

By Maureen Hart

Richard Anzuoni and Patricia Ann Romaine were just young teenagers when they met in 1952. He was a stock boy at Raymond's Department Store in Boston, Massachusetts, where she was working at a counter selling figurines.

Richard had lost his father, then his mother, in quick succession, and was living with his older brother.

"The minute I saw Pat, sparks went off," Richard reminisces. "I was only 15 years old, but I was bold in those days, so I asked her out and she said yes." He took Pat to a movie, and then they went across the street to Kresge's for hot dogs, which were priced at two for a quarter. Before the night was out, he had hugged her, and the two began dating.



The following year, Richard's brother signed him into the Air Force, and after completing boot camp in New York State, the new recruit was assigned to Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul, Illinois, where he began training as an aircraft mechanic working on C-130s, C-124s, and B-36s.

To his surprise, Patricia ran away from home at the age of 16 and took a train to Rantoul, where she showed up at the guard shack. This wildly romantic gesture pleased Richard, but presented him with a dilemma. He went to his squadron commander who got Patricia temporarily assigned to base housing.

Richard and Patricia had talked about getting married when they could afford it, but now he went to the base commander and told him his situation, pointing out that his parents were dead and his brother did not want him.

The commander was sympathetic and advised, "Richard, you are too young to get married without permission, so you need someone to adopt you." In short order, the commander sent the young teenager to a probation officer he knew in Illinois. After Richard explained his problem again, the probation officer asked if getting married was what he really wanted to do.

"I told him that it was going to happen anyway, but that it had to happen now," Richard explains. For a cost of \$35, the probation officer filled out the adoption papers and filed them. "He explained that now the commander could authorize me to get married, and that afterwards, he would set me free again. Things were a lot different in those days. This whole thing happened in a matter of minutes."

Within a week, on December 5, 1953, the couple was married at the base chapel by the Catholic chaplain. Richard's bunkmate was best man. "My buddy went out to dinner with us and that was our wedding reception," Richard recalls.

After that, the couple moved around the country, living in base housing at Loring Air Force Base in Maine; Tyndall Air Force Base in Panama City, Florida, and Randolph Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. Patricia stayed with Richard's sister when he served temporary duty in England, and then accompanied him for his second overseas tour in the Philippines.

Their firstborn, Donna Marie, arrived in Illinois, and their first son, Richard, was born in Maine. Their daughter Patricia was born in the Philippines, and the last two children, Michael and Kimberly were born in Massachusetts following their father's discharge from the Air Force.

Richard worked as a mechanic and the couple moved around before coming to Northeastern Pennsylvania when he was sent to refurbish teletype machines following the Agnes Flood in Wilkes-Barre.

Patricia died in 2002, at the age of 67, after 51 years of what Richard remembers as a "marriage made in heaven."

Richard says he knew the slim redhead with blue eyes was the girl for him back when he was 15 years old, and that she turned out to be an "unbelievable" wife.

"She had a lot of faith in me," he recalls. "When I was down, she'd get me back up. I was the luckiest man in the world."

His eyes are moist as he looks through the photos of their life together, showing the two of them on vacation, during holidays, and with their children and grandchildren, and repeats, "We had a wonderful life together. I was so lucky."

Patricia's ashes are on his fireplace mantel, and he treasures a lock of her hair, clipped off after her death by a nurse.

Asked for advice for newlywed couples, he doesn't hesitate. "When you talk, hold hands. Then you can control your emotions because you are physically connected with each other," he counsels. "And never go to bed angry with one another."