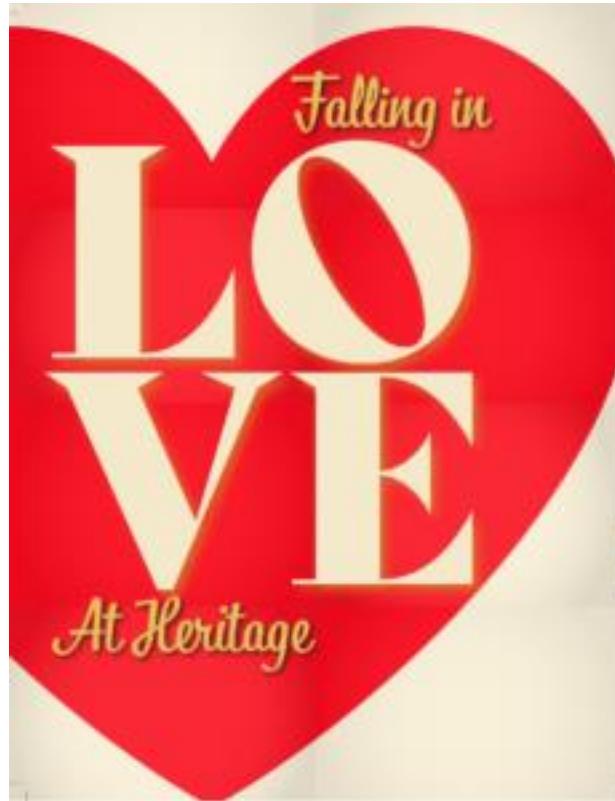


Falling in Love at Heritage

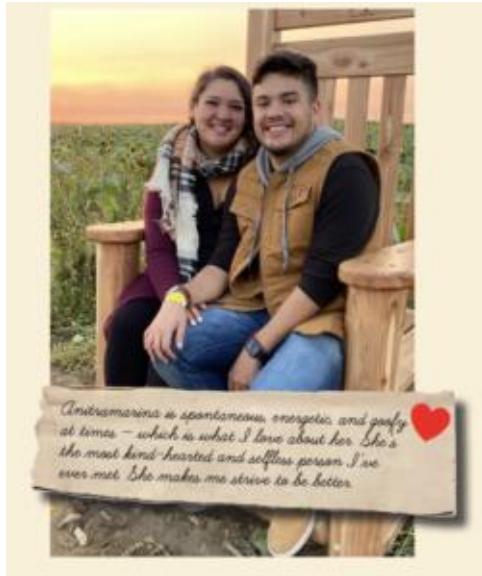
You go to college to earn a degree. To fulfill your dreams. And, sometimes, you meet the person of your dreams as well.



There's nothing like falling in love. That's what happened to Heritage alumni Brandon Berk and Anitramarina Reyna, Heber Molina and Carmen Mejia, and Jorge Borunda and Mireya Vazquez. Each left college with a degree — and the love of their life.

Best Friends: The Love Story of Brandon and Anitramarina Berk

The first time Anitramarina Reyna met the man who would become her husband, she felt slightly taken aback.



"If you've met Brandon, you know he has a strong, confident handshake – and he'd already perfected his teacher's voice," Anitramarina said. "I felt immediately intimidated by this tall, confident guy."

"I'm just good at hiding my introverted side," Brandon said. They were young – both high school seniors at a formal ceremony for the Act Six college scholarships they were receiving, both about to head to Heritage, he as a math major, she pursuing a nursing degree.

Whatever reticence Anitramarina first felt didn't last. The two soon struck up a close friendship. Both were outgoing and dedicated to their studies, and they found it easy to spend time together.

"We basically lived at Heritage," Anitramarina said. "We'd get there at 7:00 in the morning and stay through 11:00 at night."

"We were always studying, but of course, there was some goofing off to alleviate stress. We'd have lunch, walk, play board games in the Barnhill Fireside Room."

One winter, during a snowstorm, the two drove to campus early to get there before classes began. Once they arrived, they learned classes were canceled.

"We decided to stay," said Anitramarina. "It was just the two of us, studying in a room in Petrie Hall, with a YouTube video of a fireplace to distract us from the big snowfall outside."

"Rumor had it," Anitramarina said, that she may have had a crush on Brandon, even though they were technically just friends. But nothing came of it until 2020, after Anitramarina graduated from Heritage and

Brandon, who earned his bachelor's degree the year before, graduated from Whitworth University with a Master in Teaching.

Once they began dating, their days were full of hiking, kayaking and, soon, regular gatherings with both families.



They got married in the Yakima Valley in August 2023.

Today, they live in Cle Elum, where they both work for the Cle Elum-Roslyn School District. Brandon is a high school math teacher, and Anitramarina is a nurse in the school district. They have two cats, Roo and Mei.

They say the years they spent as “just friends” were a wonderful foundation for their marriage.

“We were best friends at Heritage before we even began pursuing a relationship,” said Anitramarina. “That was huge.”

Their future plans involve moving back to the Yakima Valley, buying a house, and starting a family.

Professionally, Anitramarina wants to continue to make a difference in children’s lives. Brandon imagines a future that includes adjunct teaching at Heritage.

“I’d love to give back to the university that helped shape me,” Brandon said. “And introduced me to the woman who would become my wife.”

Invitation to the Ball: The Love Story of Heber And Carmen Molina

They had the same Intro to Sociology course, saw each other around campus, and ultimately worked on student events together. However, Instagram, Snapchat and texting were the initial basis of Heber Molina and Carmen Mejia's relationship.

What began with sharing comments and thoughts on virtual platforms soon became real, with much of it playing out on the Heritage campus. Heber was a criminal justice major, and Carmen was a social work major. Both have since earned their master's degrees.



"Besides studying, we'd meet for lunch and sometimes watch movies together. Sometimes, toward the end of the day, we'd play flag football," Carmen said.

The Heritage campus, where they felt so at home, seemed like the perfect setting for two invitations Heber would make to Carmen. The first came when the Student Government Association (SGA) was hosting a masquerade ball. Heber devised a scavenger hunt to ask Carmen to go with him to the event.

"With the help of some friends, he wrote clues for me to find around campus where we spent a lot of time," Carmen said. "The last clue led to the library. Heber was waiting for me with flowers and an invitation to the ball.

"When I say Heber is detailed and thoughtful? You see what I mean."

A couple of years later, Heber outdid himself. Carmen's sorority organized a scholarship event called "Big Man on Campus." As a raffle ticket emcee, Carmen called a number Heber "just happened" to have.

"I walked up to the stage and proposed to her in front of the whole crowd, including friends and family," Heber said.



The couple married in 2018.

Student-focused events were a huge part of their Heritage life. Both the TRIO and Enactus programs gave them the opportunity to travel together. They've followed up those trips with some of their own—to the Olympic Peninsula rainforest and the Southwest, usually camping so they can bring their three dogs—Zeus, Atlas, and Kleo—who are family to them. They envision more travel to Mexico and the tropics.

Heber works for Highline Public Schools as a recruitment and retention program manager. Carmen is a student advisor at the University of Washington in Seattle.

Having recently purchased their first home in the greater Seattle area, they talked about their dreams for their future.

"We want to raise a family, maybe have our own business, maybe buy land to build our dream home."

"But more than anything," said Heber, "we plan to continue to love each other."

DREAMers: The Love Story of Jorge and Mireya Borunda

Jorge and Mireya Borunda are "opposites" personality-wise, but their values are cut from the same cloth.

They met at Heritage in 2009. Jorge was a computer science major. Mireya majored in business administration. Both were active in Enactus (formerly Students in Free Enterprise [SIFE]) and recipients of the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship. Sharing meaningful experiences helped them become friends quickly.

"We were introduced by Leonard Black, who was a business professor and in charge of SIFE," Mireya said. "He counseled me about school, about our relationship, about life. He is still like family to us."



In 2010, Jorge asked Mireya to listen to the student address he was asked to give at his commencement. In it, Jorge talked about his experience of being a DREAMer.

"We were both DREAMers," Mireya said, referring to the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM) legislation that was introduced in 2010 as a way to give undocumented young people who were brought into the country as minors a pathway to citizenship.

"We both made it through college via private scholarships, and we kept our full-time jobs throughout our studies. We worked really hard.

"What Jorge talked about in his speech really resonated with me and my story. We both had to navigate the same struggle. That speech was a highlight of our time at Heritage."

By commencement, Jorge had been accepted into his master's program at the University of Washington. He and Mireya traveled extensively as they fought for the DREAMers Act, which brought them even closer. While the Act never passed, they were able to get some protection by getting DACA status.

Romance had crossed both their minds over the years. But Jorge felt there were so many things on their plate that anything beyond friendship would be challenging.

Ultimately, laughed Mireya: "I needed to make it more formal."

Before Jorge headed to Seattle, she asked him over coffee if he wanted to be boyfriend and girlfriend.

"I played hard to get," Jorge smiled. "But after we finished our coffees, I said yes."

They dated for two years, as Jorge traveled between Seattle and Yakima. In 2012, they decided to get married right after Mireya's graduation.



Today, the couple lives in Renton, Washington, where Jorge is a functional analyst in Costco's data and analytics department. Mireya is the manager of Molina Healthcare's healthcare broker team, advocating for the community and ensuring that Medicare agents follow appropriate guidelines.

"I think people are surprised we connect the way we do, but our life goals are very clear," Mireya said. "We both value family first, and we always remember where we came from."

Remembering their struggles, particularly during the second half of college, led the couple to work with Heritage's advancement team to

create a sustainable endowment to support students in their last two years at the university.

“We had so many projects and exams, and we kept our jobs so we could make ends meet,” Mireya said. “We want the endowment to help other students who are up against the same things we were.”

“We feel very strongly that it’s important to do what we can to help others, to pay it forward,” Jorge said. 