



Andrew Russell/The Gazette

Jenny Givens begins to cry in arms of her husband, Les, on Friday after family and friends recreated the night the two met 38 years ago.

Love at first sight

Couple celebrate 38 years together on Valentine's Day

By **WILL MACDONALD**
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People really do fall in love at first sight. Just ask Les Givens.

When he saw Ruby Virginia Cantrell at Sunday services, he fell hard.

Later at Tony's Ice Cream, it didn't take the two long to get past those first awkward moments that come with every first date. The butterflies were replaced with love. Everyone around them saw it.

They've been together ever since, through good times and bad, for richer and for poorer — 38 years and counting.

Their love is the kind some people spend a lifetime looking for.

Steady and true. Tender and honest. Devoted and understanding.

They still sing to each other, and they can't make it through "their" song — "Let It Be Me" by the Everly Brothers — without one of them crying.

A few years back, Les learned the lyrics to Colin Raye's "In This Life." He presented her with a dozen roses and while daughter Jennifer played the country song on the piano, he serenaded his wife.

Love and marriage

That first date was on a hot summer night in August 1963.

After Sunday night services, Church of God congregations

from across Gaston County would head to Tony's, so that's where they agreed to meet.

That night, she came with her sister, Ellen, and other family members. He came with his family.

"I knew something special was happening," said Ellen, who shared a booth with the two. "My sister was the key. She had this sparkle in her eye."

Ellen was only 11, but she says she knew she spotted true love.

"I just got this warm feeling inside," she said.

That night started the first chapter in a love story that continues to be written today.

They started dating. Love bloomed. Les went into the Air

National Guard while she stayed with her family in Lowell.

The letters they wrote to each other filled three boxes. Daughter Suzanne still has them today.

One day the phone rang. It was Les. He wanted to know if she would be willing to wait for him while he served his country.

Of course, she said. Well, would she marry him? You bet.

On Valentine's Day 1965, Les Givens got the girl.

For the love of family

Marriage can be hard work, anyone will tell you. Like many young couples the Givens struggled on a limited budget.