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Sealed with a Kiss

Alumna shares love letters written during her 1960s long-distance courtship.



The Billerbecks penned more than 288 letters to each other from October 1960 to June 1961 while Fred lived in Michigan and Barbara in Missouri. She signed each letter, “Your Missouri Tigress.” Photo courtesy of Barbara Aust Billerbeck.

Story by Kelsey Allen

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Barbara Aust Billerbeck had never been to a football game. She was working as a waitress, babysitter and lab technician in the MU Agriculture Building to put herself through Mizzou in the late 1950s.



Fred Billerbeck and Barbara Aust Billerbeck married June 3, 1961, at the A.P. Green Chapel. Photo courtesy of Barbara Aust Billerbeck.

But when Professor Marion Fields set her up on a blind date at a football game, she figured she better do her homework. There was added pressure because her date, a longtime friend of Fields', would be driving more than 600 miles from Fremont, Mich.

She found a Tiger football player to fill her in on the Xs and Os.

“I asked him if he could tell me why the University of Missouri would defeat Iowa State [Oct. 22, 1960],” she recalls. “He gave me five reasons.”

When Fred Billerbeck knocked on the door at Templecrone, the all-girl co-op where Barbara lived, she was kind of prepared. She told him three of the five reasons, but it was enough.

To Fred's great surprise, Barbara seemed to understand football and the split T formation, he wrote years later. The Tigers won 34–8.

Fred was so impressed that the day he returned to Michigan, he wired Barbara, BA '60, BS Ed '61, a dozen red roses and a letter, which started their daily correspondence. Fred made the trip to Columbia a few more times, eventually proposing on Christmas Eve 1960. Until their wedding day, the couple exchanged more than 288 handwritten love letters. Barbara signed each one, "Your Missouri Tigress."



The wedding reception was held in the Templecrone Cooperative House on 701 Hitt St., across from the Agriculture Building where Barbara worked as a student. Photo courtesy of Barbara Aust Billerbeck.

They married June 3, 1961, at the A.P. Green Chapel, and Fields stood as Fred's best man.



If it weren't for Marion Fields, professor of mycology at MU, Fred and Barbara never would have met. Fields, second from the right, was Fred's best man. Photo courtesy of Barbara Aust Billerbeck.

The Billerbecks settled in Fremont where Fred worked for Gerber and Barbara taught at Newaygo High School. When Barbara retired in 2003, she typed up the handwritten letters she and Fred had penned so long ago. In 2009, shortly after Fred was diagnosed with lung cancer, he added an introduction to the letters he called, *Dating a Missouri Tigress: A Date with an Angel*.

"Barbara certainly was not a shy, clinging vine type but

an animated, gracious lady of good taste,” Fred wrote. “On deep reflection, I decided that Barbara was the one for me and that we were compatible.”

It was only a few years later that Fred found out the truth about their first date.

“I learned that I was grossly misled, as she had been prepped by a football player friend,” he wrote. “But despite this small subterfuge, Barbara was a terrific date.”

Fred and Barbara celebrated 48 years together before he died in 2009.

“I still wish I had him,” Barbara says. “But I’m glad to have these letters.”

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Barbara returned to MU in 2011 for her 50th reunion. Her daughter presented her with a Missouri baseball cap. Photo by Nicholas Benner.

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