

# Cupid Hits The Mark

By Chris Moody, VA Contributor

Cupid doesn't always use a bow and arrow. The little winged one sometimes settles for a couple of hours in an Applebee's with a deep, soul-searching conversation about bicycles and running shoes. And Facebook. The year was 2016, so Facebook had to be part of it.

As Valentine's Day 2025 rolls around and people take account of their romantic situation, the Roanoke area triathlon community has a great love story front and center. Chris and Kathy Davis, who are six years married, are there for each other and for all those who do training for, competing in, and volunteering for triathlons a major part of their lives.

Look for them at the Smith Mountain Lake triathlon, a sprint event that will be held May 3. "It's one of our favorite races," Kathy said, "We just love the intimacy of it. I think it's a great introductory race for new racers."

She's right. But let's return to the story.

Using the Way Back Machine, we see Christmas Eve 2016, Kathy is visiting her parents in Bedford for the holiday, six hours from her home in Delaware. New to triathlons but enthused by the scene, she finds a Facebook group, "Ironman Singles." Don't think of it as a swipe-right site.

"It's really like a networking site so if you're like single and going to a race or you want to find someone to ride with or train," Kathy said. "It's for like-minded people."

She saw a post from Roanoke and, after a few more days in the area, reached out to the Roanoke resident to see about a meet-up. Chris Davis accepted. They met at Applebee's in Bedford and talked all things triathlon for three hours. At the end of the evening, Kathy said goodbye and thought that was that. Chris had other ideas.

"I said 'Thanks. If I'm ever back in town maybe we can go for a ride or a run or something,'" Kathy said. "Then he kept talking to me and I said, 'You know I live six hours away.'" He knew. Didn't care.

Thus started a cycle of bi-weekly road trips to see each other, along with planning for races supporting each other in training and competition. They became partners as well as a partnership within the triathlon community.

For Kathy, 2018 was quite a year. "I moved down here (to Roanoke) did my first full, turned 40, and we got married," she said. The wedding in Highland Park was complete with little cowbells – a triathlon staple – inscribed with "Iron Love." Typical wedding vows have a couplet of lines about "for better or worse; in sickness and in health."

For triathletes, injuries are common, and surgeries are regular occurrences. Kathy and Chris have both been bit by the injury bug and had medical fixes. But injuries heal. Soreness dissipates. There came a time when Chris knew he was experiencing something abnormal. Pain that was not typical. After repeated visits to orthopedic doctors, he was diagnosed with an autoimmune disease called ankylosing spondylitis, which causes inflammation in the joints.

“Many people are affected by it and are misdiagnosed,” Chris said. “I was only lucky because I was in tune with my body so well that I had a doctor finally working with me to finally diagnosed it.”

The problem is, Chris is not going to get better. Treatment is an effort to mitigate its progression. “The thing we’re trying to say is there are athletes that are battling things that are more intense than just an injury,” he said.

Training goes well sometimes, other times, not so much. Susceptible to cold, Smith Mountain Lake is too cold in early May for Chris to consider taking part in that race. He’ll be there, however, cooking bacon and pork barbecue for everyone.

Chris wants to train for and run in one ultra-marathon and bring his ultra-running son into the fold of triathlon enthusiasts. While that will signal the completion of a transition into a supporting role, he’s been working his way toward that direction for years. “Just because I can’t work out the way I used to I had to switch roles. I’ve helped so many people grow in the sport that you know I couldn’t just walk away from it,” he said, “I like just being there for everybody. Now there’s several of them that refer to me as ‘Papa.’”

Kathy said Chris is more like a MacGyver. He can fix anything – from a bicycle to a uniform zipper. He saved the races of a young woman in Roanoke whose wardrobe malfunction would have kept her from racing and a man whose handlebars needed a major repair to make the bike safe to ride. “Chris just fixes everything,” Kathy said. “He has all the tools. It’s so funny in the morning and somebody runs up saying ‘I can’t get this done or my zipper broke, or my bike won’t shift.’”

Kathy is comfortable in a supporting role, as well. She is the president of the Roanoke Triathlon Club and an organizer, along with Chris, of course, of weekly Wednesday rides. “We support the club at different races,” she said. “Smith Mountain Lake is one of the big ones. We always have a huge showing and we always do a big breakfast. We start cooking the bacon as soon as the swim starts. We just love to support the club. If we’re not racing, we’re volunteering.”

Whatever Chris and Kathy are doing – training, supporting each other or supporting the club and other triathletes – they’re doing it together. Cupid didn’t need an arrow. The bike was enough.