

## That someone on the other end

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From one end to the other: an MTSU's couple's marriage. Video by John Coulston.

Written by  
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Campus employees Paul and Marie Junkin spend the workday separately, but have spent life together for almost 48 years.

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"It's just something that was meant to be," 68-year-old Marie said about her husband. "I don't know what else to say. We're just supposed to be together."

The first thing she does before opening up the Provisions On Demand (P.O.D.) market is put on a pot of coffee. The smell of roasted beans momentarily escapes into the John Bragg Mass Communication building as caffeine-deprived students trickle behind a closed door. Marie likes to unlock it at 7:15 a.m., 15 minutes before schedule.

"They know I always let them come in as long as I have one pot done, cause they just want coffee," she said tenderly as her northern accent stretched the "o" sound in "coffee."



Paul and Marie Junkin have been married more than 40 years. / Photo by Bailey Robbins.

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Meanwhile, Paul prepares for his drive to the Keathley University Center, where he will clock in at 8 a.m. as a Subway cashier. The restaurant opens at 10 a.m. as Marie's head begins to disappear behind a swell of students and faculty members waiting to purchase last-minute necessities ranging from batteries to Scantrons.

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Then, distance separates the couple again at 2 p.m. when Marie drives home from and an easy walk across campus grows into miles. Thirty minutes later, Paul clocks out, too. Miles reduce to feet, and he's home once more.

One end meets the other end. This is how Paul and Marie's days have come together for almost half a century.

### Connected beyond wires

The year was 1965 when Marie's boss at Applied Dynamics, a computer assembly company, asked her to pick up the phone.

"My boss says, 'I'm on hold. The gentleman's name is Paul ... When he comes back on, ask him when he's going to ship the parts for us,'" Marie recalled. "And so, when he picked up the phone and I said, 'Hello.' It was the first time we ever talked."

On the other end, Paul, who was about 150 miles away in Kalamazoo, Mich., sold electronic parts for a living. The pieces Marie's boss needed for the computer were on backorder, so the phone calls became more regular. Each one only lasted from 10 to 15 minutes, but when the parts finally arrived, those minutes didn't reduce.

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“If [the company] needed anything, she would call and ask for me,” Paul said.

The conversations never strayed far from business and were always held by the work phone. However, both voices heard something in the other’s that was more than just talk about computers and part shipments.

“We just connected,” Marie said affectionately about the link they shared beyond the phone line. “Something was there, but we didn’t know what.”

Though they casually discussed the possibility of meeting one another, neither person ever uttered a word about feeling “connected” to the voice on the opposite end. There was curiosity about each other’s personality and appearance, but neither made a move to bring them together, until Paul made a move.

“I was interested,” Paul said, smiling, as Marie let out a small laugh. “I figured what the heck ... and [I wanted to] see what she looked like.”

The relationship began when Paul surprised Marie by showing up at her doorstep. The first date came and went, but it left her wondering whether he felt the same spark, too.

“The girls at work wanted to know how he was because they knew we were talking on the phone,” Marie explained. “And I said, ‘Let me put it this way, if he calls me back, that means I know he likes me, and I won’t go out with anybody else.’ And, he calls me back on Monday at work, and I didn’t go out with anybody else.”

By their third date, Paul surprised himself by proposing at a drive-in movie theater. Backlit by the film and accompanied by the smell of popcorn, Marie said, “Yes.” Eight months later, the couple married.

### In sickness and in health

After almost five decades of marriage, the Junkins say they can’t remember a single fight, only a reoccurring disagreement about Paul’s “picky” eating habits.

“But we really don’t fight; we don’t really argue,” Marie said. “I mean, just over food, that’s not really an argument. I don’t remember any

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Murfreesboro: Then  
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severe fights we've ever had over the years. We've really had a good marriage."

While living in Michigan, Paul and Marie had three sons. In 1974, the family moved to Florida where the couple traded snow for beaches. Twenty-seven years later, the couple moved to Tennessee, where they made Tennessee their final home.

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“Marriage is not an easy thing,” Marie admitted. “It’s give and take. I told my boys, ‘You can’t change anybody; you can only change yourself. Don’t try to change the person you’re with, and you’ll do fine.’ So, I didn’t try to change [Paul], and he didn’t try to change me.”

Instead, internal changes have taken place throughout the years, which has shed light on the vows “in sickness and in health.”

“At the beginning of our marriage I was really quite sick,” Marie said. “I was in and out of the hospital so much it was unreal.”

Then, roughly seven years ago, Marie learned that she had colon cancer. Not long after recovering from that, Paul’s health took a beating, too.

“I nearly lost him a couple years ago,” Marie said softly. “He had surgery, and he had problems after the surgery. He was bleeding to death. So, I took care of him for two and a half months, because he couldn’t do anything. We’re always there for each other.”

### Something different to talk about

For more than 12 years, Marie has managed the same line that wraps around and out the small P.O.D. market. She swipes, studies and repeats the name printed on the payment card, personalizing each customer’s visit as he or she walks out the door.

“I really enjoy them all,” she said about the students and faculty who stop by her store. “I’ve done real well because I’m learning people’s names — they just love when I can do that. It’s hard. I was the type of person that I’d never forget your face, but I’d never remember your name. And now, I’m remembering names. And it’s good for me.”

At the other end of campus, Paul feels the same about those who stand in his line craving sub sandwiches.

“They keep me young,” Paul smiled as Marie agreed. “I look at them and say, ‘Boy, I wish I had that enthusiasm still.’”

When the couple returns home for the evening, Marie cooks a big dinner. Then, they settle on the couch to watch TV, favoring NCIS. On work nights, they’re in bed before 10 p.m., and start again by 6

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"I don't want to quit," Marie said about her job. "What's there to do staying at home all day? There's not much you can do. And, I told [Paul], 'If we stayed home, what are we going to talk about?'"

And, after almost half a century of talking to one another, both Marie and Paul listen to the outcome of each other's day and still care. When one partner makes a joke, the other can still sit back in a chair and laugh. And despite Paul's indifference about Marie's cooking choices, they can recall their youth and feel a connection that is much, much stronger.

"I'm Aries, and he's Pisces and we shouldn't even be together," Marie said. "But, we haven't had any problems. I love him more now than I did when I met him, if that's possible."

It's possible because Paul replied with a smile.

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