By Amy Morgan

The lives of Dr. Rick and Kathryn Gaither read like a script from a Hollywood movie—love lost, found and a heart-warming, happy ending.

The couple, who grew up in Southwest Houston in the early 1960s, went on their first date when Kathryn was just 13 years old. They spent five years together, often spending time at the South Main Drive-in Theater, a popular hangout.

After graduation, Rick went off to college and veterinary school at Texas A&M. Like in so many movies, the couple parted ways. Rick commissioned as an officer in the army and enjoyed his military stint so much that he eventually served 28 years, retiring as a Colonel. He remembers driving across the prettiest parts of Europe procuring provisions and ensuring food safety for the troops when he was stationed at The Hague. Military veterinarians overseas perform duties similar to the USDA stateside, he explained.

“I used to say to myself, ‘It is not possible I’m being paid to do this!’” Rick’s training alerted him to prevent several potential disasters. He stopped a shipment of tainted pork and prevented Hepatitis-A contaminated milk from being distributed.

During this time, Kathryn was living her own movie script. She had secured an accounting position at the hotel directly across the street from NASA. News anchors broadcasted from the top of the roof during the Apollo moon launches. She met Neil Armstrong and Jim Lovell, as the establishment hosted glamorous splashdown parties celebrating successful missions. She eventually became the comptroller for a Houston vehicle leasing company, where she worked for 34 years. In 2009, on her 60th birthday, Kathryn realized her heart’s desire was to see Rick.

Rick had moved to San Antonio and was working at Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital. The practice had just updated its web page, and when Kathryn googled Rick, up popped his picture. After much soul searching, she sent him a letter expressing her feelings. Unbeknownst to her, Rick had gone fishing the day her special delivery letter arrived. Several agonizing weeks passed before he called.

“I got so giddy, it was like I was 16 years old again!” she said. Rick planned a trip to Houston, and it suddenly occurred to her that his last vision of her had been 40 years prior. All worries dispelled when they met. “That was it, my heart burst,” Kathryn said. The couple has been inseparable ever since and officially married Oct. 11, 2014.

The lovebirds settled into their cottage at Independence Hill Retirement Community a little more than a year ago. They enjoy watching the birds on their patio with its maintenance-free lawn. Kathryn remarked how safe they feel. She is not afraid to sit on her porch to gaze at the moon, even in the middle of the night. They also enjoy the camaraderie of the close-knit community and their neighbors.

For more information about the lifestyle offered at Independence Hill, call (210) 764-5260, or go to www.independencehill.com.