

Our Fairy Tale
Romance





*Our Fairy Tale
Romance*

how I met a
"princess in disguise"
and convinced her
to marry me

by andrew schmiedicke

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Summary: If you're a lonely Catholic bachelor stuck in a dead-end job, how can you find someone to marry? The author shares his experience of hardship, courtship, and marriage to the author Regina Doman in this inspirational booklet.

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looking for life direction

At 25 years of age I was already a lonely bachelor. After a number of failed relationships in high school, college, and after college; after a number of journeys, adventures, and failed business and employment ventures; I found myself back in Michigan, looking for a job, and feeling...well...like a failure. And a bachelor.

After a period of profligacy during college, I had rediscovered the beauty and truth of my childhood faith and began practicing it again. Soon I was inspired like the knights of old to dedicate myself to the protection and defense of those who are most vulnerable; in this case, endangered babies and their mothers. Quests and missions ensued. Along the way I met several promising young ladies, yet I was still single.

And now I was unemployed, living in the cave-like basement of my parents' house, thinking of all the time and money I had spent on my bachelor's degree. Apparently the only result was that I was still a bachelor.

I prayed for my future spouse daily, particularly seeking the help of the Holy Family and St. Raphael the Archangel. Since he had arranged such a good

marriage for Tobiah and Sarah as recorded in the Book of Tobit in the Bible, I figured he could help me find a good spouse too. But at the time I had no means of supporting a wife and children. I couldn't even support myself. Fortunately, St. Raphael was also the patron saint of finances, so I thought he could help me with that too.

Apparently the only result of my bachelor's degree was that I was still a bachelor.

After two months of fruitlessly sending out resumes, I got a job. Well, actually, my Aunt Pati got me the job: a minimum wage job at a clothing store where she worked a couple hours away. Not exactly what I had hoped to get with a double major in Communication Arts and German, but it was better than feeling like a poor peasant in my parents' basement.

Three weeks later I got a better job back in my home town of Greenville working as a cashier in a lumberyard. It paid more than the clothing store. And I could move out of my parent's basement.

My Grandmother Kane offered to rent me a bedroom at her house, which was close to the lumberyard. In her generosity, she only charged me \$25 a week in rent, and she let me know she was putting \$15 of that rent into a savings account for me. Her kindness meant so much to me.

Yet I still felt like a serf. I worked at the lumberyard for a few months with my face feeling hot and my stomach filling with acid every time some former fellow high school classmate came into the store. I guess the fact that my dad was head of the English Department at the high school had something to do with that.

I could just imagine what they were thinking. *Soooo, you were one of the brighter kids in high school, your dad was head of the English Department, you went to college, got your degree and...decided...you really wanted to work as a cashier in a lumber yard. Oookay. Awkward.*

In the days leading up to my 26th birthday, I remember praying a special novena to know what God wanted me to do. On my birthday after work, I got a call from Tom Sayre, a lawyer friend of mine in West Virginia. He was opening an independent law office in a small town and he wanted to know if I would be interested in being his legal assistant. Boy, would I ever! Finally, something that sounded like a real job with growth potential. We made our final agreement on the last day of the novena.

I had a feeling that this time I'd be leaving home for good so I decided to ask my dad for his blessing before I ventured off into the world to seek my fortune.

I began to think seriously that perhaps God was calling me to the priesthood.

Early on the morning of my departure Dad and Mom met me at my grandmother's house, and I gave him the prayer I wanted him to pray. We went into the living room, and I knelt down while my dad prayed for me and gave me his blessing.

I think my mom cried a little.

Glad for my father's blessing, I headed down to West Virginia with all my belongings in the back of my little Chevy S-10 pick-up truck. Life direction at last!

However, though I was happy enough with the job, it quickly became apparent to me that the chances of meeting a suitable spouse in such a tiny town tucked away in the tight hills of West Virginia were slim to none.

It turned out to be none.

After half a year or so of increasing loneliness and other difficulties, Tom and I came to a mutual decision that I should leave my position with his office. I began to think seriously that perhaps God was calling me to the priesthood. I made arrangements to accompany a group of Franciscan University of Steubenville students who were going to visit some friars. Life direction again?

At the end of January 1993, I left West Virginia and drove up to Steubenville, Ohio to meet the group. I spent the night with my sister's in-laws, the Nelson family. They said I could stay with them as long as I liked.

Before the group left, I stopped by to see my friend Mike Hernon. He was recently engaged to a girl named Alicia Doman. When I arrived, he asked if he could talk to me privately. So we went to a room where I sat down wearily from my travels, disappointments in my employment failures, lack of life direction, and loneliness.

"How you doing?" Mike asked cheerfully.

"Tired," I said. "I'm just really tired."

"Too tired to be my best man?" he asked with an Irish grin on his face.

I was surprised to tears, and choking a little, I said, "I could do that."

Later that evening we went to a "Festival of Praise" at the campus chapel. I again was thinking that perhaps God was calling me to be a priest. I looked forward to meeting the leader of the group that was going to visit the friars. I was ready to explore this new direction in my life.

So the next day, I met the group leader at morning Mass at St. Peter's church. After greeting her, I enthusiastically told her that I was all ready to

go with them. There was a slight pained expression on her face. She explained that since I was new to the group and that there were already some internal conflicts she was trying to handle, she decided that it would be best if I didn't go with them after all.

"Oh." I said blinking and surprised. "OK. I understand. Well, thanks anyway," I said.

"Yeah. I'm sorry," she said.

I went back into the chapel, feeling as though the Lord had slammed a door in my face. "Well, Lord, now what do you want me to do?"

Maybe He wanted me to get married after all. "Good," I thought. "Because that's what I want too."

That evening, I told Mike Hernon of this latest event, and he suggested I talk with Alicia's sister, Regina. She worked as an assistant editor at *Lay Witness* in New York City and might know of a job opening there. Sounded good to me. So I spoke with Regina on the phone. She was friendly, but she didn't know of any openings. However, I could send my resume in case anything opened up. I did send my resume, but nothing ever came of it.

So I moved in with the Nelsons and got a handyman job with an old acquaintance. And I met with my spiritual director, Father Giles Dimock, O.P., about my vocation: priesthood or married life? He recommended I ask God for clarification about that on a retreat. I had scheduled a weekend retreat

at the Holy Family Hermitage, a Camaldolese Monastery.

Father Giles counseled, “Try imagining yourself as a priest; then as a married man. Pay attention to what thoughts or feelings you experience during those imaginations.”

I did that on the retreat. When I was alone in the small stone chapel, I approached the altar and imagined myself as a priest offering the Mass. I thought I would experience a rush of joy...But I didn't. I felt awkward and out of place.

Then I imagined myself at Mass with my future wife and children by my side. I was filled with happiness and felt a strong desire to be with that woman who would be my wife. So I felt certain that this was the direction God was leading me in.

If God
wanted me to
marry, how
was I to
support a wife
and family?

Thinking hard, I genuflected, left the chapel and returned to my retreat cell, pondering. How was I to support a wife and family? I couldn't exactly do it by just being a handyman. I had a desire to work in the church as a teacher of theology or a DRE, but I didn't have a degree in theology and I didn't have money to pay for—*Wait a minute! If the Nelsons really will let me stay with them free of charge as long as I need, I won't have to pay college room and board. And maybe I can get loans to cover the tuition. It just might work.*

I left the retreat with renewed hope.

Returning to Steubenville, I asked the Nelsons if I could continue to live at their home while I pursued a Master's Degree in Theology. They generously said I was welcome to. Then I spoke to an admissions counselor at FUS about student loans. He said that I could get loans to cover the entire tuition (about \$30,000) for the three years needed to complete my M.A. I was so excited to finally have a clear direction for my life for the next few years, so I called my parents to tell them the good news. They were...less than enthused.

"We just don't want to see you go into that much debt, Andrew," my mom said in a pained and concerned voice.

"But Mom, I don't know what else to do. I feel like I'd finally have some direction in my life for the next few years and at the end of it have something I can turn into a career."

"I don't know, Andrew. \$30,000 is just an awful lot of debt to be starting off in married life. Aren't there any scholarships or grants you could get?"

A bit deflated, I admitted, "The only one the counselor told me about was 'The Disciple of Christ' scholarship, but he said it's like finding a needle in a haystack."

"Well, try it anyway. We really don't want to see you go into that much debt."

“All right. I’ll apply for that. If I don’t get it, I won’t pursue getting this M.A. degree,” I promised my mom.

So I applied for the scholarship, writing the necessary essay. And then the weeks of waiting followed. I continued my handyman jobs and wondered what in the world I would do if I didn’t get the scholarship. I tried to stay calm and detached about the outcome and trusting God’s will. Some days I was confident that God would grant me the scholarship. Other days I wasn’t so sure.

I remember one day in early May as I was working outside at my employer’s house. It was a lovely day. The trees and grass were lush and green. There was dew on the grass and birds chirping merrily in the trees. The sky was blue and full of sunlight. But I...could not see. I worked mechanically in silence. I had no foresight; no sense of whether God would grant me the scholarship or not.

I tried to stay calm and detached about the outcome and trusting God’s will, but it was tough.

One of my employer’s housemates saw me. He came over to me and asked how I was doing.

I looked at him probably with a face devoid of any cheer or hope and said, “It’s dark. It’s all dark

and I can't see." I was surrounded by a beautiful sunlit spring day, but interiorly, I was in utter gloom.

"You still haven't heard if you got the scholarship then?" he asked.

"No," I said.

"Well, you know what they say. It's always darkest before the dawn."

I tried hard to trust and to choose to be happy, even though my path ahead was still unknown to me. Within a couple of days, I found I could be cheerful while working.

Then, a day later, I got a phone call. As soon as I recognized the admissions counselor's voice, I knew I had gotten the scholarship. As he congratulated me on winning the Disciple of Christ scholarship, I felt a surge of joy knowing that I had a definite direction in my life, and new hope for my goal of being able to support a wife and family.

Bring the woman into my life, Lord!

Shortly after this I got a call from my lawyer friend in West Virginia asking if I could come back to work for him during the summer until classes began in the fall. Grateful for the chance of stable income to tide me over, I went back to work for him.

I was also reading a journal called *Caelum et Terra* and came across an article by Regina Doman titled, "The Church as One Big Rowdy Family", which I enjoyed. I submitted an article of my own to the journal, but ended up getting in a rather heated disagreement with the editor about it. I told Mike Hernon a little about the argument and he suggested I come up to Steubenville to talk with Regina about it since she personally knew the editor. She was leading a youth group to a FUS Youth Conference in July and I could meet with her then and discuss the situation.

So one hot, humid Saturday evening in July, I walked uphill to a huge red-and-white circus tent perched on a University soccer field where the Youth Conference was being held. Inside, thousands of young people were cheering, singing, and praising God. By now I was used to the "Steubenville milieu."