

**A personal story written by Ellyn Farley
about her relationship and love for her wife,
Jennifer Tobits**

*Time may change
a lot of things
in our lives,
but one thing
it can never change
is the way I feel about you...*

You're everything to me.

Happy Anniversary

February 17, 2010

*JEN,
Thank you for marrying me
and for staying married to me!
I love you deeply.*

all my love,


xoxo

I was recently asked to describe our relationship, how we met, and the places and things that hold the most significance to me and us. The following was my answer in multiple parts.

Part I

The first time I met Jen was at Market Days Street Festival (Halsted Street Festival) on August 8, 2004. We had mutual friends and I ran into them at the street festival. My friends had repeatedly told me that I should meet Jen. When I met her that day, I was totally speechless. She was intoxicating. Unfortunately, I was sunburned and wearing a Pink Panther t-shirt because I had been at the beach with one of my law school pals earlier and he has two little boys. I thought that they would like the Pink Panther t-shirt; I had no idea I would meet the love of my life later that day. Jen was with the woman she was dating at the time, who proceeded to kiss, grab, caress, strangle, and otherwise smother Jen to the point that I thought she might choke or suffocate. On the other hand, after we were introduced, Jen talked to me the way that people refer to the way that Bill Clinton speaks to people: like I was the only person on the earth and the total focus of her attention. She was talking about decorating my place, given that my friends had told her that I might need some help in this regard.

Part II

About a month passed before I saw her again, but not a single day went by without me thinking of her and what she was doing and how she was doing. Sometime in September 2004, about a month after I first met Jen at Market Days, Becca, my neighbor, asked me to meet them at the Heartland Café in Rogers Park on a week night after work. I was so nervous, and I missed the stop while reading an old Joyce Carol Oates book on the red line, so I had to get off at the next stop and go back. When I arrived (late), Jen asked me what I was reading that was so interesting such that I would miss my stop, and from then on, it was like we were the only ones there the entire night. I learned that she had attended college in Lynchburg, Virginia, which is about an hour from where I grew up and where one of my father's sisters lives and two of my cousins. It turns out that Jen and I probably both visited one gay bar in Roanoke, Virginia in the early to mid 90's. When we parted ways for the night, I remember standing up and shaking her hand. After we started courting in late January of this year, we went back to the Heartland Café, and one Friday night after two bottles of wine, I told her the story of how my parents became engaged, and I offered her a few intimate glimpses of how close I felt to her and much I cared about her and how she delighted me each and every time I saw her.

Part III

When I was at Clausen Miller, right about the time I was interviewing at Cozen, I had a water loss at the Louis Vuitton store on Michigan Avenue. I went up there to meet with the insured and look at the scene and I walked back on Michigan Avenue past Jen's gallery, which is in the Wrigley Building. With my heart pounding, palms sweating and stuttering like crazy, I stopped by her work and offered her an article that I had written for the Clausen Miller firm publication about mold litigation. This would have been later in September 2004. Jen and I had discussed another mold case that I had been really worked up about when I saw her at the Heartland Café and she had talked about how much she was exposed to mold in her work with restoring old or water damaged pieces of art. I gave her the article and told her why I was near the Wrigley Building. I was so nervous and flustered, I thought I might die. She invited me to a party that she was having at her place in early October. I thanked her for the invitation, but I never went to the party because I knew at that point that I had serious feelings for this woman and she was with someone else. I was so out of sorts because I had never felt so physically, emotionally and spiritually attracted to someone.

In November 2005, right after the election and right before I went to Spain (I had been working at Cozen for a little less than a month), I was coming home late on the train and I received a call from Becca, my neighbor. She was having wine with Jen and Jen's girlfriend at Jen's place and asked me to stop by. I had intentionally skipped Jen's party the month before, and I didn't want her to think I was indifferent about invitations to her place, nor did I want to appear as though I did not like being around her girlfriend, so I accepted the invitation and stopped by Jen's place. Again, everyone else in the room seemed not to be there. I think at one point, Jen's girlfriend and Becca went into another room because Jen and I were so entranced in conversation. Jen and I talked about the recent election and an incredible assortment of other topics, including my pending trip to Spain and hers to Haiti. It was one of the most incredible conversations I've ever had. I wound up leaving after 1:00 a.m. and then had to go to work the next day and to Celeste Hill's birthday party that next night.

On the Wednesday before New Year's Eve of 2004, December 29th, Jen came over to my building to have drinks with Becca. They called me at some point and asked me to come down to join them. I was still wearing a suit from work, and when I walked into the room where Jen was, I thought my heart might stop, even more so than any courtroom or deposition that I have walked into. We talked effervescently and she asked me to show her my place upstairs, which I gladly did. When she left that night, she asked me to come to her New Year's Eve party. I went to the New Year's Eve party, offering to Jen one of my favorite wines - a Valpolicella. I stayed at Jen's place until 7:00 a.m., which is unprecedented party behavior for me. I loved being around her at that party, and it seemed to me that she was extremely attentive to me, even though she is always a fabulous hostess. I'll never forget either of those nights during the last week in December 2004.

On Wednesday, January 12, 2005, I went over to Jen's place per her invitation to discuss a legal situation regarding the ownership of her condo. We had some wine, talked a little about the law, a lot about life, and even more about love, once her girlfriend had gone to bed. It was on this night that Jen told me that she was not in love with the woman she was dating at that time. As guilty as I felt, I was also thrilled to hear this. I stayed at her place until 3:00 a.m., and I hated to leave her then, even though I had two court appearances early the next morning. We just couldn't seem to stop talking to each other. I felt very close to her and extremely comfortable talking to her even though I was also terribly flustered around her. I loved this night.

On Saturday, January 29, 2005, I met Jen and Becca from my building at the Speakeasy Supper Club on Devon, a few blocks east of Clark. It was this night that turned out to be the confessional evening. Jen has since told me that she asked repeatedly whether I was, in fact, going to show up at the Speakeasy that night because she had heard that I have a reputation for saying that I am going out, and then staying in and reading or something. I had been on a date the Thursday before this night that had not been a success. Jen wanted to know all about it, and I told her that the woman with whom I had gone on the date had not been the heart-pounding, palm sweating, stuttering experience that I had hoped. Jen asked me who I thought would be able to do those things to me, and, in the bravest moment of my life, I said, "It is you. You are what makes my heart-pound, my palms sweat and me stutter." She smiled very broadly and from then on that night, she sat very close to me and there was purportedly some leg rubbing that occurred. We went to another bar in Andersonville that night, T's. This was also the night of our first kiss(es) on sidewalks as I walked her home and in an alley behind her place (I know, not very classy, but keep in mind, very uncharacteristically wild and with abandon for me).

Part IV

After that night in late January 2005, things progressed swiftly and driven with the most powerful emotions I have ever known. We talked and emailed every day, and saw each other whenever we could. Places and things that strike me as memorable from then on include:

- The Ale House on North Avenue where we had our first "real" date on February 3, 2005.
- The Jazz bar on Hubbard Street. When we snuck away to this bar in early February 2005, I told Jen that she made me feel like I did the first time I kissed a girl (which was a very long time ago).
- On Saturday, February 12, 2005 we had a monumental date at my house that lasted until well after 4:00 a.m., somewhat in celebration of Valentine's Day. Jen brought me some chocolate from a fancy store in the Nordstrom building. They have very unusual items, such as dark chocolate with wasabi. I didn't even think that I liked chocolate because I have virtually no sweet tooth, but it was so sensual eating it with her. She also brought me some bath salts that were shaped into a ball with rose petals in the middle from another fancy store in the Nordstrom building.
- Architectural Artifacts, Inc. on Ravenswood. We had an unbelievable date here on Presidents' Day, February 21, 2005. It is an incredible antique store. It was one of the most amazing dates in the history of people dating. I swear that someone could have made a movie about it. There are thousands of these amazing old ceramic tiles that they have collected from all over the world and they are fantastically beautiful. I remember standing next to her while we looked at some of these tiles and she ran her hand down my arm and I thought my heart might burst.
- In late February 2005, Jen left to go to Haiti for two weeks. I missed her terribly, although I tried not to because I knew she was having an amazing experience. I had no contact with her for the entire two weeks, except for one brief email that sent to let me know she was safe.
- The Federal Courthouse in South Bend, Indiana and, on the same day, Smoky Jo's Barbeque and Tap in Crete, Illinois
- Carol's Pub in Andersonville. I went to this bar for the first time with Jen and her best friends in April 2005.
- Charlie's Ale House. We have had some great Sunday lunches there with a few glasses of wine and then even better late Sunday afternoons at home.
- Waking up in the mornings with Jen and Rilke.
- A going away party for a dear friend and colleague on April 1, 2005, her last day at Cozen.
- The long, but amazing road trip to Connecticut for Jen to say goodbye to her childhood home.
- Daffodils, irises, star-gazer lilies (to pay my respects to Ben, the pug), and hyacinth.
- The time I had a terrible flu and Jen made everything better.
- A charity event that turned rowdy for Jen and I at the Three Arts Club, which is also where Jen lived when she first moved to Chicago.
- Dinner at Mon Ami Gabi where I was so nervous that I knocked over a really nice bottle of wine.
- Seeing a Scottish film called My Summer of Love.
- Caprese salad, Proseco, roast beef sandwiches, red wine, brie cheese, olives and strawberries.
- Jen's Sunday softball games.
- Going to the beach with Jen and Rilke for swimming and picnics.
- The annual canoeing and camping trip on the Wisconsin River with Jen's best friends.
- Jen's birthday date at The Half Shell and seeing The Cowboy Junkies at Park West.
- Jen's birthday party at Joie de Vine.

Part V

For me, the first thought that comes to my mind about where the most special place I have been with Jen is my kitchen table because we spent hours and hours until practically dawn sitting there talking about everything. I can't think of my kitchen without thinking of us sitting at the table, drinking wine and smoking, with her feet in my lap, laughing and talking and me sitting there falling more in love with her every minute.

I can say with almost certainty and without much thought that one of the most special places where we have had a date is an area with grass and trees near Foster beach. We had a picnic there on Memorial Day. It was just a perfect day, although I think we have a lot of perfect days. I would think that if you asked Jen where her favorite date spot is, it might be this one.