

# Thorps, Fridays share love stories, advice

**Patti and Holden Thorp**

**BY NICOLE COMPARATO**  
STAFF WRITER

The most powerful couple on campus started at age 12. Growing up in Fayetteville, Holden and Patti Thorp were cast in a production of "Peter Pan." Holden Thorp said he fell in love with her on the spot in a friendship that has blossomed into a 20-year marriage. Though it falls every year in a busy and occasionally cold month, the two celebrate their relationship on this day each year.

**DTH:** How did you two meet?

**Holden Thorp:** My mother runs the Cape Fear Regional Theatre in Fayetteville, and we met because there was a production of "Peter Pan" put on in 1973, and we were both cast in it. I fell in love with her then, and she didn't fall in love with me until 12 years later.

**DTH:** How did you propose?

**Patti Thorp:** Well, after dat-

ing someone for so long, we kind of just knew we were going to get married. He had followed me to Yale when I went to drama school, and he got his post-doctorate. Actually, in 1989, on our first Valentine's Day together, he gave me a set of four glass plates and bowls, and that's when he asked me if I would marry him then. The intention behind the plates and bowls was that we would get married, and they would be for our life together.

**DTH:** What is your favorite thing about the other person?

**PT:** His sense of humor is my favorite. Also, he's very honest, forthright, and usually delivers bad news gently. No matter how bad things are, he's there.

**HT:** She's always going to keep me on the ground. She reminds me of how I was when I was 12.

**DTH:** What is one of your most memorable moments?

**HT:** The night the Board of

Governors elected me to be Chancellor, we renewed our wedding vows. It's more special after so much time. You know how much work it has been and how much it really is.

**DTH:** What is the key to love?

**PT:** Commitment and marriage takes a lot of trust. What was great about him knowing me so long when we started dating was that I eventually tried to push him out of my life, like I always did with my love interests, but he had seen that before, and wouldn't let me. It's knowing someone's patterns.

**HT:** You need to recognize that the other person is going to do stuff that drives you crazy, but if you have the ability and want to work through it, that's the secret.

**PT:** Like I told him about that tweet (from the Duke game), it's a good thing that he's cute!

Contact the University Editor at [university@dailytarheel.com](mailto:university@dailytarheel.com).

**Ida and Bill Friday**

**BY CLAIRE MCNEILL**  
STAFF WRITER

Before he was president of the UNC system, Bill Friday was president of the N.C. State University student body — and he didn't have date. A friend set him up on a blind date with a Meredith College student named Ida. Years later, they would marry and have three children. In 68 years of marriage, Bill and Ida, both in their early nineties, have enjoyed the company of chancellors and presidents. But the company they value most is each other's.

**DTH:** How did you two meet?

**Bill Friday:** You won't believe it, but it was a blind date. It was Greater University Day, an occasion when State and Carolina played football way back in the 40s. I happened to be class president of State, and all the guys had girlfriends come and be their sponsors. I didn't have one so I called out to Meredith College ... I found her so interesting that I

called back and we've lived happily ever after. That was 68 years ago, and we've been happily married ever since.

**DTH:** How did you propose?

**BF:** (I proposed) just like anybody else, but it was before I was leaving to go to war. Many proposals were made in those days. She was sweet enough to accept and we've had three daughters in our family since that time.

**DTH:** What is your favorite thing about the other person?

**BF:** We're a great team. We work together on everything we did. We built two houses together, and we've had a great time every day. Every day seems to be a new adventure.

**DTH:** What is one of your most memorable moments?

**BF:** There was the time when our first child came to our home. That's a memory no one forgets. The happiness of being together, you never forget that. We always worked as a team. I didn't want to do anything she didn't share.

**DTH:** What is the key to love?

**BF:** Well, the first thing, of course, is complete trust and complete acceptance. That's where you start. You're two people building one life and you do it together. And you do it recognizing that neither of you is perfect, but you can do it together. And we did.

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# Love from China to Chapel Hill

## Couple dated across hemispheres

**BY LILLY KNOEPP**  
STAFF WRITER

It might seem as though two people who live a world apart and speak different languages could meet and fall in love only in the plot of a romantic movie. But that scenario is a reality for UNC graduate student Grant Ligon and his fiancée, Jingyuan Sun, now a UNC graduate student herself. The couple met in Qingdao, China, while Ligon was on a summer study abroad program at Ocean University in 2009. In a city of more than 7 million people, the two still managed to meet one day at the university's tennis courts.

"I'd never really considered a white boy before but he just kept asking me to eat," Sun said. When she finally said "yes," the couple hit it off and their relationship quickly progressed.

Although Sun spoke limited English and Ligon spoke no Chinese, the two connected immediately. "A big step in our relationship was when I proposed that I meet her parents about three weeks after meeting her," Ligon said. Meeting Ligon shocked Sun's parents, who live in Changchun and who had never seen a white person before.

Just a few weeks later it was time for Ligon to return to the U.S., but the couple decided to continue the relationship by chatting daily over Skype. It was never a burden for them to make time to be able to talk to each other, they said.

"Don't let the difficulties of staying in touch get in the way," he said. "You can find the time to talk to someone even if it means getting up in the middle of the night because of the time difference."

Over the next year, Sun was able to apply for a visa to visit Ligon. While visiting UNC, Sun decided to apply to a graduate program so she could stay with Ligon. She was accepted into the program but had to return to China to finish her senior year of college.

"We were all so sad when she left the first time, myself and my parents, that was when we knew it was serious," Ligon said.

Just before the pair started graduate school together, they decided to take a pre-honeymoon trip to Dubai, Italy, France and Spain.

"It was a dream," said Sun. But since the vacation was a stop on Sun's way to the U.S., they had to bring her luggage from China with them on the trip.

"We had to drag about 67 pounds of luggage all through Venice's cobble streets," Sun said.

Ligon remembers differently. "No, I had to carry all that luggage around Europe," he said, laughing.

Before their 22-day trip to Europe, they had already traveled to South Korea, Guizhou and Malaysia.

Their love of travel has spread to Ligon's family, who visited China for the first time in October to surprise Sun.

"My parents were blown away by China — they loved it," he said. "We even got to take my parents to the tennis courts where we met."

After all of their adventures, the pair said they are happy to be living in Chapel Hill.

Ligon said Sun has become a true UNC student. Sun said she came to understand a major part of UNC life while watching the Duke game on Wednesday.

"Before I didn't know why they say 'Go to hell Duke' in the school song, but now I do," Sun said.

Ligon asked Sun to marry him

on his birthday in March this year, and the couple is planning their wedding. They would like to hold a small marriage ceremony in early May, and might also go to China after graduate school for a more traditional Chinese wedding.

But the couple doesn't have any big plans for this Valentine's Day. Ligon said it would be difficult to top their travels.

"It's hard to think of something impressive to do," he said. "We really love going out to dinner together so that's probably what we'll do."

This is perfectly fine with Sun. "We don't require a lot to be happy, that's one of the great things about our relationship," Sun said.

Contact the University Editor at [university@dailytarheel.com](mailto:university@dailytarheel.com).



DTH/MELISSA KEY

Current UNC graduate students and engaged couple Grant Ligon and Jingyuan Sun met in China while Ligon was there studying abroad.

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**MEN'S BASKETBALL**  
v. Wake Forest 8pm

**THURSDAY, FEB. 16**  
**WRESTLING**  
v. The Citadel; 7pm

**SATURDAY, FEB. 19**  
**MEN'S BASKETBALL**  
v. Boston College 4pm

**SUNDAY, FEB. 20**  
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