The Bridges of Madison County

Welcome to the national tour of The Bridges of Madison County, one of the most romantic stories ever told.

The Bridges of Madison County is the unforgettable story of two people caught between decision and desire, as a chance encounter becomes a second chance at so much more.

The story of Iowa housewife Francesca Johnson and her life-changing, four-day whirlwind romance with traveling photographer Robert Kincaid,

The Bridges of Madison County first captured the nation’s attention over 20 years ago as a best-selling novel by Robert James Waller, then as a film starring Meryl Streep and Clint Eastwood.

You may be one of the over 50 million readers of the book, or one of the many who loved the movie, or perhaps you are brand new to The Bridges of Madison County. Whatever your relationship, now is your chance to experience this love story live as the two-time Tony Award®-winning Broadway musical sets out across the country.
"But what we did is that WE LOVED AND LOVE IS ALWAYS BETTER.
— Francesca, The Bridges of Madison County"
The Bridges of Madison County has been told in three different genres—originally as a novel, then a film and now as a musical.

**THE BOOK**

The Bridges of Madison County was written by Iowa native and University of North Iowa economics professor, Robert James Waller. It was a mash-up of Waller’s personal experiences—his time as an amateur photographer taking pictures of Madison County’s covered bridges and a song that he wrote about a woman named Francesca who wanted love and a better life. Told from the third person, the novel uses simple and plain language to evoke the passion and longing of the story. The focus of The Bridges of Madison County is Robert Kincaid. The novel, The Bridges of Madison County would spend 164 weeks on the New York Times bestseller list, selling over 50 million copies worldwide and be translated into 23 languages. But the story was far from over.

Yet, Warner Books purchased the novel and published it in 1992. Initially, big chain books stores were wary of Bridges, the untraditional length plus the mixed reviews did nothing to dissuade their reluctance. Then summer came and something began to happen. Chain and independent book stores were noticing a spike in sales. Customers were buying multiple copies of the novel to pass out to friends and relatives.

By the beginning of 1993, The Bridges of Madison County was a sleeper hit. It was rising to the top of the best seller list from word of mouth, by readers who fell in love with the story and told their friends. Then came Oprah.

In 1993, The Oprah Winfrey Show was the highest-rated talk show in America. With a viewership of about 8 million. On May 23, 1993, Oprah filmed her show at Cedar Bridge in Winterset, Iowa. The episode was entitled “Bridge of Love,” where guests talked about their real-life Bridges love stories. Reportedly, during taping of the show, Oprah leaned over to Waller on a commercial break and said, “By the end of this weekend, you won’t be able to buy a copy of The Bridges of Madison County in America.”

The novel, The Bridges of Madison County would be written by Iowa native and University of North Iowa economics professor, Robert James Waller. His life and family are something that Robert discovers on his journey. He has been all over the world but the most exotic place he discovers is the love in his heart for a one woman. The novel would dominate the publishing world and capture the popular imagination of the 1990s, but it had a bumpy start.

First, Waller’s agent was skeptical. He was concerned over the book’s length; at 42,000 words it was too short for a novel. He also thought the style was odd and the theme wasn’t the kind of stuff that sells.

**THE MOVIE**

The film, The Bridges of Madison County was shot in Winterset, Iowa in the late summer of 1992. Clint Eastwood co-produced, directed and portrayed Robert Kincaid. Meryl Streep starred as Francesca. The script was written by Richard LaGravenese, who wrote the fantastical and touching The Fisher King. Unlike the novel, the film tells the story from Francesca’s point of view. Her longing and her choices propel the action of the film. Francesca is the heart of the story. It was a rarity in a Hollywood film to have a middle-aged woman’s journey at the center. The role of Francesca would earn Streep an Academy Award® nomination. According to Janet Maslin in a New York Times review (June 2, 1993) Streep, “looking sturdy and volupitous in her plain housedress...embodies all the loneliness and fierce yearning Andrew Wyeth captured on canvas.”

Through his direction, Eastwood created a subtle and lush film. Incorporating jazz tracks from Johnny Hartman, Dinah Washington, and Irene Kral, Eastwood used music to underscore the rising tension and deep emotions of the two lovers. Richard Corliss writes in Time magazine (June 5, 1995) “The Bridges of Madison County...is about the anticipation and consequences of passion—the slow dance of appraisal, of waiting to make a move that won’t be rejected, of debating what to do when the erotic heat matures into love light. What is the effect of an affair on a woman who has been faithful to her husband, and on a restless man who only now realizes he needs the one woman he can have but not hold?”

“I believe that a lot of people have the potential to fall in love with any number of people. You don’t know what fate has in store.”

—Kathleen Kennedy, Co-Producer, The Bridges of Madison County (Film)

**THE MUSICAL**

The Bridges of Madison County, the musical, first premiered at the Williamstown Theatre Festival in August 2013 and was followed by a critically acclaimed run on Broadway at the Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre in 2014. The Broadway production featured Tony Award®winner Kelli O’Hara as Francesca and Steven Pasquale as Robert. Bridges would win the 2014 Tony for Best Original Score and Best Orchestrations.

Reflecting on where the musical sits alongside the book and the movie, writer Marsha Norman said “...What we’ve built is an expansion on the book and on the movie...the novel has nailed an iconic idea, which is: What if you had a week that didn’t count? What if you discovered your soulmate in the middle of a failing marriage and having children? What would you do? And from what we’ve seen from audiences, enough people have had those experiences...And not only did they respond, they cried. They talked to us. They grabbed us. There is something in this piece that causes people to go into their personal lives and respond from what’s happened to them and to connect with the people on the stage.”

And the love continues. In the fall of 2015, a national tour begins in Iowa and travels across America, to bring the story that has been beloved for two generations to die-hard and new fans alike.

“A novel, a film and now a musical. What is it about The Bridges of Madison County that continues inspire audiences? Why do you think this story keeps getting told?”

“...ONE OF THE MOST ROMANTIC, STIRRING TALES OF TRUE LOVE...”

—Oprah Winfrey

“The essence of musical theatre is conveying an emotional experience, an illumination of some aspect of human life.”

—Marsha Norman, Book Writer, The Bridges of Madison County; Notes on the Musical Book
The Bridges of Madison County

RICHARD “BUD” JOHNSON — Iowa farmer, rigid and dependable. He resents his life, he gets irritated that life hasn’t gotten easier. Bud’s daughter, age 14 — Prone to trouble with authority. We’ll guide you through the great unknown: WE’RE STANDING BESIDE YOU/ REACH OUT AND TOUCH ME. YOU’RE NEVER ALONE.

FRANCESCA — An Italian woman who came to Iowa as a war bride. She is hard working and diligent. Life has not unfolded the way Francesca has expected but she has made a family and life for herself.

Robert’s former wife, a musician. Wearing four years of mid-western sturdiness and kindness. His energy is the edge of propelling him into life of either productivity or trouble.

FRANCESCA — Suddenly there’s a world I never knew. And somewhere ahead of me... Bud before and after you.” Late 30s, early 40s — An Italian woman who came to Iowa as a war bride. She is hard working and diligent. Life has not unfolded the way Francesca has expected but she has made a family and life for herself.

CHARLIE — Marge, I’m not at the fair. You’re not in the truck. We’re not where we want to be... Do we have any of that cake left? 60s — Marge’s husband. Salt of the earth. The best example of mid-western stubrnless and kindness.

MARGE — Marge, I’m not at the fair. You’re not in the truck. We’re not where we want to be... Do we have any of that cake left? 60s — Marge’s husband.

MARIAN — “Find a picture of a woman. Wearing four years of confusion like a scarf.” 40s — Robert’s former wife, a musician.

CHIARA — “Chiara would squeeze every drop of attention wherever she’d go.” Francesca’s sister still living in Italy.

“First impressions are everything” — is true, especially on the stage. Another cliché that actually does? How would you describe what a costume designer actually does? A costume designer creates the first impression the audience has regarding a character. They assist and collaborate with the actor and the director to bring to life the external definition of the character they are portraying. Can you share something about the costumes for The Bridges of Madison County that an audience member could look for while watching the show? What is a part of the design they will see that could only happen onstage rather than in the film or book? Francesca starts out in our story wearing pretty much anything a mid-’60s woman might wear, but by the end of the show she appears in a deep shade of pink. Her hair is worn down. Regarding costume design, the progression that occurs in ‘When I’m Gone’ happens before our eyes, during the course of the song. This could happen in a film, but the theatricality of the amount of information that transforms us through 15 years of time in less than 5 minutes on stage is thrilling.

Mike or no influence on society.” Thank you Mark Twain! Theatre is a collaborative medium. How do you work with the director and your fellow designers? Can you give us a glimpse into that collaboration? Our designer gives us his priorities for the story-telling. He encourages us to visually assist his vision by illustrating the emotions the audience should take away from the experience. As designers, it is our responsibility to search for those key visual elements that guide our journey through the story. The theatre keeps alive — “Clothes make the man.” The full reflection is — is true; especially on the stage. Another cliché that actually does? How does the costume design help tell the story of The Bridges of Madison County? The costume designer helps the audience understand the people in the play! In The Bridges of Madison County, the costumes strive to capture Iowa in the mid-60’s. Some of the characters would have dresses that would have been homemade, or from a mail-order catalog, or a dry-goods shop in the local town. It is the summertime, so the clothing contributes to creating those wonderful sultry August days.

As designers, it is our responsibility to help the audience navigate the world of the play. They assist and collaborate with the actor and the director to bring to life the external definition of the character they are portraying. They assist and collaborate with the actor and the director to bring to life the external definition of the character they are portraying. There is nothing urban about the clothes.”

Reflections from Six-Time Tony® Award Winning Costume Designer CATHERINE ZUBER

IN SHOW Biz, a triple threat is a performer who can sing, dance and act. Think Catherine Zeta-Jones, Hugh Jackman, Vanessa Williams, Neil Patrick Harris, James Cagney. The Bridges of Madison County could be considered a triple threat. It has been a novel, a movie and a musical. What about you? Do you own the book? Is it hardcover, special and always dusted? Do you have a copy in paper back? Do you have multiple paperbacks to pass out to friends — because they need to read it? Do you own the movie? On VHS? DVD? Bob? Do you have an electronic copy on your laptop? Do you always watch Bridges when you stumble upon it on cable? Do you watch it until the end and cry every time? Now you can enjoy The Bridges of Madison County through the power of song. Reconnect with characters you know and love. See how they have been re-imagined. Meet new characters. It is time to go back to Winterset. It is time to fall in love all over again. It’s time to become a Triple Threat! How does the costume design help tell the story of The Bridges of Madison County? How would you describe what a costume designer actually does? A costume designer creates the first impression the audience has regarding a character. They assist and collaborate with the actor and the director to bring to life the external definition of the character they are portraying. How does the costume design help tell the story of The Bridges of Madison County?" — Catherine Zuber, Costume Designer, The Bridges of Madison County.

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COSTUME DESIGN

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thought it was a bridge/You thought it was the water/You thought it was sky/It's the — Robert, The Bridges of Madison County.

“There are a lot of things you won’t find in Iowa. But CARE is not one of them. People care about each other here.”
— Francesca, The Bridges of Madison County

COMMUNITY

PERFORMERS IN A MUSICAL production must work together. The ensemble of actors must coordinate the movement, music and words, with the lights, set and costumes. Like a community bringing in the harvest, or building a barn; an ensemble works together to tell the audience a story.

One of the primary differences between The Bridges of Madison County, the musical, and previous versions of the story is the prominence of the Winterset, Iowa community. Taking on multiple roles, an ensemble of twelve actors create Francesca’s family and the community that surrounds the intimate world of Francesca and Robert.

In songs like “To Build a Home” and “You’re Never Alone”, director Bartlett Sher’s staging further explores the theme of community by having the actors move the set pieces — literally building the town. They also sit silently in chairs at the edge of the action through much of show. “I think it is a Greek chorus,” Sher said of the device. “What do the citizens of Thebes think about what’s happening to Oedipus, or in this case, what do the citizens of Winterset, Iowa, feel about the story?”

Having the community of Winterset witness the love affair deepens the tension between passion, freedom, security and responsibility. The chorus of citizens contrasts with Robert’s isolation and highlights what Francesca is risking to be with Robert.

In the musical, community is happening in many ways. There is the community in the story themselves — the people of Winterset. There is the community of performers, technicians and musicians working together to create the story on stage.

And there is the community of the audience who are the ultimate witnesses.

1) How does having the larger community on stage impact the story for you?
2) Does meeting Francesca’s family shift the way you feel about the love story? About her decision?

PLACE AND TIME

PLACE AND TIME are important parts of a musical. Place and time determine the choices that characters make. The scope of their possibilities. A change in place and time can alter a story profoundly.

1) Imagine if The Bridges of Madison County was set in 1965, San Francisco or New York City. How would the change of setting alter the story?
2) Do you think that Francesca would face the same choices if the story took place in 1935, 1965 or 2015?

Robert Kincaid doesn’t work here

AFTER THE SUCCESS OF THE NOVEL AND MOVIE, National Geographic headquarters in Washington, D.C. began receiving requests for copies of the May 1966 issue that contained the photos of the bridges of Madison County taken by Robert Kincaid.

National Geographic told the Bridges enthusiasts that since Kincaid was a fictional person, he didn’t work for the magazine nor did he take any pictures of the covered bridges of Madison County. The magazine seen in the 1992 film was fake. The real May 1966 cover photo was of the Golden Gate Bridge.

The requests kept coming so National Geographic embraced Bridges’ fans enthusiasm and paid tribute to the movie by including a copy of the “Robert Kincaid” cover in its museum.

Robert Kincaid didn’t work there

The Roseman Bridge — featured in the love story—is also known as the “haunted bridge.” In 1872 two sheriff’s posses trapped a county jail escapee and it is rumored that the man rose up straight through the roof of the bridge, uttered a wild cry and disappeared. The escapee was never found.

The bridges became nationally known because of the success of Robert James Waller’s novel The Bridges of Madison County. The bridges reached super stardom after the release of the film, in 1993. And according to the website roadtrippers.com the bridges of Madison County are the number one make out spot in Iowa.

The Cutler-Donahol was built by Eli-Cox in 1870. Hogback were built between 1870-1880 by Benton Jones.

Five of the bridges: Roseman, Holliwell, Cedar, Imes-Cox and Hogback were built between 1870-1880 by Benton Jones. The Cutler-Donahol was built by Eli-Cox in 1870.
When caught up in story, lost in drama, wiping tears of laughter or sorrow from our eyes, we don't normally think of the set and the lights as part of the journey. But they are. These design elements provide the context for the story — establishing the tone, mood and style of a show.

bridge (brij), n. 1. a structure spanning and providing passage over a river, chasm, road, or the like. 2. a connecting, transitional, or intermediate route, phase, etc.

The Bridges of Madison County are a real-life place as well as the physical catalyst that brings Francesca and Robert together in the story. Bridges are often used as a metaphor for life's journey. Our language is filled with bridge imagery — we build bridges, we burn bridges, we bridge the gap. A bridge can symbolize a transition or a change. Crossing a bridge can be a transformation — we are not the same person we were on the other side of the bridge.

Why do you think bridges are used to symbolize Robert and Francesca's love story?

If it had been a different physical structure — like a road or a lighthouse — would it have been a different story?

Are there bridges you have had to cross in your own life? Where did that crossing take you?

“And I’ve been looking for something at every bridge that I crossed.”
— Robert, The Bridges of Madison County

We experience sunrise, sunset, dawn, twilight, moonlight, starlight. And the color of the sky and the direction of the sun or moon has a strong influence on all the other light that is introduced in the space. It’s a world filled with ever-changing natural light, ebbing and flowing to respond to the emotional temperature of a scene or song. During the flashbacks, the sky takes on a surreal quality with very rich and intense colors, thus providing an important clue to the audience that we have stepped back in time.

Theatre is a collaborative medium. How do you work with the director and your fellow designers?

Because light can be so influential about how everything is perceived, it’s very important that a lighting designer understands the intentions and objectives of the director and his design collaborators. Early conversations that get to the heart of the production and its overall vision are really crucial. And a great deal can be learned by studying the set design, as it will always provide a lot of information about how the show has been conceived and will be staged. Because lighting and scenery share the same stage space, the two disciplines must work in close collaboration.

In the case of Bridges, Michael, Mikiko (scenic and associate scenic designers) and I spent a great deal of time working out the proper spatial relationships between lighting positions and scenery to get the sky looking just right. We also collaborated on the layout and details of the star field you’ll see throughout the course of the evening.

Can you share something about the lighting design for The Bridges of Madison County that an audience member could look for while watching the show? What is part of the design they will see that could only happen onstage rather than in the film or book?

In Act One, Robert and Francesca meet at dawn as he photographs the sunrise at the covered bridge. It’s a special moment in their relationship, I speculate it’s when they fell in love. As all of this unfolds, the sky takes on a brilliant surreal red, with a single onstage tree silhouetted by a bright golden sun. It’s a dramatic and poetically heightened moment that we see once again in Act Two. During the song “It All Fades Away,” as Robert considers his own passing, he remembers Francesca vividly and the sky returns to that same intense red and yellow at the musical and emotional zenith of this song. To me, it’s one of my favorite images in the entire production.

How does the lighting design help tell the story of The Bridges of Madison County?

The story of The Bridges Of Madison County unfolds on a relatively open space, in front of a vast expanse of Iowa sky, and takes place over the course of just a few days. Although much of the story is told in a linear fashion time-wise, there are several flashbacks that provide important context and deepen our connection with the characters. The passage of time is central to the telling of the story, and the sky, as rendered through light is the principal device used to communicate this, constantly changing during the course of the evening.

How would you describe what a lighting designer actually does?

A lighting designer “reveals the world of the play or musical,” and is responsible for not only what the audience sees, but “how they see it.” Light provides the visual context for a theatrical event, or the lens through which a play is seen. It informs style, and has a clear subliminal effect on perception. Working with a strong understanding of the intentions of the director and his fellow collaborators, a lighting designer manipulates light to tell a particular story or to evoke a particular emotional response.

Donald Holder, Lighting Designer, The Bridges of Madison County

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— Donald Holder, Lighting Designer, The Bridges of Madison County

“Crossing a bridge, a river or a border is to leave behind the familiar, personal and comfortable and enter the unknown…”
— Jean-Pierre Vernant
It’s this moment that people have when they think, “What about that other path? What about that love that I had to turn away from?” What about that? What would have happened if married that guy who went to the University of New Mexico?

Robert describes the music and the book as having a “shared” creative process. “The book and the music, you know, there was a lot of people telling the story — including a lot of people on the creative team. Everybody, I think. [Laughing]"

So yes, we have these questions. We all deal with this thing. We can’t have absolutely everything that we want to have in life. Because some of these things conflict.

Robert’s description of what his and Francesca’s life would be is so seductive and wondrous. She would actually be happy with him or not, it doesn’t even matter. She makes the decision to honor her responsibilities and she knows that if she leaves, her son is going to be in trouble. [Her daughter] Carolyn is going to be fine. But [her son] Michael? She still needs to stay to take care of Michael. To make sure Michael does okay. That’s why we see Michael’s graduation from medical school. She did have that effect. Michael was ready to bolt out of there and get in trouble with the law and his dad or whatever — and she saw that. She knew that he wasn’t going to be a farmer. She knows he has to stay.

We sometimes have to make those really hard choices between the things that we care about.

I wonder about the danger of the town watching all this happen. It seems almost as if Francesca’s all-knowing neighbor, Marge, is cheering her on! Isn’t Francesca scared?

In that moment that she chooses her family — it’s Robert’s world versus the world of passion. That’s why Marge arrives right there at the end when [Marge] leaves from Bud’s funeral and says, “I do not need to let it sit around here in the house where just my daughter and I. I need to call three people to have some...”

The piece brings up all the “what would happen,” that’s fun to suppose about. But for Francesca she’s going to make that decision in-rash-moment. The truck moment from [The Wizard of Oz] is so remarkable that we worked really hard to find something that would give us a sense of the truck moment. That’s what we call “The Rewind.”

That’s where she appears to go to Robert. Suddenly, she turns around and stops and sees her family and knows what they would feel if she did that. And she walks back to them. And then time picks up again and she goes into the Soup Shop and Marge and Robert look at each other and they both say, “What if she chooses her responsibilities and she knows that if she leaves, her son is going to be in trouble,” and that’s what we call “The Rewind.”

It’s about a goodness of goodness. It’s about a goodness in goodness. It’s about a goodness on-the-stage goodness. It’s about a goodness-theaters.”

Robert says, “The theatre does, 4 out of every 5 things on stage that were written by a woman?”

“I mean, she’s certainly played all the glorious [female leads on Broadway],”

You feel such a less right now. You’ve lost both of these men now and here you sit. And I will see you in the morning.” [Laughing]

That’s the kind of thing, the comfort that women can provide to each other. And I think that’s very important. It’s very important. It’s how it’s done in art, in the theatre, and for work and for gender parity. Kelli received an award from us the year before last. I mean, she’s certainly played all the glorious [female leads on Broadway], but for [Francesca] to be the first time she has ever said words on stage that were written by a woman?

I was hearing this for the first time as she was saying this on the stage [at the Lily Awards]. It was a staggering experience for me and I think for the audience. I suddenly felt the significance of my staying alive in order to write. And my activism and the importance of the mission of gender parity, so the voices of women can be heard and the stories of women can be told.

In regard to gender parity, if I worked the way the theaters do, 4 out of every 5 things you heard would be said by men. In working for parity gender we are working to hear all the voices of the human chorus on the stage. All the voices. All the stories. In not hearing the voices of women, it’s almost as if theatres have chosen to only tell stories about things that happen in the daytime. It’s eliminating half the experience of life on the stage.

We need to hear all the voices in the human chorus.

So yes, if an all-male team had written this — I’m sure it would have been the Robert story. I’m totally sure. And what is the Robert story? I came into town, I met this woman. We had a date. I had a couple of thoughts of what to say or not to say her off in the truck with me and then I left. Got back to New York and saw the show. It’s there. There’s not a musical in the Robert story. There’s only a musical in the Francesca story. As in Oklahoma, so it is in Waiting. The lones have to go on their way. It’s true with musicals in general. I teach musical book-writing [at Juilliard]. This is one of the big rules. The lones go on their way. But people come to musicals to watch that glorious search for home in song. It’s all the voices. In not hearing the voices of women, it’s almost as if theaters have chosen to only tell stories about things that happen in the daytime. It’s eliminating half the experience of life on the stage.

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If you think about us as a country — there are things that we’ve lost. And yes, we mourn them. We had to give them up in order to move forward towards the other things we believe. This making of choices is something that people respond to and in this case they get to really watch a big one, a big choice and it’s kind of the most elemental thing.

It’s a story about choice.
THE POWER OF MUSIC

“The lyric theatre felt like the perfect vehicle to tell the story of Robert and Francesca.”
—Jason Robert Brown, Composer, The Bridges of Madison County

Composer’s Notes

I had been writing comedies for several years, and the longer lines of romance and yearning and fantasy had been building up, swirling around my head unchanneled, imprecise. When Marsha and I did The Trumpet of the Swan, big music, started to leak out, expansive music, something beautiful. I was afraid of turning off the tap, so I told Marsha we should look for a project that would be serious and intense and overflowing with unrestrained passion, which is not the kind of thing I say very often. I said I was ready to write Le Traviata. We set out to find a story.

The story found us. Robert James Waller’s agent approached Marsha to adapt The Bridges of Madison County, and she immediately knew this would be our project. I had never read the novel but I regarded it warily — I was a 22-year-old single guy living in Manhattan when it first came out, and I was not, to put it mildly, the target audience — but Marsha saw in it a deeper resonance and a fiercer moral energy than I would have perceived, and she sold me on the struggles of these two broken characters who each see a piece of themselves trapped inside the other. I suggested we conceive it as an octet, a piece for eight lonely voices on a large stage.

The piano reflects my energy back at me, neurotic and complicated — I knew the instrument so well by now that I sometimes have to wrestle with it to make it surprise me, and I knew that the skittery and dense music that the piano and I traditionally made together wasn’t the right sound for this piece. I’d played guitar the way most guys who hang around rock bands play it — I knew a couple of chords and I could keep time relatively well — but I felt the guitar was my way in to the world of the Johnson family in Winterset, IA in 1965, so I bought a black Takamine and hoped for the best.

From the beginning, the music flooded out of me, music that I didn’t entirely recognize as my own but that was clearly speaking some revelation to me. I felt myself sometimes butting up against the corny, the cheesy, the sentimental, but I decided in those moments to entirely recognize as my own but that was clearly speaking some revelation to me. I felt myself sometimes butting up against the corny, the cheesy, the sentimental, but I decided in those moments to entirely recognize as my own but that was clearly speaking some revelation to me. I felt myself sometimes butting up against the corny, the cheesy, the sentimental, but I decided in those moments to entirely recognize as my own but that was clearly speaking some revelation to me. I felt myself sometimes butting up against the corny, the cheesy, the sentimental, but I decided in those moments to entirely recognize as my own but that was clearly speaking some revelation to me. 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“BUT WHAT A CHOICE! AND WHAT A GIFT! AND WHAT A BLESSING!”
—Francesca, The Bridges of Madison County

IT CAN MOVE MOUNTAINS. It is a many splendid thing. It makes the world go round. The material of poems and ballads. It causes foolish extravagances and profound acts of tenderness. All encompassing. In its embrace you can find yourself, you can forget yourself, you can eat a whole chocolate cake. It explodes fireworks in the soul and brings tears to the eyes. It sings in the toes. Flowing across cultures, it is not bound by language, distance or time. Love. It is what makes The Bridges of Madison County a timeless story. Not only the romance of Robert and Francesca, but the love of family; community; art; are the heartbeat of the musical.

At first sight.
IN THE BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY, Robert and Francesca have an instant connection that blooms into an intense love affair. How is that possible? Can love appear in an instant?

According to Plato, when the soul descends from heaven it is split in two. So that immediate spark when shaking hands with a stranger at a party, that moment your heart catches in your throat, when the world collapses to a single vision of ‘the one,’ this profound sense of connection, may be the reunion of two halves of the same soul.

The ancients were not the only ones to believe in love at first sight. A 2014 survey in The Wall Street Journal, by the dating site Match.com, polled more than 5,000 singles ages 21 to 70-plus. They found that: 59% of men and 49% of women said they believe in love at first sight. And 41% of men and 29% of women say they have experienced it.

Do you believe in love at first sight? Have you experienced it?

“IT CAN MOVE MOUNTAINS. It is a many splendid thing. It makes the world go round. The material of poems and ballads. It causes foolish extravagances and profound acts of tenderness. All encompassing. In its embrace you can find yourself, you can forget yourself, you can eat a whole chocolate cake. It explodes fireworks in the soul and brings tears to the eyes. It sings in the toes. Flowing across cultures, it is not bound by language, distance or time. Love. It is what makes The Bridges of Madison County a timeless story. Not only the romance of Robert and Francesca, but the love of family; community; art; are the heartbeat of the musical.”

The Science of Love

MAYBE LOVE IS NOT THE MYSTICAL MEETING of soul mates after lifetimes of separation but the meeting of hormones and neurotransmitters. Can science explain the instant attraction and intensity that Robert and Francesca experience? Some believe love is biology.

Scientist Helen Fisher of Rutgers University proposed 3 stages of love, each driven by different hormones and chemicals.

Stage 1: Lust
This is the time of intense sexual desire and physical longing, driven by the hormones testosterone and estrogen.

Stage 2: Attraction
This is the amazing time when you are love-struck and can think of little else. Scientists posit that three main neurotransmitters are involved in this stage: Adrenaline — sweaty palms and racing heart. Dopamine — the rush of pleasure when in the presence of or thinking about a beloved. Lastly, Serotonin — which controls mood, appetite, digestion, sleep, memory and sexual desire. Serotonin is why you can’t get a lover out of your mind. Why you can’t sleep or eat for thoughts of love.

Stage 3: Attachment
Attachment is the territory of commitment. Facebook® status changes, rings and weddings. Two hormones help with in this stage: Oxytocin — the cuddle hormone and Vasopressin. Both are released by people when they make love. These hormones deepen feelings of closeness and devotion.

Scientists learned the importance of Vasopressin when studying the Prairie Vole. Prairie Voles are small rodents found in the grasslands of North America. Like humans they indulge in recreational sex and form fairly stable pair-bonds. When scientist gave male Prairie Voles a drug that suppresses Vasopressin, the bond with their partner deteriorated immediately. They lost their devotion and failed to protect their partner from new suitors.
IN A STUDY ON HUMAN CLOSENESS AND INTIMACY, Psychologist and Stony Brook Professor Arthur Aron composed the following experiment. He asked his subjects to carry out the three steps listed below and found that many of his couples felt deeply attracted after the 34 minute experiment. Two of his subjects later got married.

There were 36 questions in the study, broken up into three sets. Each set is intended to be more probing than the previous one. Sample questions:

5. When did you last sing to yourself? To someone else?
21. What roles do love and affection play in your life?

So you if you’d like to find your Robert or Francesca...:
• Find someone you don’t know.
• Reveal to each other intimate details about your lives for half an hour.
• Then, stare deeply into each other’s eyes without talking for four minutes.
• Congratulations you may be in love!

If you’d like to know more:

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If you’d like to know more:
“The only things that mattered were the four days in your arms, cause, it all fades away but you.”

—Robert, The Bridges of Madison County