It’s hard to imagine the vast number of first dates, first kisses, or even marriage proposals that have occurred at Barrington’s historic Catlow Theater since its grand opening on May 28, 1927. Over its nearly 90-year history, the Catlow has accumulated so many memories that if walls could talk, the theater could probably write Barrington’s history by itself.

Barrington-area residents Carla and Mike Stobart (pictured above) were one couple who had their first solo date at the Catlow back in 1972. In celebration of their 40th anniversary, they now are the proud owners of the very chairs where they sat on that first date.

The story goes like this: Mike had checked the papers, and the hottest movie of the year, “The Godfather,” was playing at the Catlow. Megawatt stars Al Pacino, Marlon Brando, James Caan, Diane Keaton, and Robert Duvall were lighting up the screen, so he invited Carla to travel with him all the way from Elmwood Park to see what all the fuss was about.

Carla recalls: “I remember the night we drove from Elmwood Park in a nonstop downpour. The streets were pretty dark and not busy until we reached Main Street. The line to get into the show was all the way around to the railroad tracks. I was to get the tickets while Mike parked the car. I got to the window, and I had gotten the last two seats in the theater! They happened to be by the first exit on the right, and I remember feeling the rumble of the train when it passed through and also hearing the rain. It was the best night.”

She continues, “A few years later after Mike and I married, we moved to Barrington to raise our family and continued to go to the Catlow. Then, during our 40th wedding anniversary year, the Catlow announced that they were raising money through donations to upgrade the theater. I was probably one of the first to help this process – I walked into Baloney’s and talked to Roberta [the Catlow owner]. I told her my story of how I needed my two seats to give to my husband for our 40th anniversary present. Roberta walked with me into the theater to see the chairs, and when the time came, she called me to pick them up, showing me the new chairs that would go in their place. It was a bittersweet moment – and the best donation I ever made.”

Carla then took her chairs to Don Michaelchuck of Don’s Upholstery in Fox River Grove, who remade them in their original red-velvet tradition and placed plaques with the couple’s names on the back. Don was so touched by this couple’s story that he felt it should be told.

By saving and remaking their theater chairs from the Catlow, Carla and Mike have reminded us that as we celebrate Barrington’s 150th birthday, it’s important to cherish our memories of old times, but also to save and preserve those elements of our history that will live on long into the future.