

It Wasn't Friendship At First Sight. 35 Years On, They Found A 'Forever Love'

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StoryCorps

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Heard on Morning Edition

Jey Born

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Beau McCall (left) and Julaina Glass spoke for a StoryCorps interview in 2017 about how their relationship has blossomed over the years — from distant neighbors to close friends.

Jhaleh Akhavan for StoryCorps

Julaina Glass was just 19 years old and on her own for the first time when she moved into a studio apartment in a Harlem, N.Y., brownstone during the 1980s.

Soon, she met her upstairs neighbor, Beau McCall, who was about 10 years older.

The two strangers would become lifelong friends — but it was hardly friendship at first sight.

A 60-year-old McCall and Glass, 49, came to StoryCorps in 2017 to talk about those early days.

When McCall first met his new neighbor, who was living alone two floors below him, he did his best to keep to himself.

"I'm halfway up the stairs and I hear this voice: 'I like your coat.' And I said to myself, 'Oh, God, here's a nosy neighbor,' " he said.

But Glass was fascinated with McCall's vibrant style — he wore outfits with a lot of flair and accents, some he'd fashioned himself.

"I seen someone walking up the steps just so unique-looking. And I'm like, 'Who is this person?' So, I was — 'Hey, good morning.' And you pause, glanced over, and you's like, 'Oh, hi.' And then you kept on going."

Glass was persistent, though.

"I'm a baby, on my own, don't know what life is about," she said. "So, in the morning time I would come upstairs."

"And you would say, 'You got anything to eat?' " said McCall. "And then, my partner would say, 'Oh, we have so and so, so and so.' I was like, 'Don't tell her that 'cause she's gonna be comin' up here and eatin'! " "

Glass laughed. "It was my go-to place," she said.

As time went on, Glass endeared herself to McCall.

"Remember when we used to sit out on the stoop, in my little miniskirt that I made?" McCall asked her, describing one of his denim fashions he repurposed himself.

It was so short, Glass joked, that she could hardly call it a skirt: "I would say more like belt, yes."

Back then, she told McCall, he was the only person with whom she spent quality time and developed a close relationship.

"You were young, and it was so much going on. In the building, in the neighborhood, on the block," McCall said. "I felt that I needed to protect you." In the 1980s, New York City was experiencing a sharp increase in violent crime and drug use, which cast a long shadow over even vibrant communities like Harlem.

"And I felt protected with you," said Glass.

With all the life changes they encountered side by side, there were also stories.

In her 20s, Glass converted to Islam. McCall was worried that Glass becoming a Muslim might change their friendship — that it meant she couldn't spend time with him. But she told him their friendship would never change.

"I gave you the pep talk," she said. She let him know that she would need to cover her hair in front of him.

But in one chaotic moment, she recalled, all of that "flew out the window."

Glass, who'd been staying over at McCall's place, was taking a shower when McCall told her that her celebrity crush — actor-dancer Savion Glover — was on the television.

"I just had such a big crush on him," Glass said. "I ran out the shower butt naked."

They still laugh at the memory.

"But, you know, you my brother and I love you, and I'm comfortable with you — clearly," she said.

Unlike those early days, as McCall jokes now, the feelings are mutual.

"I love you," he said. "I didn't love you from Day 1. But, you know, as time went on, you're a part of me."

"You're my forever love," said Glass.

Audio produced for Morning Edition by Jey Born. NPR's Emma Bowman adapted it for the web.

StoryCorps is a national nonprofit that gives people the chance to interview friends and loved ones about their lives. These conversations are archived at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, allowing participants to leave a legacy for future generations. Learn more, including how to interview someone in your life, at StoryCorps.org.

