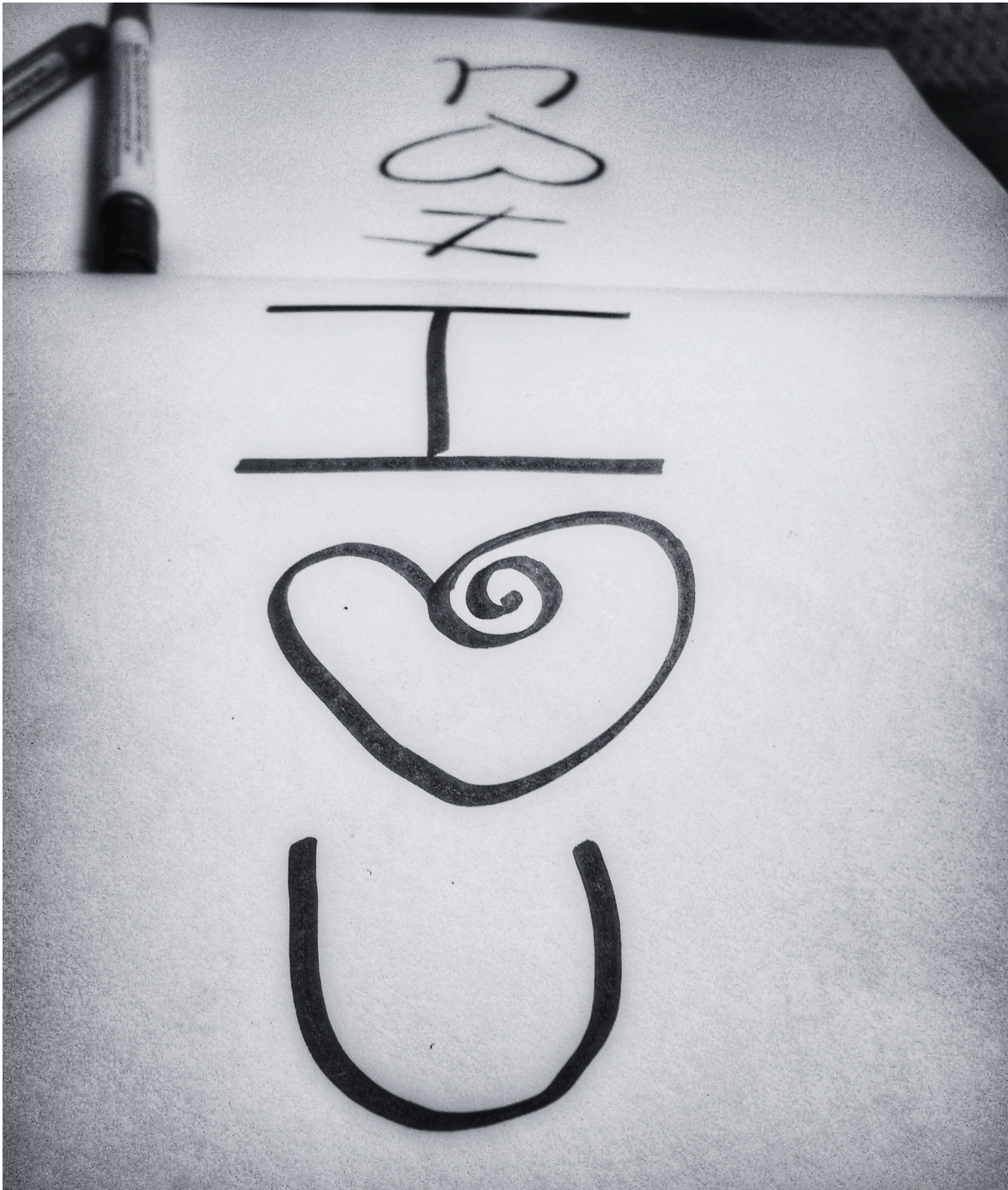


musings

of Millbrook Baptist Church

FEB 2025



ISSUE No. 04

LOVE STORIES

LOVE POEMS

LOVELY THINGS

musings

noun [plural]

UK /ˈmjuː.zɪŋz/ US /ˈmjuː.zɪŋz/

your thoughts or comments on something you have been thinking about carefully and for a long time:

When we dreamed of creating *Musings* in early 2024, we envisioned a literary space that would invite expressions from our entire community. This marks our fourth issue of *Musings*. We're excited to report that there have been 53 submissions from 25 different Millbrookers. That means this is YOUR creation. *Musings* offers an authentic glimpse of what's happening in the life of Millbrook!

We also imagined that *Musings* would be a form of worship. We hope these pages offer sacred spaces in the place, time, and mood of your choosing. You'll notice *Musings* is not time-stamped. We believe its contents will be as relevant in the future as they are today.

A word about this issue: A few months ago, Jessica said, "I think we should ask everyone to share their favorite love stories and create a Valentine's-themed issue of *Musings*." Millbrookers, you delivered! This is our favorite issue yet. Mostly because this issue isn't full of all the stories Millbrookers *think they should* tell, but instead, all the stories they *want* to tell. Stories we have all known!

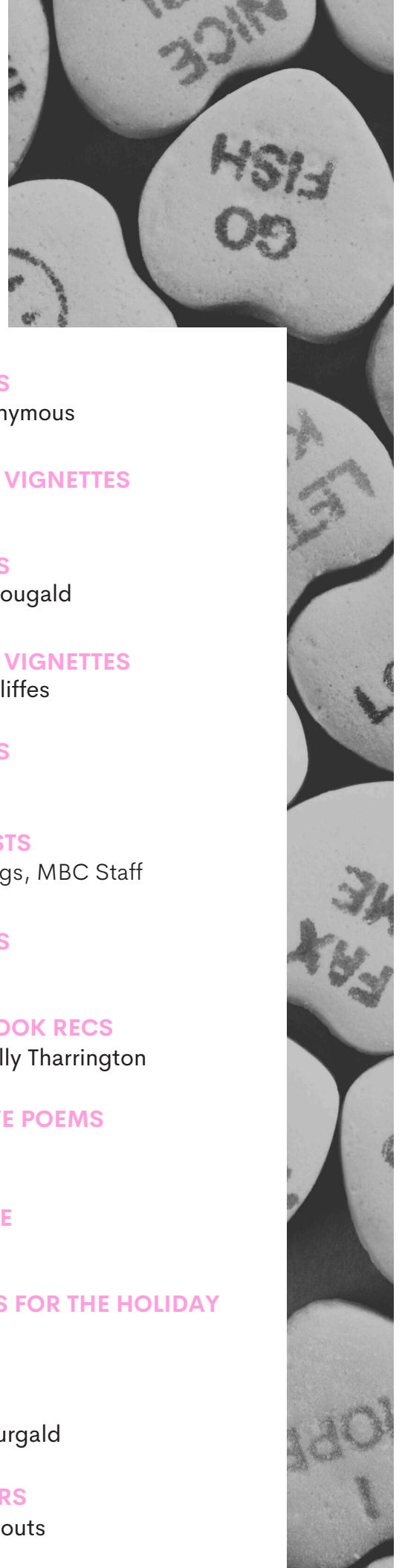
May you find a spirit of love in these pages. And may that love help inform your worship!

Agape!



RESIDENT MUSES

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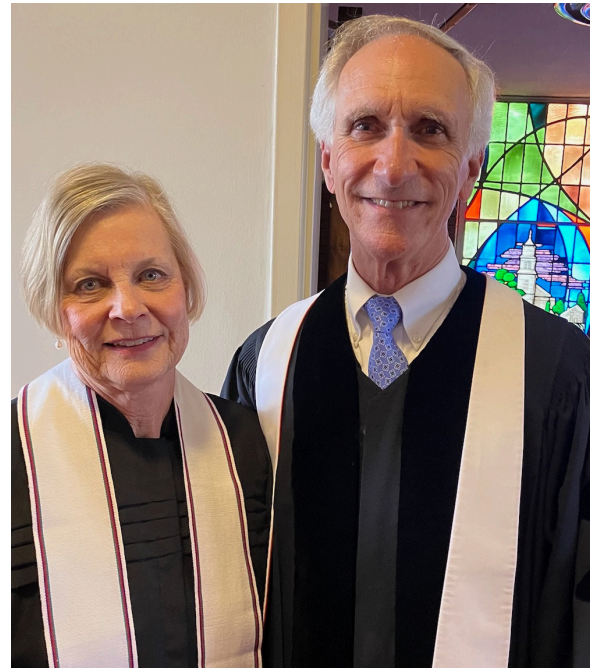
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LOVE STORIES: FINDING LOVE IN A PHILOSOPHY CLASS

Bob Albritton

I noticed her long hair, smile, blue eyes, and affirming nods in a room full of males. In January 1977, I was grading a philosophy course, 'Science and Faith,' in The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. When I started the M.Div. program in 1973, very few women were enrolled in the School of Theology. By the time I was in the doctoral program, some, but not many, women were in philosophy courses.

She was Becky Neil. We talked a bit during that month-long "J term," and I hoped to ask her out after the four weeks were up. And then she signed up for the spring semester's "Introduction to Christian Philosophy" course!



Bob and Becky Albritton

Although I had only a couple of Christian Ethics classes, I thought it prudent not to date her while grading her papers. Sometimes she would arrive early to class, and we would visit for a few minutes. Besides being intrigued about how she grew up on the Baptist Mission Field in Nigeria, West Africa, I found her charming. I looked forward to asking her out.

Summer came and I was heading to the stacks of books in the library when I saw Becky sitting at a desk surrounded by books. We talked a while (quietly in the library, of course) and then I went looking for the book I needed.

When I walked back, she was still there. Later she told me that she already knew there was only one topic left to discuss, and I broached it.

"Would you like to go out Friday night?"

"I cannot."

"Would you like to go out Saturday night?"

"I am busy."

"What night are you available next week?"

"Tuesday!"

LOVE STORIES: THE ALBRITTONS

So on Tuesday, July 10, 1977, we went to see the first "Rocky" movie in the theater and then to Shoney's for chocolate cake and coffee. I am not sure whether it was the coffee or her charm that kept me awake that night from midnight until 2:00 a.m.

So we started dating and talking often via phone. When I asked her what plan she had for Christmas since her parents were serving in Ghana, she said she had no plans. "We have plenty of food and space at my parents' house in Florida! Why don't you fly down and stay with us for Christmas?" It was an innocent offer to someone who needed a place for Christmas. I had no other intentions.

When we picked Becky up at the Orlando airport, I realized how much I had missed her. That night I asked her to marry me. She responded, "Say that again!" I did and she said, "Yes!" After a month in which she took her class exams and I graded 120 philosophy final exams and completed my own comprehensive exams, we were married June 25, 1978. We returned to her last year of M.Div. and my year of writing a boring dissertation.

Since graduation we have enjoyed sharing the life of church vocational ministry with you and many others. One of our early dreams was to serve as co-pastors. In 2021 that dream came true when we were asked to serve for three years as co-pastors of Jonesboro UMC in Sanford, NC. What a way to bookend a life of vocational ministry together!

Very few couples can be partners not only in marriage and family but also in theological training, love for the local church, vocation, and service in the name of Christ. And we often remark that we are very rich in many friends who have blessed us along this way.

After that first date I do not think that it was the coffee that kept me up most of the night!



LOVE STORIES: LOVE STORY 1975

Anonymous Millbrooker

She had me at "sweetie pie." A quick peck on the cheek, and she smiled and said "Goodbye sweetie pie" before heading off to class. I remember the morning sun illuminating her face and her hair, and that sunny smile, and I fell in love with her that day.

Before she left for class that morning we had discussed and agreed on when we would get together for our next date. There were no cell phones and no text messages in the fall of 1975, so everyone had to talk with each other in person or use those 20th century adaptations of the Edison invention, a rotary dial telephone, and sometimes a coin payphone in a phone booth.

A few weeks before that wonderful day, an umbrella also proved to be a useful communication device. It was pouring rain. The storm had come suddenly and I knew that she had no rain jacket or umbrella with her. I knew her class schedule and that her next class was in the history department building some distance across campus. And I knew I wanted to ask her out for our first date.

So, I overcame my shyness and my fear of rejection, and I seized the moment. I dashed down the stairs to the bookstore in the basement of the student union building to buy an umbrella. I raced back up and caught up with her as she was heading out with her arms full of books, and I gently offered to walk her to class, and we huddled close under the cover of the umbrella. I don't remember what the awkward small talk was before we made it to her classroom, but just before she opened the door to her classroom, I was able to blurt the words out to ask her out for our first real date. And she said yes!! I wasn't a stalker or complete stranger. We had met each other a few weeks before in another history class and had coffee in the student union after she and her girlfriend, another classmate, invited me to join them. It was her friend's helpful maneuver to try to get us to meet and to talk. So it was my move. And the umbrella proved to be a very useful tool in those ancient days before email and dating apps.

Our first date was a Pizza Hut pizza and Coca-Colas across the street from campus, and then a stroll to the football stadium for the first home game of the season. I was so nervous I stammered and completely forgot her name when I was introducing her to a friend. She smiled, told him her name, and she rescued me from that embarrassing moment. I remember that she really wasn't interested in the game, but she observed and remarked at how lovely the sunset was, as the football game was winding down.

LOVE STORIES: LOVE STORY 1975

The other details of that first date (Saturday, September 13, 1975) have faded in my memory now, but some vivid images from the days after remain. Just a few weeks later and a few dates later as I was driving her to class, she pecked me on the cheek and called me her "sweetie pie" as she was getting out of the car. I had never heard that term of endearment before. I was convinced she had invented it, and just for me. And I fell in love with her for sure that wonderful fall morning. I know it took her much longer to decide on me, but I persevered, and persuaded her to give me a chance. Repeatedly. And she's been doing that for nearly 50 years now.

There have been more rainy days and sunny days, and beautiful sunsets and sunrises, since then. And tears and grief and joys and laughter, and, greatest of all, love. As her mother's favorite scripture passage affirms, "love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Love never ends." I'm so glad I ran to buy that umbrella.



VALENTINE'S VIGNETTES

Celia and Tom Driver's Love Story as told to Jessica

It was the summer of '74 and Celia was living in Quail Ridge apartments. One day she was reading a book at the pool when a man called over to her and asked her what she was reading. The pool was noisy that day, so the man came over to Celia and introduced himself as Tom. They chatted for a long while that afternoon, and she was surprised to find that he had been living in the same complex. She'd never seen him before! It turned out that he was planning on moving across town in the next week or two, but he asked her for a date anyway. Tom and Celia went to dinner and had a great conversation; she wanted to know everything about him. They saw *Dillinger* at the movies together and had a great time.

A few days later, Tom asked her for another date. However, Celia already had plans to go out with someone else that day, so she declined. But while on the date, Celia realized that she didn't find him nearly as interesting as she'd found Tom. When she and her date returned home, she went over to Tom's apartment (while the date was at her apartment!) and, knowing Tom would be moving soon, told him goodbye. Tom asked for her phone number that night and they connected the next week for another date. They talked and talked and talked over dinner.

Celia hadn't wanted to be serious about anyone; she wanted to be free to be herself. But slowly, with Tom, she started to feel differently. Over Christmas that year, Tom met her family and they loved him. That same Christmas, Tom gave her a beautiful sapphire ring as a gift. She knew she felt strongly for Tom at the time, but was relieved that it wasn't an engagement ring - she wasn't quite ready for marriage yet!

But, five months later, in May of '75, at dinner at Seth Jones, a French restaurant in town, Celia noticed that Tom was acting very strange and awkward. By the end of dinner, Tom had proposed and Celia had accepted. They began planning a wedding!

Tom and Celia were married on Nov 8, 1975 at 2 pm at Millbrook Baptist Church. Tom and Celia have a daughter and two granddaughters. They will celebrate their 50th anniversary this November!

VALENTINE'S VIGNETTES

Lee and Linda Korb

I met my husband-to-be in September 1971 at ECU. I was a member of ECU Angel Flight. Angel Flight was a sorority service organization which works with the Air Force ROTC program and helps coordinate social activities for the ROTC program. Lee was an incoming freshman. We had a lounge where we could meet and socialize between classes. My sister was also a member of Angel Flight. She met Lee first. He did not know she had a twin sister. He was wondering why I did not talk to him later when I was in the lounge area. The next time I was in the lounge with my sister, he realized there were two of us (twins). Brenda introduced me to Lee. Lee quickly could tell the difference between Brenda and I. Our first date was to the Homecoming concert. Lee and I dated for my last three years of college and we married in July 1974.



Lee and Linda Korb

LOVE STORIES: A GRANDMOTHER'S LOVE IS A GIFT FROM GOD AND A TESTAMENT TO STRENGTH

Angela Hatchell

When I think of earthly love the first thought that comes to mind is the love of my grandmothers. Of course, I felt loved by my parents, sister, cousin, husband, sons, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren but the foundation of love began with my grandmothers.

My grandmothers were two distinct and different individuals, but both were strong women who endured hard times, never complained about their situations, and showed unconditional love to their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Both were the first to come to my defense even if I may have not deserved the backing. They made sacrifices for their families and always put God, Faith, and Family first.

My maternal grandmother, "Mamaw", was one of the sweetest individuals that you would ever meet. She did not sit in judgement of anyone but instead said "But by the grace of God go I." She was a devout Christian and laid the foundation for my faith. She not only talked the talk but walked the walk. My maternal grandfather "the love of her life" passed away when my mother was 6 years old, and my aunts were roughly 10 and 12. In 1943 the opportunities for women to find a job/career were scarce. People told my grandmother to put the 3 girls in an orphanage since she had little hope of supporting a family of 4, my grandmother would not hear of it. She took a job in Cannon Mills in the weave room – not an easy job by any means, and the family lived in a mill house with no bathroom but with a roof over their head and often survived by the kindness of strangers. She worked in the mill until her 60s. My grandmother lived in a mill house until her stroke in 1995 and was so proud of the fact that she was able to always support herself. She loved the Lord, and she showed love to everyone. She always put her faith in God and believed that the Lord would provide and protect her. I can honestly say that she is the person that I most looked up to and wished to emulate – with my faith, character, unconditional love, and strength.

love

LOVE STORIES: ANGELA HATCHELL

My paternal grandmother was a strong woman and spitfire. She was from a large family with a farm and went to work at the mill in her teens to help support the family and worked there for 60 years – never missing work unless it was when she had a baby or surgery – in fact she worked her last two weeks with a fractured arm. She loved her 4 children, 7 grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. She was a woman that spoke her mind and was quick with advice and opinions. She lived to the ripe old age of 98 – and was well known for her breakfast feast, fried apple pies, and garden, especially her wonderful tomatoes. She loved to listen to sports and said that had she been born in this day and time she would have been a golfer. She too lived in a mill house, and it was a place where many mouths were fed and many stories were told. Her home was always a very lively place with many opinions but she always spoke her mind and did not back down. She was a faithful woman and gave me a glimpse of heaven with her stories while in hospice the last several weeks of her life – what a gift.

I hope that my children and grandchildren will grow up knowing the love that I have for them just as I felt the love from both of my grandmothers. I hope they will witness the character, work ethic, and the strength that I witnessed from both of my grandmothers. I am so blessed and proud to come from a legacy of such women including my mother.

HOPE
FAITH
LOVE

LOVE STORIES: THE MCDUGALDS

Jessica McDougald

Straight out of high school and soaked through with eighteen year old angst, I moved to the coast for college at UNCW. For a few semesters I tried to do college well—I tried to go to classes and tried to turn in assignments. But I was still deeply hurt from my parent's recent divorce, reeling from the recent deconstruction of my lifelong faith, and I was desperate for someone to love me—someone other than friends and family and God. I wanted to find someone who would complete me the way I'd grown up believing a life-partner was supposed to. I wanted to fall in love with someone I could absorb—and that was much more important to me than my college classes were.



Matt and Jessica McDougald

So, I made myself small and got good at pretending. I was willing to be anyone, abandon anything, pretend to like things I didn't like, pretend to be less intelligent than I was, for just the chance that one of those college boys would love me.

So when, several poor attempts at semesters later, the college sent me a letter that said my GPA was too low for me to continue taking classes, I wasn't surprised. Disappointed in myself? Afraid of what everyone would think when they found out? Yes. But not surprised at all.

My mom said that if I wanted to stay in Wilmington with my friends and not have to move back home to Raleigh with my tail tucked between my legs, I was going to need a job. Luckily, one of my roommates had moved off-campus and offered to let me live with her, the two of us packed tightly into her one-bedroom one-bathroom apartment. She was working at an in-patient drug and alcohol rehabilitation hospital at the time and was able to get me a job there as a treatment assistant. It was something to help pay my half of the rent and keep a few groceries in the fridge with just enough left over each week for the two-dollar cover at the hole-in-the-wall bar down the street that offered penny drafts on Monday nights.

On my first day of orientation at the treatment center, I sat across the conference room table from a fully tattooed guy with a head full of gray hair.

LOVE STORIES: THE MCDUGALDS

At this point, I had long given up my search for love. I was done begging for scraps at bars and parties. I was done looking for love in trash heaps. I'd grown up thinking that if I could just be good enough, pretty enough, submissive enough, my family would love me, boys would love me, and God would love me. This line of thinking had done nothing for me. It was clear to me that what I'd grown up believing was garbage, and if a man was what it was going to take to complete me, then I would have to be okay with never being complete.

The tattooed guy was Matt; he was quiet and serious. He didn't join in our joking at the treatment assistant office. He was meticulous and never shared anything about his personal life. No matter how friendly I tried to be to him, he paid me just enough attention to get our work done and spared no more.

I found this hilarious. His refusal to engage with me made me more eager to break down his barriers. Didn't he see how cute and fun I was – how sparkling my personality? Who did this guy think he was? I picked on him and tried to joke around with him for months with nothing to show. One day he walked into the office wearing his usual outfit—thick work khakis, a plaid button-down, hiking boots, his G-Shock facing the inside of his wrist—and I told him he looked like he was going camping after work.

And he replied, immediately and completely straight-faced, with an inappropriate joke about pitching tents. That afternoon I told all my coworkers that I was going to marry him one day. A few months later, I convinced him to get coffee with me. After that, we walked the north end of Wrightsville Beach together, dodging the hundreds of moon jellies that had washed ashore, the globes of their bodies reflecting the spark of hope that I allowed to ignite inside of me for the first time in years.

We've been together ever since; married for ten years. I've loved him for almost thirteen. Together we have seen it all and faced it all.

Matt happened to me. I didn't have to search him out. I didn't have to conform to him. I didn't have to appeal to his ego or become less in order to hold his interest. I didn't have to abandon myself to love or be loved by him. Matt didn't complete me—Matt helped show me that I was already complete.

Love doesn't come with prerequisites. Love doesn't ask you to be someone different. Love is not a prison or a set of rules you must follow.

Love sets you free.

VALENTINE'S VIGNETTES

Gregg and Janny Mealor

Gregg & Janny: This is us....

- Met in 1987, across the street neighbors until 1999
- First date was an MBC Night Life Outing April 2016
- Married June 2018

Gregg and I met during a different phase of life for each of us, as part of a close-knit, dynamic group of neighbors.



Gregg and Janny Mealor and family

We spent twelve wonderful years surrounded by shared experiences—growing families, celebrations, and even embarking on an entrepreneurial endeavor together. Our oldest girls grew up in the same neighborhood, creating lasting memories with countless gatherings, parties, Easter egg hunts, Halloween adventures, and picnics. It was a special time, one that shaped the bonds we would later rediscover.

Over the following 16 years, our paths crossed occasionally, especially after we both joined Facebook in 2009. Our FB feeds would provide a window, and we'd see bits of each other's lives from afar. Then, a few years after Janny's husband passed away, she reached out to Gregg with a question, and that simple conversation set off a chain of events. At that time Gregg was single, and a spark of flirtation began to grow, igniting something that neither of us expected.

VALENTINE'S VIGNETTES

Jerry and Carol Radcliffe

Having celebrated our 60th anniversary on December 27, 2024, Jerry and I thought our story was worth sharing and look forward to reading others.

When I was a sophomore at Radford University and Jerry was a senior at Virginia Tech, we met at a mixer/dance in October 1963. In May 1964, we became engaged. Having arranged my transfer to State University of New York at Cortland, we married in December 1964. This was after exams and prior to the new semester starting - and honeymooning in New Orleans!

After 1.5 years, I graduated with my BS in Elementary Education and Jerry could stop commuting 43 miles each way from Cortland to Endicott, NY where he was an engineer for IBM. We moved to and lived in Owego NY, raising our son and daughter there. In June 1993, Jerry left IBM and moved to Raleigh to begin working for a start-up. I remained to sell our house. We bought our Raleigh house in September and moved in together in October 1993.

Our big anniversary celebration will come this summer when we cruise from Vancouver to Alaska.



Jerry and Carol Radcliffe

LOVE STORIES: THE ROMANCE OF JOE AND LLOYD SPRUILL

Lloyd Spruill

I met who I thought was the love of my life at North Forsyth High School after breaking up with an upperclassman who graduated and went to Appalachian State – out of sight, out of mind! The new guy was named Craig – tall, dark, and handsome – the drum major of our successful high school band. He played the trumpet with ease as well as led the band, playing for the Valkyries, the dance team/hand maidens of our mighty Vikings football team. Many of my friends thought he was a dream boat. So did I! My mother and father particularly liked Craig even though Daddy caught me sitting on his lap and quickly brought a chair in from the den saying, “Oh Lloyd, I’m so sorry. I did not realize there were not enough seats in the living room!” I was mortified, but I learned my lesson!

My high school years flew by and suddenly it was time to graduate. I was accepted at Converse College in SC, at Salem College in Winston-Salem, and at Guilford College in Greensboro. I chose Guilford because it was co-ed. Daddy really wanted me to go to an all-girls school, but that was NOT for me.

Continuing my boyfriend saga, I headed to college, still in love with Craig who was at ECU. We dated throughout my freshman year and the beginning of my sophomore year. At the same time, however, I met this really cute guy who talked with a strange accent. We happened to stand in line together for class registration in the gym for quite a while as he told me about his summer venture as a camp counselor for underprivileged children from the lower east side of Manhattan. I was sooo interested and impressed! He was also very athletic, playing soccer and running track, and had a handsome build with broad shoulders. When we finally began to truly talk with each other, I asked him where he was from. “I’m from Aulanda,” he said (Aulander is in Bertie County). Of course, I thought he meant Orlando and just didn’t pronounce the name correctly since he said so many other words in a strange Northeastern North Carolina accent (hice, not house; brun, not brown, for example).

We hung out together on campus as “just friends,” eating lunch and dinner together in the dining hall. He also came to visit me OFTEN in the parlor of Shore Hall. Poor Craig was beginning to fade into the sunset, but I was so torn between the two.

Then came Guilford College Homecoming. Joe asked me to go with him, but I told him I was going to the ECU Homecoming with Craig. What a miserable weekend! I stayed at ECU with one of my high school friends. I told her all about this cute guy named Joe.

LOVE STORIES: THE SPRUILLS



After the ECU game, she and I went back to her room. She soon realized how sad I was to miss Guilford's homecoming with this Joe guy; so she made us rum and coke drinks to help me feel better. We drank for hours until I started throwing up. That was the one time in my LIFE that I got really sick drunk. I've never had rum and coke since! Soon I realized that dear old Craig had to go. So, after visiting him during homecoming at ECU, I decided to tell him the next weekend not to come to see me anymore. He cried! Too bad! Joe was THE ONE! We were engaged by the next year and married just before our senior year!

He proposed at sunset on the steps of Memorial Hall on the beautiful Guilford College campus with majestic oak trees in full fall color. Our very traditional wedding was at Rural Hall Moravian Church on June 1, 1969, surrounded by all our family members and many college friends. Our reception was nothing like a couple would have today. We had the traditional wedding cake, some mints, little cucumber sandwiches, peanuts and lime punch in the fellowship hall of the church. In no time, we were ready to exit! The college guys managed to find Joe's Pontiac Firebird to decorate it and put massive amounts of gravel in each hub cap. We rattled our way from the church to the Asheville area to our romantic Swiss Chalet in the mountains. We left our honeymoon one day early, deciding we would rather spend time at our beloved Chowan River. So off we went to Bertie County – the land that time forgot.

Our first "house" was a three-room apartment in Frazier Flats – married couples housing at Guilford College. The guys came over most nights for party central. Then after graduation, we moved to Joe's grandparents' old farmhouse in the center of Bertie. I think I kept my bags packed at the foot of our bed for quite a while. I was not at all sure about this country life I had dropped into. Remember, I thought I was going to Orlando, FL! When the water froze by our bed the next winter, Joe decided it was time to build a new house on the edge of the farm in a grove of beautiful trees facing the pasture where the black Angus cattle peacefully grazed. It was Nirvana!

LOVE STORIES: THE SPRUILLS

Life continued with much happiness as we had our two sons and became very active in Bertie County Schools, Connaritsa and Cashie Baptist Churches, and the surrounding communities of Aulander and Windsor. Joe coached, taught, and became assistant principal then began his pig, cattle, and crop farming career. I taught high school English, speech and drama and served as the cheerleading coach to go with Joe to all his games. We were inseparable! Joe was a Jaycee, a member of Rotary, and served 16 years as Bertie County Commissioner. I was very active in the Windsor Junior Woman's Club, taught youth Sunday School, and directed our youth and adult choirs.

We came to Raleigh for a new job opportunity in November of 1997 and joined MBC in March of 1998. And the rest, as they say, is history!

Thanks be to God that I didn't marry Craig and found Joe! Our almost 56 years of marriage have been AWESOME! We love our home and our many friends in the Millbrook Baptist Church community! Praise the Lord!! And thank you, Joe, for our many years of blissful happiness together!





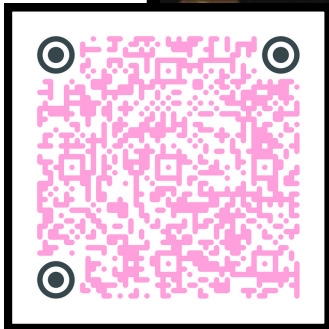
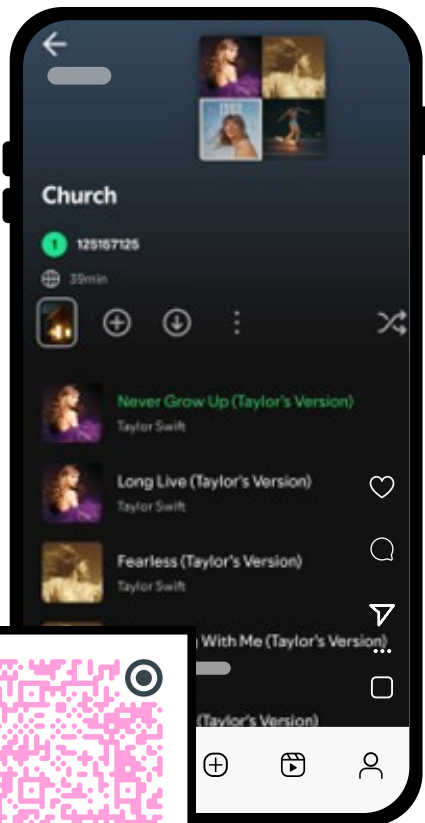
mix tape

a compilation of favorite pieces of music, typically by different artists, recorded onto a cassette tape or other medium by an individual.

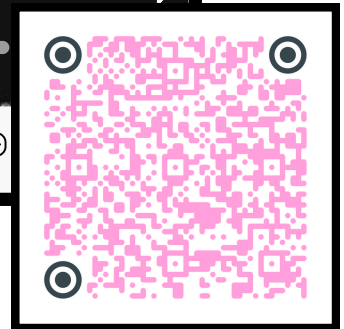
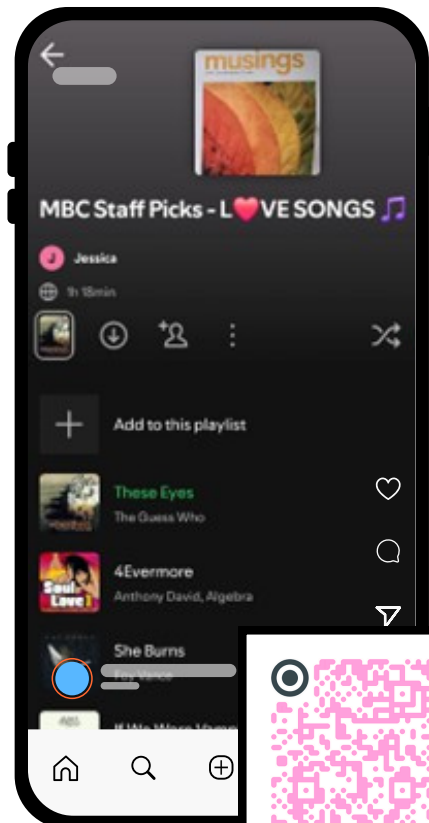
Those were the days! Composing your favorite playlist(s) with technologies like high-speed dubbing, hoping beyond all hope that your special person would understand your vibe! Is your Walkman long gone? Boom box or tape recorder in the landfill? Fear not! We've got you covered with Gen Z's common curator, Spotify Playlists!

Special thanks to Charley Jennings for her "swift" response to a recommended Valentine's playlist, as well the Millbrook Staff for their list of favorite love ballads. Enjoy!

CHARLEY'S PLAYLIST



STAFF PLAYLIST



LOVE STORIES: THE STILLERMANS

Bob Stillerman



This is a picture of Bob and Jacqueline Stillerman at a friend's wedding in June 2012. The following day, Millbrook affirmed Bob as associate pastor. And for the record, he was wearing a jacket, his tie was straight, and his top button was not undone.

Love is a Battlefield Trivia Contest. I had just begun my final year of divinity school at Wake Forest in August of 2011, and was returning from a three-month internship in London. I went to dinner with a classmate, John, and while at dinner, we ran into another classmate, Shannon, who just happened to be having dinner with her friend, Jacqueline, as well as their younger sisters. We said a quick hello.

After dinner, John and I went next door for a nightcap at Old Staley's. (If you are from Winston-Salem, you'll know it as the old steakhouse with a giant cow). Anyway, who should we run into, but Shannon and Jacqueline's group. It was trivia night, and they invited us to join them. And the next thing we knew, our team, Bixby's Back, had won!

Somehow, a \$25 gift certificate was enough to convince us to return for trivia night the next week. I'm sure our bill was quadruple that, but, hey, free is free, right?!? Well, Bixby's Back won again, mostly because I have an unhealthy knowledge of 80s and 90s pop culture. And so began a weekly tradition. Our group became good friends, not to mention dominating the Triad trivia circuit!

After about two months, a few of us went to the Dixie Classic Fair, our first non-trivia outing. At some point in the evening, our friends John, Anna, and Kolby (who is terrified of heights) decided to ride the Ferris Wheel, offering space for Jacqueline and I to chat. I didn't miss my "chance," and the following week, we went on our first date, to Nawab, an Indian restaurant. It wasn't my favorite place by any stretch, but my interest was not in cuisine!

I'm pretty sure I fell hard, if not instantaneously, in love with Jacqueline shortly after meeting her. But I know for certain that my love for her was cemented in the fall of 2011.

LOVE STORIES: THE STILLERMANS

I'm pretty sure I fell hard, if not instantaneously, in love with Jacqueline shortly after meeting her. But I know for certain that my love for her was cemented in the fall of 2011. It was a whirlwind of late night texts, fun conversations on a weekly trip to Statesville for my church internship, adventures about Winston-Salem, and being in the presence of someone who just understood me, and made me feel completely comfortable about myself.

Jacqueline followed me to Raleigh in 2012, where we became even more silly in love with one another, exploring a new city, pretty-much leasing a nightly booth at the Player's Retreat, getting to do church with our new Millbrook family, and continuing trivia competitions with our new team, The Whimsical Donkeys. Sidenote: We could have been city champs if we knew how to spell Sarah McLachlan.

We got engaged in 2013, married in 2014. Three kids, two cities, a half-dozen career changes, a pandemic, and even a minivan later, we have entered a second decade of marriage. And HOW lucky I am!!! I couldn't imagine a better friend, partner, or mother to do life with. And maybe we aren't quite as silly as we once were, but we're still plenty silly enough to smile, dance, laugh, and love this life of ours together. And I know this...I won the Valentine's lottery! Thanks be to God!



TRIVIA



NIGHT

ROMANCE BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

GRACE & MOLLY THARRINGTON



Red, White, & Royal Blue

My all time favorite book! Its a sweet romance between the First Son of the US and a Prince of England with some angst and trauma, happy ending though!

- Grace

Author: Casey McQuiston

Spice Level: 2

\$16.99 Paperback

My Rating:



Author: Ali Hazelwood

Spice Level: 0

\$14.00 Paperback

My Rating:



Check & Mate

Previously chess ruined her life, now its helped her find the love of her life! This book was such a good and easy read, I never put it down the whole flight home!

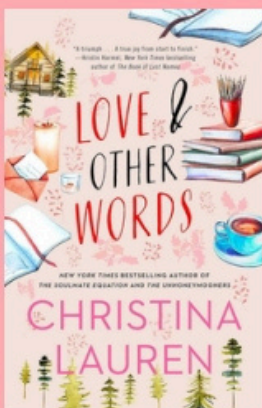
- Molly



Love & Other Words

Another one of my favorites! It flips between past and present of two childhood best friends. Some sad tones and plot lines, but ends happy!

- Grace



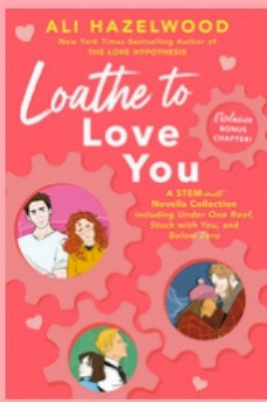
Author: Christina Lauren

Spice Level: 3.5

16.99 Paperback

My Rating:





Loathe to Love You

I love Ali Hazelwood (if you can't tell)! Another easy romance read! Three short stories about friends all finding themselves in an enemies to lovers situation!

- Molly

Author: Ali Hazelwood
Spice Level: 4
\$17.00 Paperback

My Rating:



Author: John Green
Spice Level: 0
\$14.99 Paperback

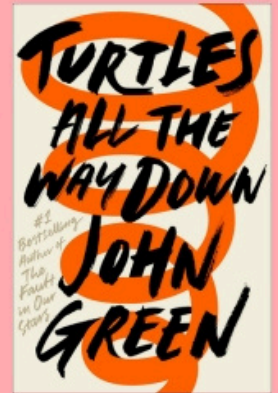
My Rating:



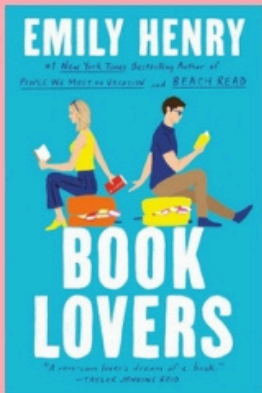
Turtles All the Way Down

A solid mix of mystery, and romance. It's about a young girl with OCD, and a missing person (her crush's dad). Cute & short read, with some trauma.

- Grace



Book Lovers



Two big city new yorkers end up in a small town in NC. One's a writer, the other is an editor. They keep getting thrown into situations until they finally end up falling in love.

- Molly

Author: Emily Henry
Spice Level: 2
\$17.00 Paperback

My Rating:

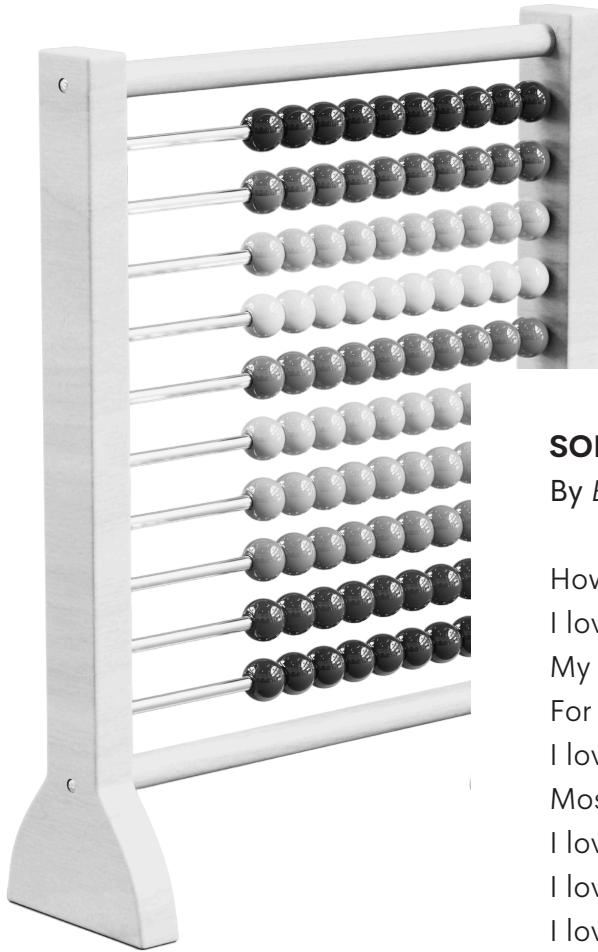


Honorable Mentions!

- Funny Story** - Emily Henry
- Love Hypothesis** - Ali Hazelwood
- Today, Tonight, Tomorrow** - Rachel Lynn Solomon
- Beach Read** - Emily Henry
- The Husbands** - Holly Gramazio

- The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo** - Taylor Jenkins Reid
- Just for the Summer** - Abby Jimenez
- Funny You Should Ask** - Elissa Sussman
- One Last Stop** - Casey McQuiston

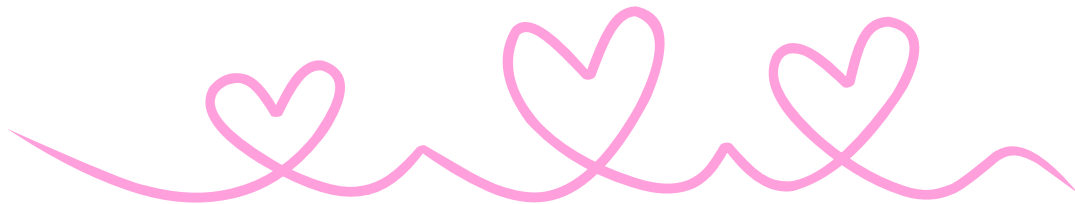
LOVE POEMS: THE CLASSICS



SONNET 43

By *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for right.
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.



[i carry your heart with me(i carry it in]

By e. e. cummings

i carry your heart with me (i carry it in
my heart) i am never without it (anywhere
i go you go, my dear; and whatever is done
by only me is your doing, my darling)

i fear

no fate (for you are my fate, my sweet) i want
no world (for beautiful you are my world, my
true)

and it's you are whatever a moon has always
meant

and whatever a sun will always sing is you

here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the
bud

and the sky of the sky of a tree called life;
which grows

higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)

and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars
apart

i carry your heart (i carry it in my heart)



Song from Arcadia:

"My True Love Hath My Heart"

By Sir Philip Sidney

My true-love hath my heart and I have his,
By just exchange one for the other given:
I hold his dear, and mine he cannot miss;
There never was a bargain better driven.
His heart in me keeps me and him in one;
My heart in him his thoughts and senses
guides:
He loves my heart, for once it was his own;
I cherish his because in me it bides.
His heart his wound received from my sight;
My heart was wounded with his wounded
heart;
For as from me on him his hurt did light,
So still, methought, in me his hurt did smart:
Both equal hurt, in this change sought our
bliss,
My true love hath my heart and I have his.

Song of Songs 8:5-7

Under the apple tree I roused you;
there your mother conceived you,
there she who was in labor gave you birth.
6 Place me like a seal over your heart,
like a seal on your arm;
for love is as strong as death,
its jealousy unyielding as the grave.
It burns like blazing fire,
like a mighty flame.
7 Many waters cannot quench love;
rivers cannot sweep it away.
If one were to give
all the wealth of one's house for love,
it would be utterly scorned.

ACTS OF LOVE

Bob Stillerman

Think about the people whom you love the most. And think about the things you do to make your love known.

We say our love. We show our love. We live our love. Over and over again.

As a parent, morning and evening rituals – leaving for school, bedtime and bathtime, the supper table – provide an ongoing opportunity to say, “I love you.” Saying is reinforced with showing – being present in our children’s lives. And living love, too, as providers, as encouragers, as safe space. And we do it in the easy weeks, the hard weeks, and the ones in between.

It’s more of the same with our partners. We show our fidelity toward them in our everyday rituals, in the occasional grand gesture, and in the many moments that require support, encouragement, tenderness, or creativity. We think of them more often than we think of ourselves.

It’s the same for friends and family members and neighbors.

All this makes me curious about our weekly worship practices. How often do we confuse reverence for love? God, we profess nearly every week, represents a love that surpasses our understanding of the purest forms of love we experience.

God’s love for us surpasses the mutual love we know in partner, neighbor, parent, child, sibling, and friend.

And if we’ve loved somebody in our lives, how often have we been willing to be vulnerable, or silly, or courageous, or humble, or open, or creative, or empathetic, or bold in order that we might demonstrate our love? How often have we believed that their love, our love, was enough for us to be who we are?

For my girls, for Jacqueline, for my church buddies, for the friends in my life, I would do ANYTHING, say ANYTHING. I’d make a fool of myself; I’d sing out of tune in public; I’d wear a horrible tie; I’d watch the show they wanted to stream (occasionally!); I’d drive their route to work, or try their system, or listen to their playlist; I’d try something new; I’d listen for something new; I’d shout and scream and hug and dance and whatever else was needed if that’s what was required for them to feel my love.





What, then, might we be willing to do to profess our love for God in weekly worship? Are eyes glued shut, bodies held stiff, revered distance enough?

Do we love God enough to sing out loud and out of tune? Do we love God enough, feel confident enough in God's love for us, to be present, as we are, rather than feigning perfection? Do we love God enough to find a sense of the sacred in new voices, in new traditions, in new expressions?

Each Sunday, are we really able to leave the sanctuary confident that God has been witness to our love by our words, presence, and actions? God never, not once, keeps us guessing about Their affection and delight for us. God loves us, always. It seems to me that worship is a wonderful opportunity to reciprocate the unbounded love God so generously expresses for each of us.

5 DATE SPOTS FOR THE HOLIDAY

Robin Griffin

Instead of a detailed review of one establishment, I'm featuring five for Valentine's Day. These are great places I recommend for that special day, or any day for that matter. Hope that you enjoy.

Cape Fear Seafood Company,

<https://capefearseafoodcompany.com/>

- As a Maryland native, I'm a fan of seafood and Cape Fear does it well with great service. Their restaurants are designed well with a great atmosphere.
- Some of their items I have enjoyed are the fried seafood baskets, grilled shrimp platter, and shrimp diablo.
- With three locations in the area: Spring Forest Rd., the Village District, and Wake Forest.



Lemongrass Thai,

<https://www.lemongrassnc.com/>

- Right inside of 540 off Litchford Rd. is a small, unassuming Thai restaurant that serves great meals.
- My favorite Thai place has a deal with their lunch specials where you get an appetizer and drink with your entrée, and their dinner portions are enough for two or leftovers.
- If concerned about spice, Pad Thai and Pad See Ew are safe (the Pad See Ew with spice is my personal pick). Those seeking adventure and heat can try Tom Yum soup or a curry dish.



Brig's Restaurants,

<https://www.brigs.com/>

- Many may be familiar with Brig's with locations across the Triangle, the closest location being Great Beginnings on Creedmoor Rd. in Brennan Station.
- This locally-owned franchise is my favorite breakfast/brunch spot. I always enjoy my meals here with quick and polite service.
- I applaud Brig's for doing unfussy food well. Though they can get a little fancy with their monthly specials, super stuffed omelets, and croissant French toast (my personal choice).

Flavor Hills,

<https://www.theflavorhills.com/>

- This spot is downtown but is special and worth the drive to the city center.
- With its modern vibe, this Black- and veteran-owned restaurant has a delicious take on soul food. Flavor Hills is becoming well known for their brunch but dinner is just as good (I highly recommend reservations for dinner).
- On my recent visit I was blown away by their catfish and grits, one of the best dishes I've had in the area. I liked it so much I ordered one to go and am planning for my next visit! And the rest of the food looks just as good.



Date Night!

Two Roosters Ice Cream, <https://www.tworoosters.com/>

- The Triangle has plenty of local ice cream shops (which is a great thing), and they're amazing. Two Roosters is one of my favorites with multiple locations, including Lead Mine Rd., Lake Boone Trail, downtown off Person St., and Wake Forest.
- They craft their own unique flavors in small batches, and it is such a treat! They feature a new set of imaginative flavors each month including options inspired by cookies, cereal, and even local children's creations.
- My fave flavor is Brookie-O, an occasionally featured monthly flavor with a vanilla base blended with Oreos, chocolate chip cookie dough, and brownies. But you cannot go wrong with Sea Salt Chip Cookie Dough, an ice cream classic they do VERY well that is a standard on their menu.



LOVE POEMS

Jessica McDougald

New

For the past three Saturdays,
we have curled into one
another and talked
about what belongs to us.

We have turned
on Martin Denny and peeled
sliced mango from its thick skin
with our bottom teeth, sun
shining on our shoulders
through the slats of the blinds,
those spiderwebs of light.

You said the difference
between the two of us is
that I keep my things
until they're completely worn
and you trade in
long before.

Against you, close
as the ink in your skin,
I contemplate the possibility:
that one of us will be left
empty and ragged
or full and spilling
by and for the other.



Sometime After Midnight

I wake wound
around you, the ballerina
to your music box,
we lie tangled
in the streetlight's gauze,
that peeping Tom.

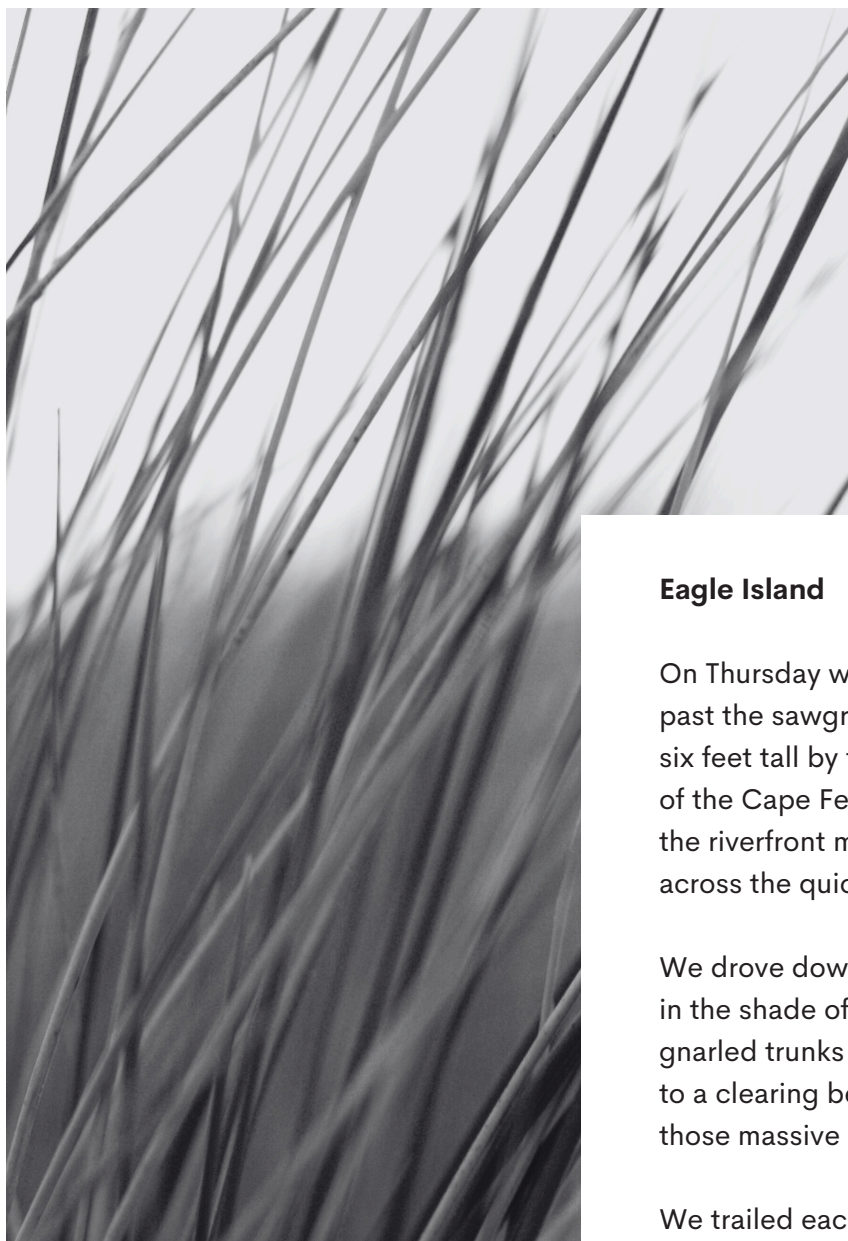
There is art buried deep
in your skin, shadowy as e-minor.
A skull, a raven, merely this
and nothing more.

Your lips channel life
rhythm as you sleep, soft.
Only hours ago, I held
them between my teeth.

I reach and rest
my hand over your navel –
a sure sign of your mortality.
You are not a dream
or a god or permanent.

We are a man and a woman,
leaving invisible teeth marks
on one another's lips,
almost as temporary separate
as we are together.





Eagle Island

On Thursday we walked
past the sawgrass that grows
six feet tall by the edge
of the Cape Fear and watched
the riverfront move in slow motion
across the quick current.

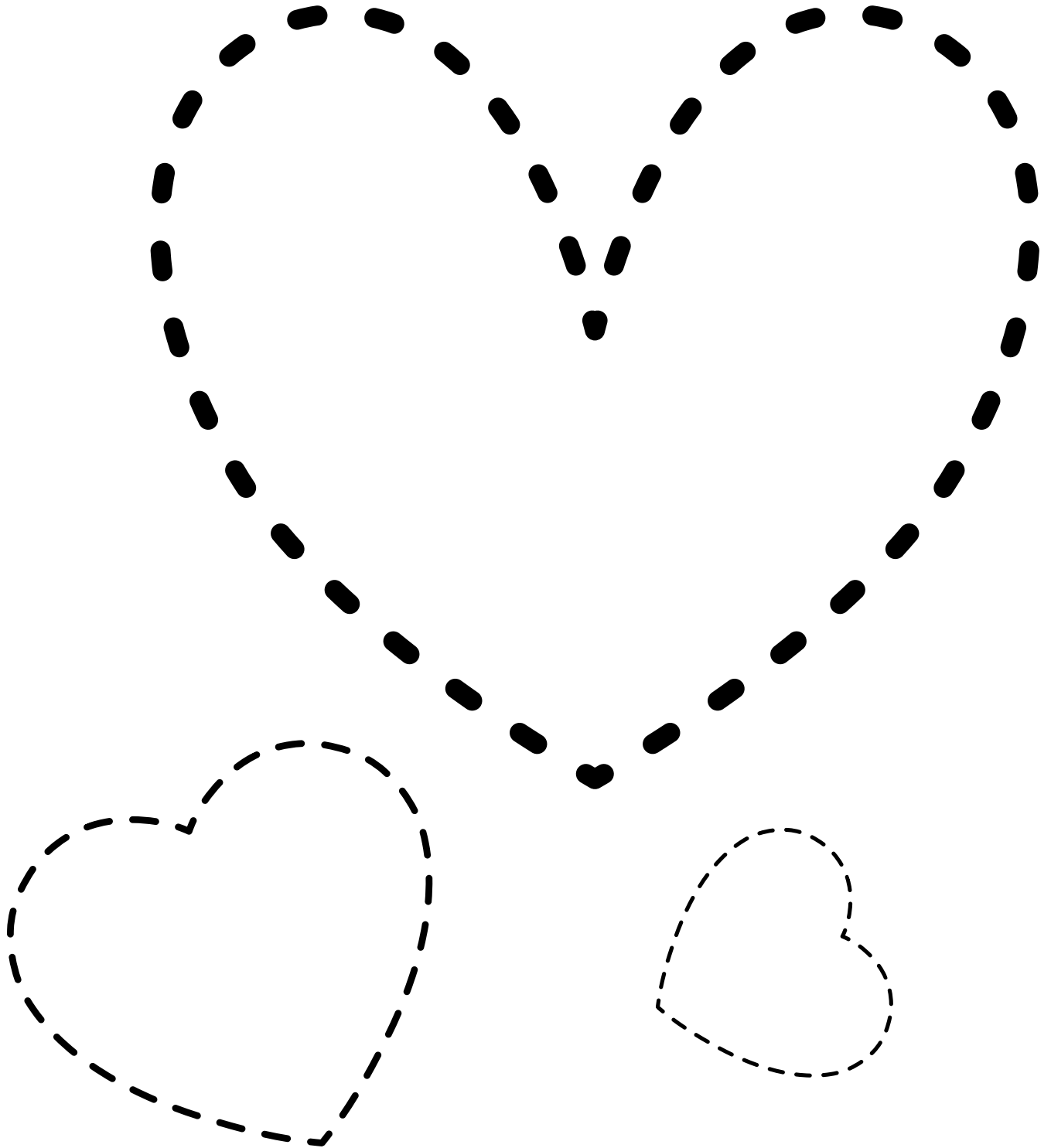
We drove down a lost road,
in the shade of forgotten trees,
gnarled trunks peering from their knots,
to a clearing beneath the drawbridge –
those massive concrete piles, stretching.

We trailed each other
through the market, the wooden
floor creaking under our weight.
We laughed, glass bottles dripping
from our free hands.

We called to one another
from the rows of produce;
the peaches perfume
demanded attention –
they were as full and ripe for us
as we were for each other.

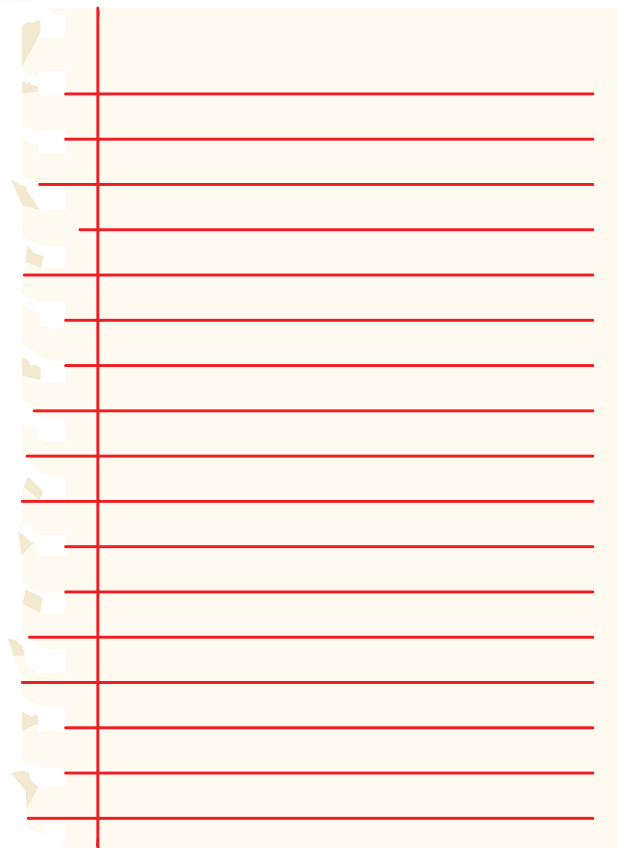
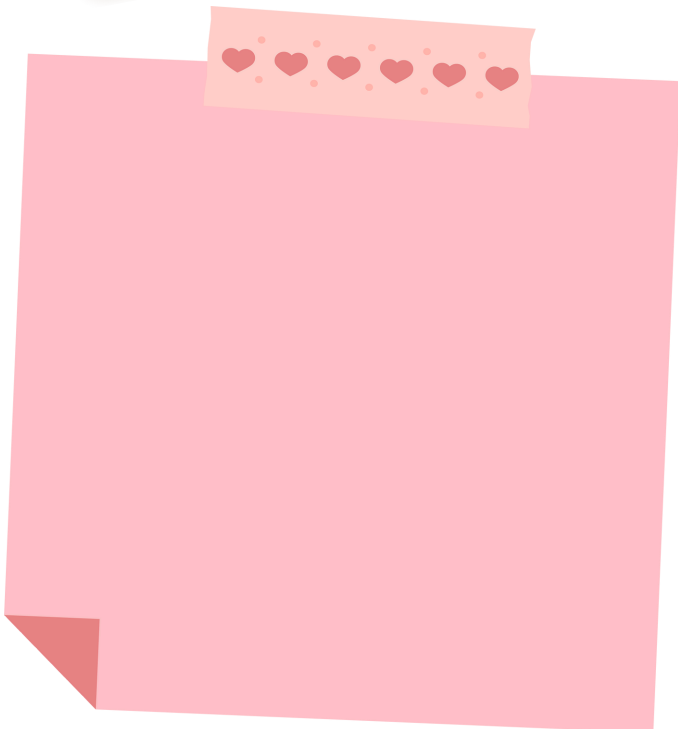
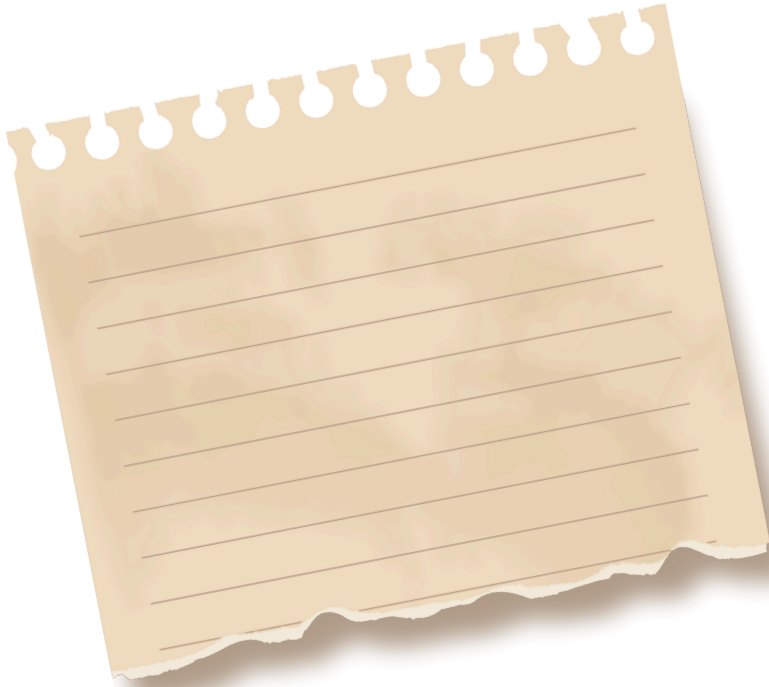
HEART CLIPPINGS

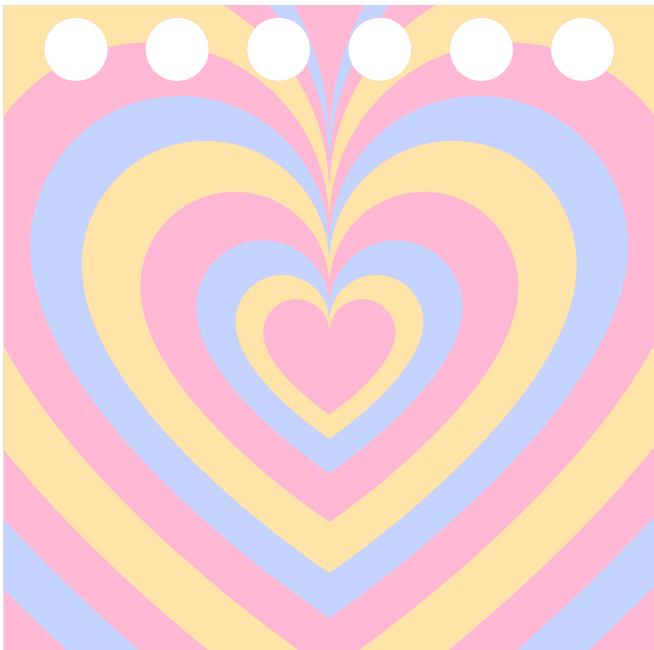
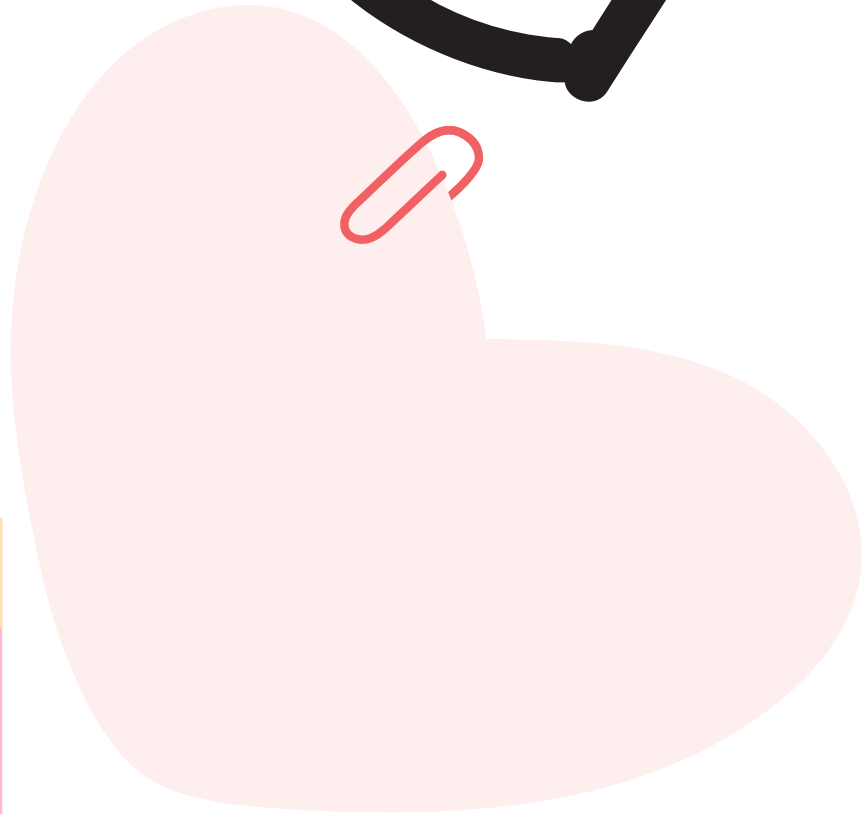
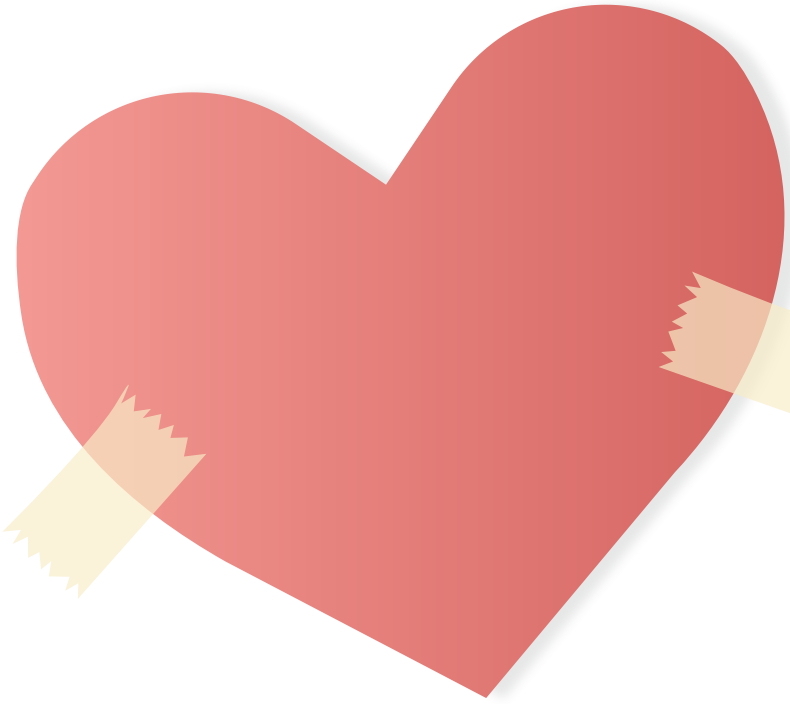
Make your own Valentine



PERSONAL MUSINGS

Use this space for your own love notes, scribbles, and musings





Thank you for reading and connecting with us!



MILLBROOK
BAPTIST CHURCH

**1519 E. Millbrook Rd.
Raleigh, NC 27609
(919) 876-1519**

