

L.A. AFFAIRS

One moment's ripple effect

BY TITO MORALES

“**T**he moment.” In matters of love, it's that spontaneous, euphoric instant when two lives intersect.

Some refer to it as a spark. Others reference the alignment of the planets. But for me, the split second that launches all the other seconds, days, months and years in a relationship will always be, simply, the moment.

It was the summer of 1981, and we were both outlanders, of sorts, in Southern California. I had moved here from a small town in Northern California to study and pursue a career in film; I'd just graduated from UCLA. Her family had recently moved to Los Angeles from Chicago; she was attending summer school at UCLA between her junior and senior years at the University of Arizona.

We were both trying to get a handle on the whole L.A. thing.

Relocating here can produce a wide assortment of emotions. This city can prove to be intimate and inviting one day, daunting and nightmarish the next. I hadn't yet found my fit, still staggered by the excess of it all, from the rivers of cars to the mountainous billboards. She, on the other hand, was captivated by the novelty of becoming an honest-to-goodness Californian — still smitten with the ocean, the skinny, funny-looking trees and the sun.

Our worlds converged at UCLA's Sunset Canyon Recreation Center, whose sprawling lawns and majestic pine trees more closely resemble a mountain summer retreat than a corner of a bustling university campus. I'd taken a detour from my job search to squeeze in a little exercise. She wanted to get in a swim before her econ class.

The moment happened as we were both using kickboards to cross the lengthy, aptly named Park pool. She was two lanes away from me, traveling in the opposite direction. We smiled at each other from across the way and promptly continued on with our respective workouts. But somehow I knew that my life was forever altered.



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Our paths crossed again a few days later. Same pool, same circumstances. I smiled at her and she smiled back. When she got out of the water to dry herself on a wood bench, I made sure to climb out of the pool and position myself on a bench beside her.

A conversation, we knew, was inevitable. Our talk began with pools and schools. But it quickly

blossomed to something more profound in scope.

Soon we were standing in a long line outside a Westwood theater, waiting to see a movie about a guy named Indiana Jones. And our relationship, much like the narrative of that movie, began to hurtle forward with an exhilarating momentum that made me feel as much a passenger as a

driver.

The first kiss occurred on the deck of a home perched on a bluff overlooking Malibu; the first picnic, at the fragrant Descanso Gardens; the first hike, along a winding, shadowy trail in Temescal Canyon.

Then came the birthday trips to the Norton Simon, the secret wedding on Kauai, the antiquing

in Ventura ... was any of it, upon reflection, really within our control?

I've never really been one for predetermination. I prefer to believe that I'm more of a free will type of guy whose destiny is very much in his own hands.

But how else can you explain it, the chances of our disparate lives coming together? Had her parents not decided to permanently shrug off their winter coats, she never would have been in L.A. Had I started working immediately upon graduation, I never would have been on campus. Had she enrolled in summer school at USC or Pepperdine, she never would have been in Westwood. Had the warm weather not lured me back into the water, I never would have gone for a swim.... The potential of us never meeting simply boggles the mind.

Over the years, countless filmmakers have been charged with the unenviable task of trying to capture such moments and to accurately convey their magnitude. The movie industry, in fact, has developed its own special language in this regard, from the glossy close-up and musical backdrop to the camera shot that leaves the impression that everyone and everything outside of the two love-struck individuals has suddenly melted away to obscurity.

In reality, the moment is nothing like that. For my wife and I, there were no violins. No zoom shots. No flower petals magically raining down upon us.

But the memory of that moment continues to glow.

And that initial glance — the glance that turned into a smile that turned into a conversation that would, in time, turn into a deeply shared history — would eventually give my life a substance I never imagined possible.

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