

BY DAVID LAUDERDALE

A time when love won't wait



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Norris Richardson didn't look like Cupid, but he was.

And he had good aim, too.

The story of his marriage to Lois Herring Richardson in 1938 seems so out of character for a quiet couple who became pillars of Hilton Head Island.

She was 19. He was a little older and had worked his way up to manager of the A&P Grocery Store in Thomasville, Ga., when the odd wedding took place.

Norris already knew the harsh side of life. His mother died when he was 9, and as the oldest of five boys, responsibility fell on small shoulders.

When one of his brothers was accidentally shot and killed by a cousin, Norris' father struggled even more. Norris went to live with an aunt. His grade school in rural Georgia was in a one-room schoolhouse. He went through eight grades and even got to play some football. But he always went to work at the A&P after school, mastering the toss

of flour sacks that in those days weighed 12 or 24 pounds.

Lois says that when they met, it was love at first sight. It was in her little home town of Monticello, Fla. Norris had taken a job there with A&P, and she was home for the weekend from business school.

He didn't have a car, so he'd walk six or eight blocks to see his Valentine. She remembers him being clean-shaven and real neat in his white flannel pants and yellow sweater. A hot date was sitting on the front porch, listening to the radio, with a little sister peeking out the window.

Lois told her mother she wasn't doing so well in typing at business school, and she might not be able to make it. Her mother was like a lot of the women in my family. She said: "You *can* and you *will*." And Lois could, and she did.

One day Norris proposed to Lois, knocking on the front door and getting down on one knee.



Submitted photo

Lois and Norris Richardson

Norris got transferred to Thomasville, and Lois used her business school degree to get a job in Perry, Fla. By then Norris had enough promotions to buy a V-6 Ford, and every weekend he'd cruise down to see Lois.

One Sunday night he was halfway home when he stopped the Ford and turned around.

When he got back to the home where Lois was staying,

she was already sound asleep.

"I awoke to a light tapping on my window," Lois wrote in a red booklet she calls "Love Letter to My Children."

"I was surprised to see Norris. He asked me to marry him that night."

It was Sunday night of Thanksgiving weekend. But the folks Lois was rooming with knew the Justice of the Peace. He took care of the paperwork and came over to marry Lois and Norris right then and there.

Lois had always dreamed of a nice church wedding. But her father was not well at the time and her mother and younger sister were living with her mother's parents. Lois knew this was best. The surprise newlyweds drove back to Norris' small apartment that night. There was no turning around.

But it wasn't the last time Norris grabbed life by the

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LOVE

steering wheel and changed directions. He decided to move Lois and their three children to Hilton Head Island in 1956. By then he owned five grocery stores of his own. The family was happy in Thomasville. But Norris cashed it all in and bet the ranch on a sleepy island that had just opened its first bridge.

Norris and Lois built a grocery store that he grew into Coligny Plaza with more than 60 shops and

She became the first Sea Pines employee. And First Baptist Church evolved from worship services in the Richardson home.

Norris and Lois worked hard and prospered. They went everywhere together except for her Tuesday morning Bible study for women. But he spruced up the yard for them each week.

When Lois cooked, Norris said it was the best thing he'd ever eaten. When she got dressed up, he said she was the most beautiful woman on Earth.

But they had to ride out some big storms as well, especially when their son

Collins died of kidney failure as a teenager.

On this Valentine's Day, Lois is still going, now almost 97. She lives with her son, James N. "JR" Richardson Jr., and his wife, Leslie, in Sea Pines. Norris, who the grandchildren called "Big Go," died 15 years ago.

The grandkids used to beg old Cupid to tell them again the story about the night he let the arrow fly.

And every time he told it, he got a little twinkle in his eye and a kick in his step.

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