

And in a snap, 40 years have gone by

VIDEOS OF elaborate marriage proposals requiring months of planning and even rehearsal are everywhere nowadays, but to say that wasn't Fernando Batista's style back in 1973 is an understatement.

He's more of an in-the-moment sort of guy, and that moment came mere hours after meeting Barbara Moon in Monterey. He'd given her sister a ride home from Santa Barbara, where she was a student at the

Great Lives

By ELAINE HESSER

University of California. Barbara met Fernando at her kitchen table.

They hit it off immediately and talked for five straight hours. Fernando even asked her to go out that very evening. Barbara remembered being less than enthusiastic since she'd been out all night the night before, but she agreed. Unbelievably, while they were dancing the night away at a restaurant on Cannery Row, he proposed.

"I knew she was a special person and I couldn't let her get away," he said.

Barbara's response wasn't exactly what he'd hoped for. "I said, 'You're drunk, you're crazy, and you're too short.'"

They later decided to move in together, however, and in 1975, they married.

Now the owners of Batista Moon Studio, the two have always shared a passion for photography. In fact, Barbara had worked as a babysitter for the Weston family.

"For an extra 50 cents, they let me clean out the darkroom," she remembered.

Although tests when she was in high school showed she had the aptitude and ability for medical school, her nervous system never got the memo. She passed out at the sight of blood while taking classes at Monterey Peninsula College.

So she started taking photography classes and never looked back. Fernando, meanwhile, took the long way around to California. He'd come to America from Brazil by way of a sponsor family in Buffalo, N.Y., that knew his aunt. He traveled to Santa Barbara, hoping to attend the prestigious Brooks Institute's school of photography, but he couldn't afford the tuition and was working odd jobs when he met Barbara's sister and made the trip to Monterey on a whim.

The couple worked at various jobs, all the while looking for a way to do photography full time. Their break came when the photographer for a multiple real estate listing service in Carmel decided to move to San Francisco. In those days, said Barbara, the multiple listings were done by taking Polaroids of the properties for sale, gluing them onto pages and mimeographing them for the realtors.

Once that chore was completed, the realtors would ask for 8-by-10s of some of the properties to display in their windows, so Barbara and Fernando would head out, take the photos, develop and print them late into the evening and get them to the realtors the next day.

They soon gained a reputation for good composition — Barbara said they just did common sense things like moving trash cans and water hoses out of the shots — and great lighting. Fernando said that if they drove out to photograph houses and the light wasn't just right on one of them, they'd come by on the return trip and try again.

They went back to school at Monterey Peninsula College to complete their studies as they built their business. To help make ends meet, Barbara made jewelry and sold it at art fairs. They traveled in true hippie fashion in a VW bus.

"We went through three engines on that thing," said Barbara.

Their reputation as photographers grew, and the business eventually took off. Their client list has been filled with household names locally — they did the Monterey Jazz Festival's poster for five years — and nationally, like Rice-A-Roni and Royal Viking Lines.

Two of their favorite projects were working with Ocean Mist Farms and helping to create the Shake family cookbook. They described their eight years with Ocean Mist as being part of a group of "great people, great family and great workers." Instead of just showing up to do shoots, they were invited to be part of planning them with the marketing team, and enjoyed having the opportunity to give their input.

The Shake family cookbook gave them a chance to really indulge their love of food photography. There are dozens of pictures of dishes and ingredients, and you can see the attention to detail that went into each one, from a simple bowl of clams, to complex plates of pasta.

As Fernando noted, "Commercial photography should have a fine art feel to it."

As they sat around a table in their cozy cottage near Skyline Forest, they told The Pine Cone that in spite of their many accomplishments, there are still a few things they'd like to do. First, Barbara said, they'd love to go to Alsace, Germany, for the annual asparagus festival in May. Renting a villa in Tuscany and photographing to their heart's content is high on Fernando's list, and they said they'd also enjoy chronicling the modern Celtic food of Ireland.

Sounds like a pretty delicious bucket list.



Fernando Batista's first proposal to Barbara came a little too early for her, but she eventually accepted.