '76 and Donna Benson '75 found love as students at Morris. But after more than 40 years (and 1,300 miles) apart, it took a little nudge from the Office of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving to bring them back together—this time for life.

For Paul and Donna, the journey to happily ever after was a bit unconventional: it began with a chance midnight rendezvous followed by years and miles of separation, a reunion brought about by fate, and a wedding at the place where it all began. They first met as freshmen at Morris in 1972. After spending time with one another via mutual friends in Independence Hall, they officially got together in the spring of 1973 after an unexpected kiss at the top of the stairs at the “Groovy Lodge.” As Paul tells it, he immediately “was smitten.” The two dated for several months, parted ways that summer, and went on with their separate lives.

“I’d think of Donna every once in awhile, but we each had our own lives,” says Paul.

That all changed last December. After just having “had one of those feelings,” Paul got the urge to find out where and how Donna was. He reached out to Director of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving Erin Christensen '05, who agreed to forward a letter to Donna on his behalf. Paul “made a couple drafts, put it in the mail, and left it in God’s hands.” The rest, as they say, is history.

Since they connected over the phone shortly after Donna received Paul’s letter, they “haven’t missed a day” with one another. The miles and years that separated them fell away, and over time their long-distance phone conversations turned to in-person visits (Donna was living in Minnesota, Paul in Idaho) and finally, to an on-campus wedding.

Donna suggested they marry at Morris, since that was where their story began, but also because Erin had been instrumental in bringing the two back together.

“It just seemed like the logical place to be,” says Donna. “For Erin to help as she did: it was a small act for her, but huge for us. It had big consequences.”

“It was something I’d be happy to do for anyone,” says Erin. “Now, having connected with Paul and Donna and participated in their wedding, just across from my office door, it came full circle.”

After saying “I do” in a sweet and simple ceremony in the campus Welcome Center, Paul and Donna now are looking forward to the next chapter in their love story: finally being with the one they love. As Paul put it the day before the ceremony, “it just feels good to be honest about our feelings and to be together.”