



## John and Nell

by John Balogh

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It was my misguided dream of playing in the NHL that led to me falling in love with Nell. Nell dreamed of being a hockey player too but didn't really know how to skate. She was visiting her sister in Victoria 16 years ago and wanted someone to go practice her skating with. Her sister invited me, as the only hockey player she knew, and the rest was love at first hip check. Well, if only she'd let me hold her hand.



The great thing for me that day was that my skating far overshadowed any discomfort Nell may have had with my looks. That said, once we started to date it took a little time for Nell to get used to my unique features. I love going to the movies, so when I visited Nell in Vancouver we would sometimes go to a show. Inevitably, I would get asked that age old question, "what happened to you?" Easy for me to answer, but a whole new experience for Nell. I realized quickly that I had to give Nell time to get used to the way I look and the unique experiences that can come with those looks.

I think the secret for Nell getting comfortable was for me to be comfortable talking openly about looks. Turns out, that was also the secret to falling in love as I learned I loved talking with Nell, how real our conversations were and how easily we could talk about anything. That connection has served us well over the last 16 years as we've taken on lots of the challenges of life such as raising kids, changing jobs, poor health and just the changes we all go through over time.

I feel so lucky having Nell in my life but I've never thought it took luck for her to fall in love with someone like me, who looks so out of the ordinary. I truly believe that attractiveness is a state of mind and a way of presenting yourself with confidence more than it is that first impression. I didn't understand that when I was a teenager so was terrified of dating. When I got to university, I was surprised to realize that women did find me attractive and I had pretty normal dating life after that -- still shy but willing to try to get close to someone.





My looks are a part of Nell's and my relationship, especially when Nell has had to support me through surgery as she has a couple of times, or when I feel a little beaten down by the world around us.



I think the bigger issues in our lives are the ones that face most couples like how to be good parents, what our dreams are and how can we make them happen, who cooks on Thursday and who cleans the toilet.

Nell, and now our girls Lucy and Cleo, are the loves of my life. I wouldn't trade them for the NHL any day. That said, at 50, I'm still dreaming of getting that call from Montreal Canadiens.