

Meant to Be

She noticed the handsome, young man from across the room—his wavy brown hair, bright blue eyes, friendly smile. She had never seen him before. Too shy to approach, she watched him serve as best man on his brother's wedding day in July of 1953. Later as the party celebrated at the Teche Club just outside New Iberia, Louisiana, he wandered over to chat with her date, then came back a few more times. She had the distinct feeling he was more interested in her than talking with her date. Finally, he asked her to dance, and she learned that he was a Navy man who had spent most of his ten years of service in Japan. They danced several more times that night.

A day or so later, Clifton J. Charpentier asked Joland B. Hebert to go with him, his Aunt Lou, and Uncle Neil to Grand Isle for a few days of fun before he returned to his ship in Long Beach, California. After a dinner to meet her parents and Joland's insistence that she was going with Cliff, even if it meant opposing the wishes of her mother and father for the first time in her nineteen years, she left for the beach with Cliff after work on a Friday evening. The two spent Saturday and Sunday eating, dancing, fishing for crabs, walking on the beach, getting to know each other, and even managed to sneak in a first kiss under Aunt Lou's watchful eye. On Monday, Cliff caught a bus back to California amid promises from Joland that she'd write him every day and his commitment to send a note whenever he could. Over the next eighteen months, the letters progressed from casual to interested to serious, and during a rare, pre-arranged call, Cliff asked Joland to marry him and mailed her an engagement ring. He had no time to return to Louisiana, so Joland could either wait to marry when he got out of the service and came home a year or so later or meet him in California before he shipped out.

Joland had never ventured beyond the Louisiana state line, nor had she ever driven in a town of more than a few hundred people, but she was ready to travel across the country to marry Cliff. Her parents were not so enthusiastic, and Joland prepared to defy them a second time. After sleeping on the situation, her mother and father agreed to go with her to California but not until after the holidays, three long months away. A day or so following Christmas of 1954, Joland, her mother, father, and two brothers headed to California to reunite her with a man with whom she had spent only seventy-two hours more than one and a half years earlier. Over several days and 1,750 miles, she and her mother followed in a car behind her father and brothers through major cities, across deserts, and over mountains, while her mother worried, prayed the rosary, and kept her eyes closed. The caravan of two stopped for the night just outside of Long Beach over Joland's objections.

After a sleepless night, she and her family drove into Long Beach in search of *Caymond Street*, the address Cliff telegraphed her before she left Louisiana. Father and daughter drove around the city and checked the maps, no *Caymond Street*. They asked street vendors; no one ever heard of *Caymond Street*. With frustration mounting and no way to contact Cliff, Joland pulled onto a side street and blew the horn for her dad in the car ahead to stop. She rested her head on the steering wheel for a moment and then looked up just in time to see her future husband walk out of the house she just *happened* to park in front of. The name on the sign: Raymond Street. Western Union had gotten it wrong. Clifton J. Charpentier and Joland B. Hebert married on January 5, 1955, returned to South Louisiana to live, had one daughter—Patricia—and continue to enjoy life among good friends, family, and their dogs, cats, birds, and fish. Their fifty-plus years together—proof this marriage was meant to be.