



# *A New American Classic*

by Jennifer Teel-Wolter

It could have been an all-American cliché. A classic case of boy meets girl-next-door, or a schoolyard rhyme about love, marriage, and baby carriages. But to confine Sonia and Randy Byard to such a flat description wouldn't do them justice. Can you put a caption on a love affair that's fresh and dynamic, and bridges the barriers of ethnicity, culture, and religion with ease? How do you define a love that's refreshingly modern but instantly timeless?

## *Introducing: the New American Classic.*

Sonia and Randy first met in 1998. He was studying at a community college and she was still in high school. As neighbors, they noticed and admired one another from afar.

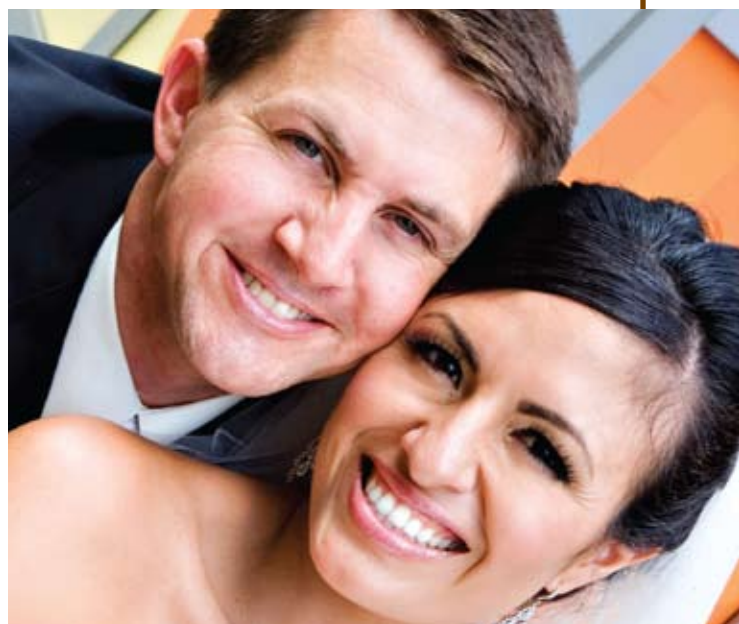
"I always noticed Sonia," remembers Randy. "There was something special about her right away...I even told her sister once 'I'm going to marry your sister one day'."

Despite the attraction, they never spoke to one another and Randy eventually moved away. But when Randy ran into one of Sonia's friends at a downtown

Sacramento bar a few years later, he jumped at the chance to turn coincidence into opportunity.

"I basically told her that I'd always thought Sonia was so beautiful, but she always had a boyfriend. Her friend said 'she doesn't anymore; you should call her'...So I did...Once I got past the shock that this beautiful girl was actually interested in me, I was blown away by how genuine and down to earth she was," says Randy.

For Randy, who grew up in a typical, Caucasian working class family, Sonia, who was raised in a Catholic, Hispanic family, was a fascinating



breath of fresh air.

“My family was meat and potatoes...her family was sushi, Thai, and Indian. She expanded my horizons; now, there is nothing I won't try,” says Randy.

For both Sonia and Randy, dating someone so different was as much an adrenaline rush as it was a comfort.

“Our families are very different. In Hispanic households you rush right up to someone and kiss and hug them; his family was a bit more reserved. When I first met them, they didn't come up to kiss me and I wondered if they didn't like me. But for Randy, it was the opposite. My family's just met him and they're hugging and kissing him, he was like 'wow' – a little overwhelming,” says Sonia. “But the great thing we came to see is how much we had in common. Our families both were so close and so loving, just different in how they expressed it...It really showed us that we could create whatever kind of life and family we wanted. It was up to us to figure that out, and we knew wanted to do that together.”

Soon, there was no doubt that Sonia and Randy were in love, and the relationship wasn't all that was getting serious. When they first began dating, Randy had quit school to work fulltime and Sonia was studying at community college. But all of the sudden, the status quo wasn't good enough. Soon, Randy re-enrolled in college.

“One day I just went back,” he explains. “When you get serious about someone, you need to do more. I wanted to be something more for her.”



“And once he started becoming more serious about school it pushed me to work harder,” adds Sonia.

The couple set a goal of transferring to UC Davis together and soon achieved it. Randy studied economics and Sonia pursued a degree in psychology. Soon, they moved in together. While some couples might have found the college life a distraction from a serious relationship, for Sonia and Randy it gave them a sense of purpose.

“There was never a question we would get married...it was just so natural for us,” says Sonia. “But I was afraid if we got married before we graduated that we wouldn’t finish. So we had this agreement that one of us had to finish before we got married...That was motivation!”

In 2006, Randy graduated from UC Davis; one year later, Sonia followed. With their futures secured, Randy decided that Christmas would be a perfect time to propose since their families would be together and Sonia’s mother, who worked overseas, would be in the country.

“I wanted it to be in front of our families; family is a big part of our lives,” says Randy. “On Christmas Eve we all spent the holiday at her parents house...and I went for it. I stood up to do a toast and went down on one knee. I could hear my Mom in the background saying ‘he’s gonna go it!’”

Once engaged, the couple immediately began planning their wedding. First, they booked a photographer, Beth Baugher of True Love Photography, whose work on a friend’s wedding had caught their eye. Next, at the urging of Sonia’s mother, a wedding coordinator was hired.

“Since my Mom wasn’t going to be there to help me along the way, she wanted to find someone to help with the process,” says Sonia.

Debra Hiebert of Très Fabu Event Planning and Design was selected to coordinate the couple’s big day. Known for her unique designs and flawless aesthetic, Sonia and Randy knew she was the perfect person to bring their vision to life.

“Like every bride, I wanted something elegant and classy. But I really also wanted it to be ‘us’...I wanted people to say, ‘that’s so Sonia and Randy,’” explains Sonia. “Debra really guided us along in that way. I’d sketch some things out and tear photos from magazines and she’d just go from there. It was great!”

Sonia and Randy selected a classic but sophisticated color palette of Tiffany blue, accented with complimentary shades of blue and bursts of chocolate brown. For a nod of traditionalism with a twist, the couple opted for all white florals and used them in unexpected ways. Tall centerpieces were constructed using white carnation balls accented with hanging crystals. For dimension and visual interest, low centerpieces containing clusters of tulips, roses and hydrangea were also added. Pewter overlays with blue embroidery added a cool air of elegance to the table, while the vivid Tiffany blue chair sashes provided a jolt of color.

The design was simple, but breathtaking. Little splashes of luxury – from the vintage silver trays to chandelier lighting at the head table – gave the event a magical and modest appeal.

“Sonia and Randy’s wedding was classic elegance defined,” says Debra. “But it was a new kind of classic. Mariachi bands,

custom lighting of a Cuban Cigar leaf on the dance floor, displaying the cake table in the very center of the ballroom with the guest tables around it...We were always looking for ways to put a tiny twist on things so that it was very personal.”

For Sonia and Randy, it was the personal touches that kept the event traditional without being stagnant. For example, rather than spring for the typical cookies or candies as favors, they donated to the Lymphoma Society in honor of Sonia’s aunt. At the reception, they found ways to turn age-old wedding rituals upside-down. They worked with DJ Matt Brys of Extreme Productions Entertainment to create individual introductions for each member of their wedding party and, instead of the typical introduction of the bride and groom, Matt told their love story. During the father and daughter dance, Matt stopped the song half of the way through and transitioned to a salsa song, in which Sonia and her father invited guests to join them.

As the night continued, guests danced into the early morning to music from Extreme Productions Entertainment while Beth Baugher of True Love Photography captured the evening in photographs and a local videographer caught the live action.

“It was everything I ever wanted...We had all these small ideas of what we wanted in the wedding and Debra really brought them together. It was just a joyous celebration for our families and friends...There is nothing I would change,” says Sonia.

After the wedding, the couple headed to Mexico for a sunny honeymoon. Shortly thereafter, they shared the exciting news with family and friends that they were expecting a baby. The couple welcomed Matthew Lee Byard into the world on March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2009 - with the same birthday as his proud father.

Looking back on a life together that’s young in years but long on commitment, Sonia and Randy are proud of the road they’ve taken.

“We’ve had a lot of milestones together...it’s like we came of age together,” says Sonia. “We went to college together; we bought our first house together; we got married and started a family... When you step through those goals with someone, it really brings you closer.”

“It has been and will continue to be an incredible journey,” adds Randy. “But who better to take it with?” That beautiful girl from the neighborhood, of course. ☺



PHOTOS BY BETH BAUGHER  
OF TRUE LOVE PHOTO  
COORDINATION BY DEBRA HIEBERT OF  
TRES FABU EVENT PLANNING AND DESIGN  
ENTERTAINMENT BY MATT BRY  
EXTREME PRODUCTIONS ENTERTAINMENT