

LOVE BLOSSOMS BETWEEN COACH AND BUDDING BOXER

You ought to do something with those muscles," 50-year-old Barry Becker told 22-year-old Sumya Anani. "You ought to fight."

It was 1993 at Bally's gym in Overland Park. Barry often saw Sumya working out hard.

"I used to be a boxer, and I could tell she was strong," Barry says. Women's boxing was starting to kick off, and Barry was considering training someone.

But Sumya was a single mom with a 3-year-old son, struggling to make ends meet. She was not interested in boxing. Still, she was always friendly to Barry, nodding politely when he mentioned the sport.

One day, Barry told Sumya that he had lost the Jamaican necklace he always wore. She found it at the gym and returned it.

"I thought that was so nice," Barry said.

They began talking. Barry often took groups to Jamaica to visit the resort his mother owned there. He invited Sumya to join a group. During the vacation, Sumya found work in Jamaica. She moved there a month later, in January 1995. Once, Barry

saw her in a spontaneous wrestling match with a 175-pound man — a local performer — on the beach.

"She wore him down," Barry says. "I had no idea a woman could wrestle like that."

When Sumya moved back to Kansas City in the summer of 1996, Barry told her, "I've got you a fight. You have three weeks to train."

Sumya had no money, no car and no job. She was living with her mom. The fight paid \$400. She said yes.

They started training and spending time together. Soon they were dating.

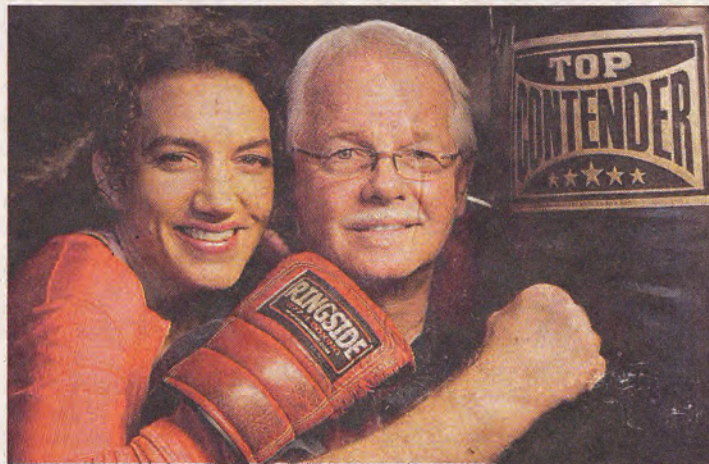
"Barry is so funny, friendly, cute and helpful," Sumya says. "Plus, his support and his encouragement were amazing. He really helped me rebuild my self-esteem."

"Sumya is a good person with a good heart," Barry says. "When she puts her mind to something, nothing can stop her."

Sumya put her mind to boxing. For 10 years, she trained with Barry and boxed. She traveled the country and won four world championships.

"I had a vision, and she listened," Barry says. "She's one in a million."

Today, the couple live in Overland Park



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Sumya Anani and Barry Becker started training and spending time together. Before long, they were dating.

with Sumya's son. Barry has three grown children. Sumya works as a personal trainer, yoga teacher and nutritional consultant. Barry owns Barry Becker's Carpet. They love to visit Jamaica, go to the dog park with their dogs and work out together. Though they value alone time, they miss each other when they're not together. "The cool thing is we were friends first,"

Sumya says. "That friendship is a great foundation for our relationship. We're always laughing."

"Sumya inspired me," Barry says. "She's the best."

Deborah House is a freelance writer. Suggest a Love Story couple by writing to love-story@kcstar.com.