

# GOLDEN

(The Love of My Life)

By: Roger Wright

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My name is Stephen. Today, I thought, was going to be a normal day as a reporter for my town's newspaper. I made my way into my editor's cluttered office. "You wanted to see me boss?"

"Yea, grab a seat for a minute." I sat as Josh Hendrix shuffled some papers out of his way. Then he spoke around his ever present fat cigar, "I want you to go out to Glory Acres for a story."

"Isn't that the old folks home out on the edge of town?"

"Yep, sure is." He said as he fixed his stare directly onto my eyes; indicating to me that he had his mind made up.

"Now boss, what kind of a story could be happening out there? Have they had a bunch of the old farts streaking or something?"

"Funny Steve. No, there is an 'old gentleman'..." I guess he didn't like my 'old fart' comment. "Who just turned 102 years old, and he is now the oldest man in our whole state."

"Wow." I was actually amazed. "Right here, huh?"

"Yes, and I want you to go out there today and interview him."

"Can he still talk?" I grinned, but got that hard stare again from Josh, so I quickly lost my grin. "I'm going. I'm going." I got up.

As I left, and on the way over there, I wondered what in the world I was going to ask someone of that age. And, better yet, what in the world would the story actually be about.

What struck me first was how quiet a nursing home was. I am so accustomed to our fast-paced office and faster paced stories. Boy, this was definitely going to be a switch. The sweet, matronly nurse led me to Mr. Garmon's room. "Mr. Garmon you have a guest." Mr. Garmon didn't even move his head; he kept looking down at his feet. At least he was sitting up in an easy chair in the corner of his pleasant, homey, little room. "Mr. Garmon?" Slowly he raised his head.

"Huh?"

"You have a visitor, Mr. Garmon."

"Oh." He barely muttered as he slowly turned his gaze toward me. He cleared his throat and said, "Well have a seat sonny." I haven't been called sonny in many years, but somehow it seemed appropriate for him to call me that.

I pulled a chair up closer to him and said, "Mr. Garmon, my name is Stephen, and I'm with the newspaper. I'm a reporter. Happy Birthday; I understand you are 102 years old now." I found myself speaking more softly, slower, and a little louder than normal.

"That's right my boy. Did you come to report on the latest wild activities of the 'Geritol Crowd'?"

I didn't want to admit that I didn't know what a Geritol was, so I simply said, "Maybe sir. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?"

"Fire away." Even though his eyes appeared a little dim he looked up at me with surprising clarity.

But, quite frankly, I didn't even begin to know in which direction to fire. I really didn't know where to start. Josh had said something about talking with him in his 'golden years', but from where I was sitting, his 'gold' was pretty tarnished. "Why don't you just tell me whatever you would like about your life Mr. Garmon?"

He began, "Well, sonny I could tell you about my youth on the farm, or my being too young for World War I, or being too old for World War II but joining anyway and fighting in Europe." He looked up to the ceiling, but was obviously looking off into a far greater distance; a distance in time. "But I'll tell you my favorite story. I'll tell you about the love of my life; the story of my Elise."

His eyes came back to mine, but this time they were different. His eyes had grown so much more mellow and loving. It was obvious that even the thought of Elise brought tremendous comfort and love into the soul of this old gentleman. He began with his weak but vibrant voice...

“Elise and I were friends before we even knew it. We just connected in such a way that required no effort. She was the daughter of a neighboring farmer. We went to school together although she was a couple of years behind me. I remember seeing her and thinking that she was the prettiest girl I had ever seen. Neither one of us made any attempts at getting to know one another. It just happened as the years went by.

Then, during our high school years, we began to spend more time together. We went to school dances, football games, and such. Soon it was just me and her doing everything together. Sure I had time with the boys, but when it came to social events it was always just Elise and me.

Even during my college years there was no one else. After college I got a good job as a salesman with a great company and had hopes of moving up to an executive position. Things were looking pretty solid, so I finally felt comfortable enough to give her the security she deserved, so I finally popped the question.”

“So the two of you got married?”

“That we did. It was 1932, and I was 23 years old; she was 21. We were together for 64 years. She went on to be with the Lord in 1996 at 85 years old.” He paused. “I miss her every day.”

With that, I simply did not know what to say, and Mr. Garmon had stopped his reflections. We both sat silently for a few moments; lost in our thoughts.

Finally, “Mr. Garmon?” I said softly.

“Yes son.”

“Your love sounds like it was pretty strong.” I ventured.

“No son. My love *is* strong.” He corrected me. “Real love is never ending. Real love is deep. Real love is passionate, and caring, and kind. Real love will carry you when everything else falls apart. Real love is the whole of the heart of God.”

As he turned those piercing eyes to me again, he gave me the best piece of advice I think I will ever receive. “You need to find real love in your life my boy.”

Then he looked down to his feet as I had found him when I came in, and I knew we were done for today. “Thank you Mr. Garmon.” And I graciously meant it.

“You are welcome son.” He said without looking up.

Mr. Garmon affected me that day like no day I had ever known. The depth of his wisdom and love reached deep within me and changed me. As I left Glory Acres that day I knew that the truth I had found was truly ‘Golden’.

