

Love and friendship can be found when volunteering

Russ and Kelly Circle first met while volunteering for the Big 12 Basketball Championships in 2000. Russ was the co-chair of VIP transportation with Mark Gibbs. Mark suggested Kelly help volunteer and he also wanted to introduce the two as Mark thought they would be a good couple. Russ' first encounter with Kelly was at a volunteer pre-tournament meeting when Kelly rushed into the meeting right when Russ was calling the meeting to order. In the quiet room, Kelly burst in yelling about her hand touching Rick Springfield's thigh when she stormed the stage the night before at his concert. Russ leaned over to Mark and said "this is the girl you wanted me to meet?"

Back then, the transportation volunteers were a tight knit group of 8-10 people who drove 15 passenger vans between downtown and Kemper Arena during 10 hour shifts. Kelly says tournament time was like summer camp; you see your best friends during the tournament, rarely talk during the off-season then pick up where you left off the next tournament.

During the next several months, Kelly and Russ became best friends as they attended group outings. Then Russ started to withdraw from the group. Kelly discovered Russ had fallen in love with her and it was becoming increasingly hard for him to be around Kelly. A few days later, after Kelly's roommate asked why she wasn't dating Russ, Kelly admitted loving Russ but didn't want to ruin their friendship by dating since she didn't have the greatest of luck lately with relationships. Kelly's roommate encouraged her to tell Russ her true feelings and later that week they started dating. By Christmas they were engaged.

In June 2001, Kelly left for the Peace Corp, which she had been planning to join for over a year. Even though Russ had written a recommendation for Kelly, when it came time to leave, he didn't want her to go. While Kelly was gone, she quickly realized she wanted to spend the rest of her life with Russ and she wanted to start that life right then. She shortened her trip returning to Kansas City at the end of the summer and a year later they were married in May. Kelly says, "That's the fun of volunteering, you'll meet the best friends you'll ever meet and you'll have them forever."