

## GUESS 2'OHW BACK

OLD FLAMES STILL SMOLDER, ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY'RE EARLY LOVE AFFAIRS, WHICH LEAVE A PARTICULARLY VIVID MARK IN OUR MINDS. REAWAKENING SUCH A ROMANCE CAN BE AN INCENDIARY EXPERIENCE—INTENSELY PASSIONATE AND DANGEROUS TO TRIFLE WITH. **BY PAMELA WEINTRAUB • ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN CRONIN**



TODD AND JANELLE WENT TO NEIGHBORING HIGH SCHOOLS IN NORTHERN California, in rural towns where teens cruised the roads in big-wheeled, jacked-up trucks. All except for Todd, who drove a silver Porsche. Janelle met Todd one night at McDonalds, and “it was love at first sight—with a side of fries,” she says. On a date to Fisherman’s Wharf in San Francisco, “we were stopped by a stranger who issued us a kissing violation. He thanked us for spreading infectious happiness,” Janelle recalls. • But Todd had enlisted in the Army and his final assignment was Korea. Heartbroken yet determined to keep the love alive, Janelle drove him to the airport in 1986. She wrote him every day, but word reached Todd that she was dating others. The gossip had been false, but instead of sorting it out, Todd withdrew. “I was devastated, but I went on,” Janelle recalls. • She eventually got engaged to someone else, although she was still pining for Todd. The night before her wedding, she poured through the photos in her “Todd box,” praying he’d swoop down and whisk her away. Fast forward to 1997.

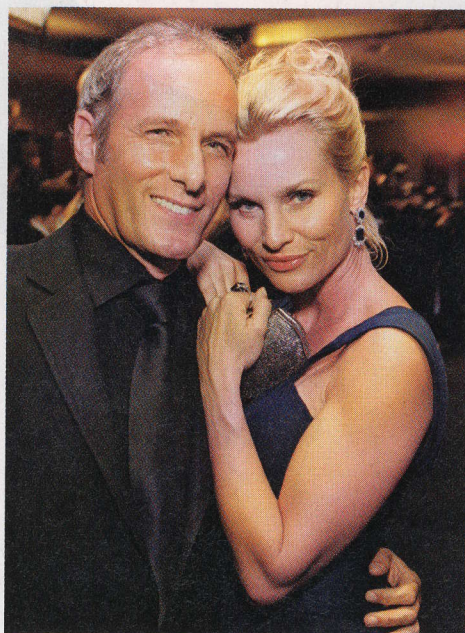
Janelle’s marriage was unraveling and, seeking comfort, she returned home to visit her folks. She had a feeling in the pit of her stomach that something terrible had happened to Todd, and so she went through her well-loved photos and memories one more time. Later that week, still thinking of him, she searched for Todd on the Internet. She found him in Los Angeles.

“Somehow, I managed to leave a message. Two days later, when I heard his voice for the first time, my heart melted. It felt like a dream.”

She told him about her foreboding, and, after a silence, Todd explained that on that day he had taken his box of Janelle memories out of his closet and thrown it away. He had spent the prior week looking for her on the Internet but could not find her and had given up.

“We talked on the phone for days,” Janelle reports, “and it felt as if we were never apart.” But in the real world, sorting things out would take time. They needed to talk about the past to determine what had gone wrong. And there was the issue of Janelle’s marriage. “I was so afraid that, if I told him, I would lose him again,” Janelle says, but finally that, too, came out.

Then, one night on the phone, Janelle blurted out a confession: “I’ve been in love with you my whole life,” she said. “I’ve been in love with you, too,” answered Todd. He hopped on a plane the very next morning and Janelle picked him up at the airport, the same



## MICHAEL BOLTON & NICOLLETTE SHERIDAN

Sheridan, the blonde, ever-so-slightly worn man-eater on the TV show *Desperate Housewives*, has reunited with her on-again, off-again flame, vocalist Michael Bolton. It’s tabloid news to many, but to the couple, the relationship is a precious chance to do it right—at last. Bolton, who says he felt Sheridan was his destiny, sustained their broken romance as a friendship over the years. He re-romanced her after she broke off an engagement to someone else in 2005. “When it’s time, you just know. In a way, we have both always known,” Bolton says.

one she’d taken him to en route to Korea eleven years before. They went straight to Fisherman’s Wharf. From that day forward, they were together. Today Todd and Janelle Graves and their two small children live in Seattle. “I love telling this story,” Janelle says. “Every time I tell it, I cry.”

## Lost-and-Found Love

IF TODD AND Janelle had left their hearts in San Francisco, only to find them in the same exact spot, they aren’t alone.

Romantic reunions with past partners are more common than ever due to the ease of finding people online. Before the Internet, locating a lost love required a library of phone books, a private detective or plenty of luck. The hunt was an act explicitly rife with feeling, a kind of public declaration.

Today, old lovers can type a name into Google. The act seems to be casual, whether it actually is or not. It’s so easy to reconnect that many people look up old flames without appreciating what’s at stake. Most of these romantic reunions, says California State University at Sacramento psychologist Nancy Kalish, are between first or early loves—those relationships that took place between one’s teens and early 20s.

PHOTO: JOHN SHEARER/WIREIMAGE

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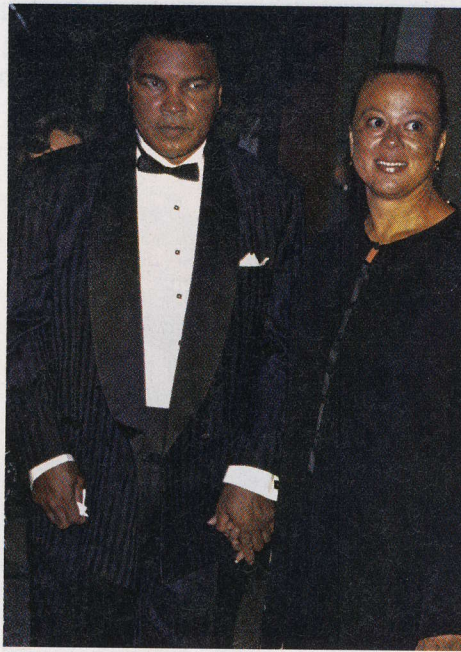


# Before the Internet, finding a lost love required phone books, a detective or plenty of luck. Now it's easy to channel a blast from the past.

According to Kalish, the country's foremost expert in rekindled romance, lost-and-found romances are surprisingly successful, as long as both partners are not otherwise attached at the time they reconnect. In Kalish's initial sample of 1,000 lost-and-found lovers, ages 18 to 95, nearly three-quarters remained together after a decade of study. When these past lovers married each other, their divorce rate after four years tallied in at no more than 1.5 percent. Usually, second marriages are relatively fragile: In the public at large, nearly one-quarter of all couples who remarry get divorced again within five years.

How to explain the endurance of rekindled first love? "Many of the couples grew up together or shared friends and values," says Kalish. Whether they were from the same hometown or met in college, "they spent formative years together and became each other's standard for all romances since."

Yet for all the power and resilience of rekindled romance, Kalish has discovered a dark side. More of the encounters are now unpremeditated, and many of these people are swept away by feelings they didn't know they still had, placing marriages—even good marriages—at risk. In her latest sample, more than 60 percent of lost-love reunions involve affairs.



## MUHAMMAD ALI & LONNIE WILLIAMS

Ali met Lonnie Williams in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1962, when her family moved in across the street. Ali was 20 and Lonnie was only 5, but they quickly became friends. "He was wearing a white, short-sleeved shirt, black pants and a black bow tie," she recalled in the Thomas Hauser biography, *Muhammad Ali*. Whenever Ali returned home, he made sure to see Lonnie. "I was like his little sister," she said. The initial age difference and Ali's fame took him through three other marriages before he found his way back. Now married for 19 years, Williams and Ali are finally in sync.

and hurt the day he drove away, never to be heard from again.

At the time, Kalish assumed—mistakenly as it turns out—that most rekindled loves, like her own, were saddled with past problems and doomed to fail. Curious about the phenomenon, she decided to conduct a scholarly post mortem of her own relationship. She designed a questionnaire and began seeking a population to fill in the blanks.

Lost-and-found love affairs were common, she learned, and uncommonly successful. Most of the people Kalish met during her earliest research had been separated by circumstance: long distances and family moves, stints in the military, disapproving parents, the uncertainty of youth. The lost lovers felt their separation had been unjust, and now they finally had the chance to set things right.

"Those forced apart by parents harbored great anger," she says. "Some had put off marriage and even lost their chance to have children as a result." The reunions were often supremely vindicating. "He kept kissing my face at the airport, and after 20 years he was saying, 'You're beautiful, you look fabulous,'" one woman in Kalish's study recounted.

Such love may sound fantastical, sure to vaporize in the light of day, but Kalish says that nothing could be further from the truth. "These are love relationships that never ended, not fantasies."

Her most compelling finding was the cataclysmic power of rekindled love. While most ordinary affairs don't break up marriages, reunions with first or

early loves are much more risky. Some of the people she met during her research had been willing to forfeit everything—custody of their children, friendships, businesses and life savings—just to be together.

Even religious Christians were caught in the staggering gravity of lost-and-found love. One study participant, a clergyman from Canada, had spent decades ministering to the pain of others, yet said the hurt he was about to inflict on his

## The Lost-Love Project

NANCY KALISH WAS teaching adolescent psychology at the University of California in San Francisco in 1993 when she began wondering about her college boyfriend. She got his phone number by writing to their alumni association, and that first contact reawakened their romance. She took a sabbatical and moved to New York to be with him; they got engaged. Yet problems emerged. Kalish found herself shocked

PHOTO: JOHN SHEARER/WIREIMAGE  
PHOTO: PACE GREGORY/CORBIS SYGMA



She thinks of her lost lover constantly, although the e-mails have stopped, since his wife might find them. "At least I know he's hooked, too."

wife and three children could not be helped. "This love that I have for my high-school sweetheart can no longer be denied," he said.

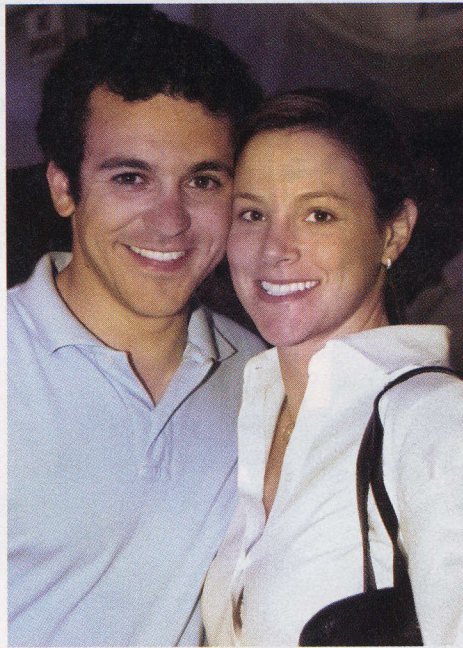
## The Romeo and Juliet Effect

THESE RELATIONSHIPS MAY be so indelible, so off-the-charts intense, because they're forged in the hormonal fire of the teenage brain. True, teen romances often fizzle, and high-school sweethearts often don't stay together after the prom. "But when the lovers get older," says Kalish, "they can mine the depths of that early bond."

Those reunited with a first or early love after years are "simultaneously bombarded with the giddy, explosive, highly sexual but ephemeral chemicals of new love coupled with the profoundly satisfying, deeply relaxing chemicals of long-term love," says Kalish. "They are able to tap all that again only with the lost lover, with whom the bond was formed."

That makes sense to University of California at San Francisco School of Medicine psychiatrist Thomas Lewis, author of *A General Theory of Love*. "The adolescent brain is exposed to heightened levels of testosterone and progesterone, the steroid sex hormones involved in sexual intensity," he says. "There's also an increase in oxytocin, the same hormone that aids mother-and-child bonding following birth." Chemistry thus sets the stage for once-in-a-lifetime sexual intensity paired with a unique opportunity for attachment—creating a model of love that persists for life.

The idea finds support in a study conducted at the University of California at Berkeley, where Jennifer Beer, then a graduate student, analyzed the first-love stories of 303 Berkeley students. Contrary to the beliefs of many psychologists, "some of the problems you have in the romantic domain may have more to do with your first love than with your parents," says Beer, who found that participants' memories of the experience ranged from "fond" to "soul crushing." Those who remembered the experience positively were more likely to perceive their sub-



## FRED SAVAGE & JENNIFER STONE

Child actor Fred Savage left the suburbs of Chicago at age 11 for Los Angeles and his star turn in *The Wonder Years*, the hit series about boomers coming of age. Among those left behind: his friend Jennifer Stone. Eleven years after last seeing each other, they reconnected at Savage's birthday party. "We started talking and smooching, and we've been together ever since," the actor told *People* after the couple married in 2004.

tantalizing the second time around.

These explanations resonate with the ideas of Rutgers University anthropologist Helen Fisher, an expert in the evolutionary biology of human sexuality and romantic love. To explain why separation and other adversities can make the heart grow fonder, she has coined the term "frustration attraction," the idea that threats to the relationship can actually increase feelings of longing and ardor. Passionate love stimulates dopamine-producing neurons, which generate the motivation to seek out the beloved. But if the lover is absent, those brain cells prolong their activities, Fisher hypothesizes in her book *Why We Love*. "As the adored one slips away, the

sequent romantic attachments as secure, found Beer, now a professor of psychology at the University of California at Davis.

Another reason these relationships seem so palpable and alive for so long may be due in part to what psychologists call the "autobiographical memory bump": the unique clarity of memories forged in adolescence and the early 20s. When Duke University psychologist David Rubin tested adults for recall on topics from top news stories to important events in their own lives, he found that the richest, most vivid trove of memories were those that had formed between the ages of 10 and 30.

Dan McAdams, a narrative psychologist from Northwestern University in Illinois, has found that it is during these years that most individuals also form their core identity and sense of self—their personal mythology. The teens and 20s give birth to our personal narratives and our lifelong ideals.

A middle-aged desire to fulfill adolescent ideals and longings could be fed by the desire to find a satisfying ending to this story. It could also be a nostalgia for the glory days, or a special connection with our idealized selves, that makes a rekindled romance so



very chemicals that contribute to feelings of romance grow even more potent, intensifying ardent passion and impelling us to try with all our strength to secure our reward, the departing loved one," she writes.

## The Dark Side of Rekindled Love

IN THE BEGINNING, Kalish had a joyous story to tell. Her study participants were largely single, divorced or widowed, and reuniting was cause for celebration. But today, with more people reconnecting online, the story has changed. Many who idly Google a former lover's name find themselves unexpectedly gripped by the first-love phenomenon—with unwelcome consequences.

"V," from Florida, has been in a holding pattern for more than six years since she reconnected with her former high-school sweetheart, a married man.

"The second I laid eyes on him, I was in love," V recalls. Though she was shy, she invited him to the school's Sadie Hawkins dance. But she was just 16, and the feelings were too intense. "I wanted to tell him that I wasn't ready for where our relationship was headed, but I had no idea how to start a conversation like that. Instead, I broke it off."

He left the state to go to college, and both eventually married other people. "But I never stopped thinking of him or wondering where he was or how he was," she says now.

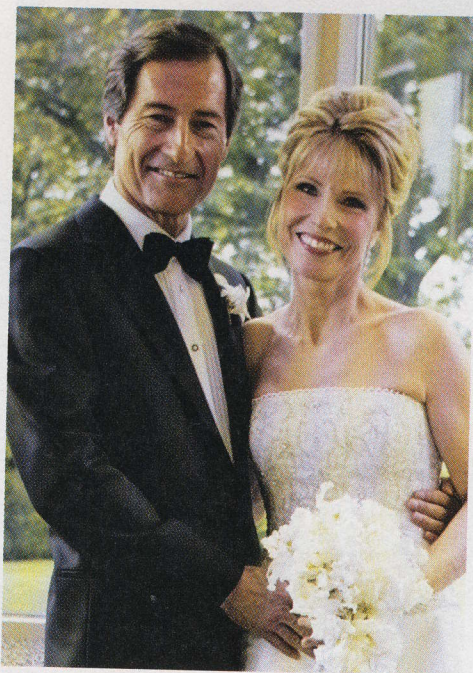
After her divorce, it didn't take long for her to post her contact information on Classmates.com and garner that predictable e-mail from her lost love. "The second I saw his message, my whole body went cold and then hot," says V.

His marriage was a happy one, but his relationship with V still took off. "We've grown closer over the years,"

V says. "The death of his son was a turning point for us. He opened up to me about his feelings and his sadness and we became really good friends. His wife is wildly unhappy about it, but he won't cut it off. Last year she went out of the country on a trip, and we came very close to seeing each other. But at the last minute, he backed out. 'I'm not that kind of person,' he said."

She thinks of her lost lover constantly, although the e-mails have stopped because his wife might find them. "I wait for his

phone call, which comes about once a month," she says. "This is killing me because I know we'd be perfect together. At least I know he's hooked, too."



### DONNA HANOVER & ED OSTER

After her divorce from Rudy Giuliani, then-mayor of New York City, TV host Hanover wondered whether she would be adrift in the single world forever. But an upcoming reunion at her alma mater gave her high-school and college sweetheart Ed Oster a ready excuse to call. The two met for coffee in 2002 and found "an immediate chemistry," says Hanover, "just as there had been when we were kids." Oster had broken her heart in college, but she was ready to forgive. "I was just too young to know what I had," Oster said. They married in 2003.

## Collateral Damage

LOST-LOVE REUNIONS may linger in limbo—or they may destroy marriages. "The true victims are the spouses who never saw it coming," Kalish says. Indeed, of the more than 1,600 lost-love reunions she studied during 2004 and 2005, some 62 percent involved extra-marital affairs (as opposed to 30 percent in the years before).

Most spouses don't realize the risk when a partner announces that first e-mail from an old high-school friend, says Kalish, but if the friend is of the opposite sex, alarm bells should go off. Likewise, she says, "if you're married, think long and hard before contacting that first love. Your life may be forever changed."

Benjamin L. Stone should know. Almost ready to retire, the Florida attorney was enjoying life with his wife of 27 years, "a very smart, very attractive woman." A good friend had died of cancer, and out in California for the funeral, Stone's wife met her old flame, someone she'd dated from the time that she was 14 until the age of 17. After the service, hanging out in Malibu—"think of the tides, think sunset," says Stone—it took them all of five minutes to reenter the "zone" and get reinvolved. "When she came back two days later, nothing was the same." She announced that she wanted an apartment of her own.

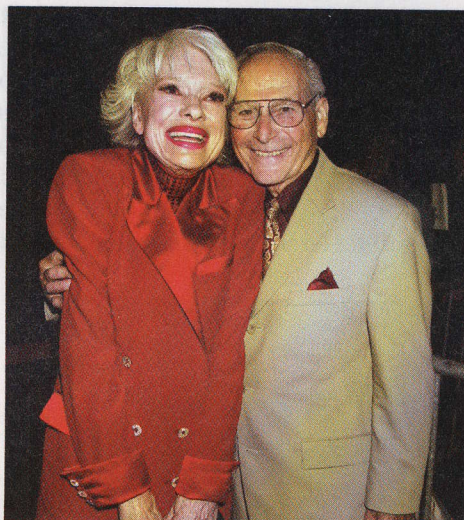


## The old feelings come back. Once these relationships take off, they aren't fantasies, nostalgia or midlife crises.

Stone eventually found them together—in bed. Deeply in love with his wife, he told her to say good-bye to her lover and come home. “I thought we could fix this,” he says. But he was wrong. “The counselors we consulted said our marriage was excellent. We had been loyal, we were best friends, our sex was great,” but neither they nor Stone had factored in the power of lost-and-found love. “It’s as if she was hypnotized,” says Stone. “They communicated constantly by e-mail, text message. She’s a very intelligent woman, but when it comes to him, it’s as if she’s in a trance.”

They are now divorced. His wife’s lover remains married and has kept the affair a secret from his own wife. Emotionally hooked to her lover, Stone’s wife now takes his calls and responds to all his e-mails in the privacy of her own apartment, without interference—but at the periphery of his marriage and life.

Many say they want closure, but closure is a myth, says Kalish. “The old feelings come back. Married people who want to keep their marriages should understand this before they search for a lost love and get in over their heads. Once these relationships take off, they aren’t fantasies, nostalgia or midlife crises. They are loves that were interrupted, and the urge to give them another chance is very strong.”



### CAROL CHANNING & HARRY KULLIJIAN

Kullijian found the courage to contact Channing, his junior-high-school girlfriend, after 70 years, when she fondly mentioned him in her memoir. “The leader of the school band was Harry Kullijian. I was so in love with Harry; I couldn’t stop hugging him,” Channing wrote. Channing’s mother, deeming her too aggressive, had broken up the young romance, but things were set right when the two wed in 2003.

### Back to the Future

FOR THOSE FREE to pursue a lost-and-found love without hurting others, however, the rewards can be intense. TV host Donna Hanover, former wife of New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani, was recovering from a bitter public divorce when she heard from Ed Oster, her high-school sweetheart and college love. Oster had dumped her during her freshman year of college, but had come to regret his choice.

Their first day together after the passage of years was magical. “He was a little older but no less handsome or thrilling,” Hanover wrote in her memoir. “In fact he still looked young to me—an improved version of his former wonderful self, complete with new wisdom and compassion.”

The two seized the opportunity, and like so many others, were transported by their rediscovered love. “I was seeing him through young eyes, and I liked how that made me feel. As quickly as you could say ‘Hey la, hey la, my boyfriend’s back,’ we decided to

take full advantage of a second chance together—a veritable miracle in both of our lives.” **PT**

## SECOND-CHANCE TIPS

**Rekindled love affairs can be like hothouse plants: beautiful but delicate.**

- Contacting an old love lets the genie out of the bottle. Feelings that are smoldering beneath the surface may be very difficult to control. Before you make contact, be sure you are ready for the fireworks.
- You broke up the first time around. If you want to reunite, you must openly discuss the original breakup and figure out what went wrong.
- It’s possible that one partner hurt the other, perhaps badly.

The responsible partner must explain his or her reasons and try to make up for past wrongs while allowing the relationship to slowly grow past this hurt. The injured party should assume some responsibility for the breakup as well.

- The reignited relationship might feel overwhelming, so don’t push or move too fast, especially if your partner expresses the need for space.
- If a romance was intensely negative and damaging and if you worked to free yourself from it, the last thing you want is to repeat the pattern or get stuck again. This kind of reconnection may be disastrous for those prone to obsessive love. —PW

PHOTO: JOE MARZULLO/RETNA