

## **The Right Fit**

*By Sarah Bigham, Frederick, MD*

I was a teenager in the '80s -- hair was big, makeup was garish, and stonewash was hot. I was not a cheerleader, or a post-Title IX athlete, or in band. I was quiet, read constantly, and preferred time spent in the guileless company of children and animals to the social cannibalism of high school.

It was a challenge in a small town to be different and apart. One bright spot was Anton. From the moment I met him, I loved him, with a fierceness that leached into my pores and filled me with certainty that devotion does not wait long to announce itself.

A multi-sport athlete, Anton was tensed muscle and dark eyes. We had completely different social circles and markedly opposite social lives, but nevertheless understood one another. He treated me as one of the guys, with my makeup-less face, limp hair, and t-shirts. He teased me (good-naturedly), told me about the things he hid behind a smile, and made me laugh.

He went to prom with his girlfriend. I went with a guy I had known since preschool. Feeling awkward in my puffed-sleeve dress, makeup, and curler-ed hair in the high school gym, I wondered why the concept of "prom" had become so romanticized in American culture.

Toward the end of the evening, I walked to Anton, sitting with his friends and carrying on about whatever teenage boys discuss, and asked him to dance. I waited a beat for him to realize I was serious, and then he took my outstretched hand.

He had touched me before, with the physicality reserved for his male friends – partial headlocks and playful shouldering in the hallways, but I had never reached for him. He held me, gently this time, his tall frame encircling mine, his face bending to my ear, telling me softly how beautiful I was. I felt then what it was to truly fit with someone, without effort or stress. It was not until much later, long after I was home while others were off at various unofficial after parties that I considered his words. He hadn't told me, as some classmates had with a tinge of surprise, that I "looked beautiful." He told me that I *was* beautiful. Words had long been my most faithful companions and I knew their power, as well as the canyon of difference between two seemingly identical statements.

I have not seen Anton since graduation, but pockets of news always make their way to those from small places. He is married, and happy. That is what I want for him. That is what I have always wanted for him. That is what love is.

I, too, am married, after growing into myself and out of relationships that exhausted me. She and I fit so well – a feeling I recognized early on, thanks to Anton. I, too, am happy. That is what I want for myself. That is what I have always wanted for myself. That is what love is.