



Brandi & Pete Moberley

By Callie Holton

At the end of May 2020, during the strange season of life that was the COVID-19 pandemic, three friends gathered on the rooftop patio at Cask and Cork for fresh air, cocktails, and company - a sure cure for the lows of those long and sometimes lonely days.

The trio was enjoying the warm evening and the chance to chat when one of the girls asked the others if they'd mind if her friend Pete came to meet them. No one objected, not even the friend named Brandi, who was still reconstructing her life as a single mom after her marriage had met an end. Brandi didn't care if he joined them, but then, frankly, she didn't even care that this "Pete" person existed.

"The end of my marriage left me hesitant to get back into a relationship. I was prepared to do this life alone and focus on raising my children, and that was enough."

But all that changed when the door to the patio swung open, and Pete Moberley walked out. Though Brandi wasn't looking for romance or companionship, she admitted that Pete immediately turned her head as he made his way toward their group, remarking that "He was hot!"

No sooner had the introductions in the group been made than Pete and Brandi found themselves wholly absorbed in conversation. Not typically one to take notice of strangers, Brandi was caught off guard by the intense, invisible tug that drew all her attention to this handsome man. Beyond

physical attraction, something grander was already at play, and Brandi felt it to her core.

Pete felt the same draw. The familiarity he felt in Brandi's presence was so comforting that after several minutes of talking, he paused mid-sentence and asked her, "How do I know you?"

Though they spent several minutes thinking of ways they might have encountered each other, they found nothing but an undeniable and inexplicable magnetism that only deepened as the evening drew later and later.

"From that moment, that was it," Pete said firmly. "Brandi had my full focus. She was all I could think about. I had to see what could happen. I had to pursue her."

Despite the connection, Brandi did not give her contact information to Pete before he left in the wee hours for what was sure to be a weary, if not wonder-filled, day of work. "So, I just had to find her on Facebook," Pete stated matter-of-factly of her reticence, "I had to keep chipping away."

"I was terrified," Brandi shared of those first few interactions after their initial meeting. "I kept telling him that I wasn't in a place to date; I wasn't in a position to try anything. Still, I was so drawn to him that my concession was to say, 'Okay, I can hang out in a group.' And that was how we spent time together for a while."

Though daring to meet only in the presence of others, Brandi and Pete found that the rest of the world seemed to fall away when they were together. The more time the pair spent together, the clearer it became that their uncanny connection was neither fleeting nor fickle.

Brandi expressed her wonder at the odd feeling to Pete one night, telling him, "I don't know what this is. I don't connect with people like this because my guard is up. But, once..."

Brandi explained that a year prior, she had been at a golf course enjoying a beer with friends when, for a moment, a man she hadn't met - and even now wasn't sure she'd recognize - had taken a chair across the table from her. Instantly, intuition had beckoned to her soul without reason, drawing her to that stranger, just as it had with Pete. And yet, nothing had come of the brief encounter. It stuck with her, though.

Pete couldn't believe his ears listening to her tale, and he spoke his conclusion just as he came to it: "That guy was me."

Sure enough, he recalled the names of the others present and the circumstances of the day, proving that Brandi had, in fact, only ever felt this fervent pull towards one man - Pete.

Knowing they had found something worth keeping, the pair agreed to proceed slowly out of care for Brandi's young children and her still-mending heart. "I was going to respect her timeline," he said, "but my plan from the get-go was to tear those walls down."

Throughout the summer, the couple embraced their relationship and began to integrate their lives and families bit by cautious bit. Brandi's son Treyson and daughter Taos welcomed Pete. Pete's adult children, Brady and Madison, gratefully and graciously shared their father and warmly accepted Brandi.

But Pete had some walls of his own, too. Six years before meeting Brandi, Pete was diagnosed with autoimmune

hepatitis and primary biliary cirrhosis (PBC). In the best shape of his life and feeling well, Pete was shocked at the news that his liver would become inflamed, injured, and eventually destroyed. Medications might help buy some time, but Pete would ultimately need a liver transplant. When diagnosed, he had vowed not to engage in a long-term relationship with uncertainty looming.

"That changed the night I met Brandi. I can't explain it, but I decided right then that I didn't want to die alone; I wanted to see if I could build a life with someone. That person was Brandi."

He'd shared his health concerns with Brandi early in their journey, but he had seen no disease progression in years, so it hadn't seemed like an imminent threat. Brandi hadn't been afraid of the possible complications. But when Pete received a call in September 2020 letting him know that routine bloodwork had showed that his bilirubin had spiked and hospitalization was required. This was a sign that his condition had begun to progress.

With COVID hospital rules in place, Brandi alternated days of thirty-minute visitation with Pete's son so that she could see him. Pete felt it was only honorable to give her an out now that his health had taken this turn, so when she came in one night, he patted the bed and told her they needed to talk. A tear traced across his cheek as he told her he would understand if she needed to leave the relationship.

"But it wasn't even an option for me to walk away," Brandi said. "All I could think was, what would I do without him? I knew by then that I had found my person." Brandi left the hospital heartbroken yet determined to support Pete. She began researching everything she could find about Pete's disease and possible treatments.

After reading an article about living donor transplants, Brandi learned that it could be possible for a portion of a living donor's liver to be carved off and transplanted into Pete. This could be quicker than waiting for an appropriate organ donor on the traditional transplant list.

As she read, things started clicking into place for Brandi, making sense of years of uncertainty, waiting, praying, and believing. "During the storm of my hardest days, I didn't ask God why. I knew He would use me for good, and I prayed for Him to show me my purpose. Holding onto that promise and that faith got me to the 'light-bulb' moment when I found that article. If this was the purpose God wanted to use me for, I was listening," she said.

Brandi was excited to share her revelation, but Pete wholeheartedly disagreed with the idea, unwilling to expose her to risk. Soon though, symptoms of itching and sores began to set in as an outward sign of his body's worsening internal crisis. Then a brush with COVID-19 that winter brought Pete down hard, and the reality of his illness and vulnerability hit home.

Eventually, even Pete, with support from his medical team, realized the living donor route might be his most viable option. But many factors can discount a volunteer from being a possible match, and several friends and family members who registered were declined.

Brandi had also applied - without telling Pete. She passed the initial screening, proving that her intuition was guiding her in the right direction. Despite his reservations, Brandi told Pete that the matching process was underway. Her children's well-being was obviously at the forefront of both of their minds: her son Treyson was fifteen then, and her daughter Taos was just thirteen.

"In the car one day, Treyson asked me, 'Is Pete going to die?' I had to tell him he would if he didn't get a liver. Without skipping a beat, my son asked, 'Can he have mine?' And that's when I realized that my kids had grown as fond of Pete as I had.

"Truly, my children's selflessness allowed me to be Pete's donor. I was so proud of their bravery and compassion for him. God granted them peace, and it gave me peace that I could fulfill the purpose He was leading me towards."

Brandi also knew that Pete had parents who deserved to see their son live. And children who, although grown up, still desperately need their much-loved father in their lives, and she helped Pete see that the risks could be worth it for his family too.

Winter turned to spring, and Pete was deteriorating even as Brandi underwent additional testing and evaluation to determine her suitability. As an added layer of the donor recruitment process, Brandi even received counseling to ensure emotional preparation and protection for the experience ahead of her should she be approved to donate.

Though most of the evaluation process was encouraging, one hindrance in Brandi's anatomy caused some doubt that she could ultimately be his donor. The "connectors" of her liver needed to be long enough to tie in appropriately, and her results had shown that one of hers came up short.

On April 7, 2021, the couple planned to celebrate Pete's birthday at a dinner with friends. They had just spoken on the phone about their discomfort at not yet hearing the final results of Brandi's evaluation. They decided to give their worry over to God.



Brandi and Pete seeing each other for the first time post-transplant



Within seconds of hanging up the phone to get showered and ready for the celebration, Brandi's phone rang again, and her transplant coordinator informed her that she had been approved as Pete's donor. Even that anatomical anomaly had worked in her favor - the surgeon would later remark that her unique "connector" configuration would make his job easier. From her conception, God had physically designed Brandi to be Pete's ideal match.

With less than an hour to spare before she was supposed to meet Pete, Brandi stopped at CVS on the way to dinner to find a card to help her announce the

best birthday gift anyone could ever receive. She grabbed a card that read "I've got something for you" on the outside and didn't bother opening it to read the rest. She scribbled on the inside, "How about I give you my liver, or we share one at least?"

Dinner was at Cask and Cork, on that same rooftop patio where they had first met. Brandi knew precisely why she felt that unshakable connection at first sight, and she would now deliver him the gift of many more birthdays to come.

Within weeks, they would travel to Dallas to undergo surgery, where seventy percent of Brandi's liver would be placed into Pete. An infection complicated and prolonged his recovery, but the liver took beautifully and began healing him from the inside out almost immediately. Thanks to the amazing team at Baylor, Scott, & White Health in Dallas, within weeks, Brandi and Pete were on the mend and grateful for a second chance at a life together.

Their families and friends bonded and blended throughout the experience by helping the couple and witnessing the healing miracle. Pete and Brandi credit this strong support system and their gifts of time and care for overcoming even the most difficult moments. They could focus on their end goal because many people believed in them and stepped up to help them get there.

Brandi and Pete grew closer, too, despite Brandi's insistence that she did not expect this result in return for her sacrifice. "I never did this with the expectation that he would be indebted to me. God led me to love this man and make this gift, but no strings were attached."

Even so, Pete had remained resolute throughout the ordeal. What he knew when they met was that he had found someone worth living for; her gift had only enabled him to love her for longer.

The couple married on January 1, 2022, in a private ceremony. They had been through so much together in such a short time that the intimacy felt fitting. Drawn together by God's purpose, fortified by selfless offerings and humbling receipts, and forever bonded by the miracles of modern medicine, Pete and Brandi now face each day with gratitude for the gift of love. *AM*

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