

Siesta love story

INTERCONTINENTAL ROMANCE FORGED ON SIESTA BEACH

This month marks the 25th anniversary of the beach romance of Janet (Hamel) Solomon and Tim Solomon.

In November 1973, Brethren missionaries Ken and Janet Solomon paused to visit the late Chaplain Rev. J.D. Hamel and his wife Jean on their way back to South America. Their eldest son Timothy already had his eye on the youngest Hamel, Janet, age 16, whom he had first met in 1958 when the two were just babies. It seems the Hamels and Solomons had been friends since their college days in Ashland, Ohio, where both fathers were studying to become Brethren pastors. Even their grandparents had been close friends.

After graduation, the Solomons headed for Argentina while the Hamels moved to Sarasota. In 1962, both families reunited in Sarasota and young Tim and Janet also found themselves side by side in a photo of their denominational magazine. The years passed, with Janet growing up playing in the sand at Siesta Beach, and Tim playing with Janet's cousins, also missionaries to Argentina.

By the time November of 1973 rolled around, Janet was 16, and did not remember the Tim she had met at ages 1 and 4. But that

crystal white sand of Siesta Key was enough to spark Tim's memory, and two hours before his family left the Hamels for a new Brethren work in Colombia, South America, Tim declared his love.

"Tim is the typical left-brained guy," jokes Jan, "so he declared his love in outline form." He said:

1a. You are 16.

1b. I am 17.

2a. I am moving back to South America.

2b. I won't see you for four years.

3a. I love you.

3b. I want you to wait for me.

"Then he kissed me one time, for the first time, and left the country with his parents. We had just finished a special Thanksgiving dinner, and I thought I wouldn't see him for four years."

But, being the friends they were, the parents came to the rescue. After just six months of separation, Rev. Solomon invited Rev. J.D. "Bud" Hamel to Colombia for three weeks of evangelistic meetings. The invitational letter read, "P.S. Bring your youngest daughter."

So, six months after kissing her new boyfriend goodbye, Janet gave up the chance to play with the National Band (she at one time held first chair flute in Florida for



The Hamel and Solomon families at a reunion in 1962.

her age group) and headed for the mountains of South America with her daddy.

"I didn't have a chance," laughs Jan. "We were there in the Andes mountains where Tim bought me emeralds and my first dozen red roses. Then he translated my dad's sermons into Spanish and played guitar at the services. I was in love."

Another six months went by, and this time the mothers had a plan. Janet's mom wrote to Tim's mother and offered to keep an eye on Tim and his sister if they wanted to finish high school in the U.S. Because of their life-long friendship, Tim's mother agreed. Tim's sister Becky met Jim Abbott, of the First Brethren church youth group. They were married shortly after high school graduation, and still reside in Florida with their two children.



Janet and Tim Solomon today.

Tim walked with Janet in graduation at Sarasota High school, and then they walked the wedding aisle after college. In fact, the couple was married by both fathers, as is only fitting for these two Thanksgiving Day beach matchmakers.

Where will the Solomons spend the 25th anniversary of their first date? With their two children in the spot where it all began - Siesta Key.