

How Mike Pence Kept Jesus First While Pursuing His Future Wife

Mike Pence had been attending a nondenominational Christian church, but one Sunday morning in October 1983, he went to St. Thomas Aquinas, the nearest Catholic church. A striking young woman with dark hair and eyes played guitar and sang during the service. Taken by her stunning beauty, Mike caught up with her afterward in the church parking lot and tried to engage her in conversation. He mentioned he'd also like to play guitar during services. She shrugged him off, saying he'd have to talk to the person in charge of worship music. Realizing he was getting nowhere fast, Mike introduced himself.

Through their brief interaction, Mike learned her name was Karen Whitaker and her sister, Sheryl, like Pence, was attending McKinney law school.

They ended their conversation and went their separate ways. Mike was infatuated, but frustrated. He didn't ask Karen for her phone number. The way she was carrying her guitar hid her left hand, so he couldn't tell if she was single or married.

"He's enthralled with her. It really is love at first sight for Michael," says Jay C. Steger, Mike's best friend. "After he talks to her, he beelines over to my office, which is only about three blocks away, and literally talks for an hour and a half, describing everything about her—her hair, her brown eyes, the way she played her guitar, the kind of guitar she played, and so forth. And after this went on for [so long], I said, 'Michael, how long did you talk with this girl?' He said, 'Two or three minutes.' I threw him out of my office at that time and said, 'I've got work to do, get out of here!'"

Mike couldn't get the brown-eyed beauty out of his mind, so he

looked for a way to find out if she was married. The first thing he did was call the elementary school where Karen was teaching art. He told them he was working on a church directory and needed to know if he should put "Miss" or "Mrs." in front of Karen's name. They told him "Miss."

Then Mike went to the Indiana University registrar and asked for Sheryl's phone number. No, he was told, it's against the school's rules to give out students' personal information. He walked away .. .then went back and explained why he wanted the number. His honesty touched the registrar and she relented. Handing him the number on a slip of paper, she jokingly told Mike to make sure she was invited to the wedding.

Hanging out with a buddy later in the day, Mike built up the nerve to call Sheryl to ask for Karen's number. However, when he called, Karen answered the phone. Flustered, Mike hung up on her. His buddy encouraged him to call her back ... so he did.

As it turned out, Karen was babysitting her niece and nephew for the week while her sister and her husband were out of town. Karen remembered Mike from church and invited him over for a taco salad dinner. A few days later, on Nov. 6, 1983, Karen asked Mike to join her and the kids for ice-skating. It became their first of many dates.

Karen says, "When I first met Mike Pence, it was love at first sight." During their first date, she says, "We skated around for a little while, and then he reached over and took my hand. Of course, Mike was right there to catch me if I fell. ... He has a servant's heart, and he always puts others first."

Both Mike and Karen quickly realized they shared common beliefs in faith, family and education. They continued to date, and their mutual faith in God was the foundation of their relationship. Mike worked hard at being the spiritual leader of the union and guided Karen into making a confession of faith and receiving Jesus as her personal Savior. Their

relationship only strengthened.

God Must Be Number One

“When we first started dating,” Karen says, “I remember saying something to Mike, something silly like, ‘Oh, you’re my No. 1.’ And he stopped right there and he said, ‘You know what? I’m probably going to disappoint you if you make me No. 1 in your life.’ What he was talking about was you need to have God as No. 1. Jesus needs to be No. 1 in your life. [Mike] doesn’t mind being No. 2, but he just said, ‘You know, I’m human, and I’m going to let you down.’”

Six months after Mike and Karen started to date, they attended the wedding of Steger and Annie Curtis. Mike served as best man.

“Mike wrote one of the most beautiful toasts I’ve ever heard at any wedding,” Steger says. “Of course, I’m only a little biased; he was my best friend and my best man, and it was my wedding. But he wrote a toast on 1 Corinthians 13, and he had the entire room both in stitches one minute and then crying the next.”

Not long afterward, Mike started to consider the idea of marrying Karen, but it was important to him that she understood his future ambitions.

“Before he proposed to her, he made it very clear that he had envisioned a life in public service,” recalls Steger. {eo}

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