Julia Dent Grant and Ulysses S. Grant enjoyed an unusually close relationship and a warm, loving marriage. They met in February of 1844 when Grant visited her home near Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis, upon the urging of his West Point roommate, Julia's brother. It was not long until they were spending much time together. In 1890 Julia recalled those happy days and Grant's proposal:

One summer day we were going to a morning wedding, and Lieutenant Grant was also invited. He came for us on horseback, and asked my brother's permission to drive me, in exchange for his saddle, to which he gladly consented.

The day was beautiful, the roads were a little heavy from previous rain, but the sun shone in splendor. We had to cross a little bridge that spanned a ravine, and when we reached it, I was surprised and a little concerned to find the gulch swollen, a most unusual thing, the water reaching to the bridge. I noticed, too, that Lieutenant Grant was very quiet. That and the high water bothered me. I asked several times if he thought the water dangerous to cross and told him I would go back rather than take any risk. He assured me, in his brief way, that it was perfectly safe, and in my heart I relied on him.
Just as we reached the old bridge I said, "Now, if anything happens, remember I shall cling to you, no matter what you say to the contrary." He simply said, "All right." And we were over the planks in less than a minute. Then his mood changed, he became more social, and in asking me to be his wife, used my threat (to cling to him) as a theme.

After dinner that afternoon, Lieutenant Grant asked me to set the day. I wanted to be engaged, and told him it would be much nicer than getting married. This was a sentiment he did not approve.

We were very quiet at the house that evening and neither said a word of the secret. After supper he went back to the regiment, and a few days later General Taylor sent him to Camp Salubrity in Louisiana. He was too shy to ask father, so he waited till he was stationed and wrote to him. Father never answered the letter. I was his favorite daughter, and he thought army life would not suit me. "Besides," said father, "you are too young and the boy is too poor. He hasn't anything to give you."
I rose in my wrath and said I was poor too and hadn't anything to give him.
The next year he came back on a leave of absence and I can remember just how he looked as he rode up in his new uniform. Father was going to Washington on business and we were all on the front porch kissing him good-by and stuffing his pockets with notes of things he was to buy. Lieutenant Grant asked for my hand, and he, in a hurry to get off, consented. (1)

During the Mexican War Grant wrote many letters to Julia. She wrote back to him, but not as frequently as he would have liked. Her letters do not survive. His are published in volume one of the Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, edited by John Y. Simon. On June 10th, 1846 in Matamoras, Mexico, he wrote this affectionate message to her:

My Dear Julia, now that we are so far distant from each other, you are my constant thought when I am alone. When I lay down I think of Julia until I fall asleep, hoping that before I wake I may see her in my dreams. I know too Dearest, from your letters that I am not forgotten. The many pleasant hours spent with you often pass in review before my memory. It certainly cannot be a great while before a recurrence of similar happiness. I often take the ring, which bears your name, from my finger and think of the day I first wore it. You recollect we were returning from the City. I don't believe you will be able to read this letter so I will close it and try and write plainer next time. Remember me to Ellen & Emmy and all at White Haven, and don't forget Dearest Julia to write soon, very soon to your devoted
On August 22, 1848, following the Mexican War, Ulysses and Julia were married in St. Louis. They were happy together for four years living simply at various army posts. In 1852 Grant was assigned to dreary western posts and could not take his beloved Julia with him. By this time they had their first son Frederick and a second child on the way (Ulysses S. Grant, Jr.). Grant was not to be home when this son was born. A few weeks earlier he had to go to with the Army to the West Coast. Here is what Julia said about this time.

He sailed July 5; my second son Ulysses, was not born until July 22. My dear husband made every provision for my comfort and independence (this he always thought of), sending me more than I needed always. His letters were full of encouragement and affection for his loved ones.

Grant spent two miserable years away from his family and 1854, unable to endure the separation any longer he resigned from the army and returned home. Hard times followed, but Julia never lost her faith in her Ulysses. She believed there was greatness in him and that one day the rest of the world would make the same discovery.

In 1855 Julia gave birth to a daughter they named Ellen (called Nellie) and in 1858 they had their last child, a boy named Jesse. In 1860, after trying to make a go of it in and around St. Louis, the family moved to Galena, Illinois where Grant worked in the family leather store. Here Ulysses and Julia found a measure of contentment.

The Civil War broke out in April of 1861 and Grant re-entered the Army. As his star rose and he was transferred from command to command, he consistently sent for Julia to spend time with him, even when there was some danger involved. She willingly went wherever he asked her, often leaving the children with relatives. She was with him at Cairo (Illinois), Holly Springs (Mississippi), Memphis (Tennessee), Vicksburg (Mississippi), Nashville (Tennessee), and City Point (Virginia).

In June of 1864 he wrote the following to her:

Dear Julia,
I wrote to you last night, but having had my hair cut to-day and remember that you asked me to send you a lock, I now write again to send it. Love and kisses for you and the children.
(2) Ulysses
Near the end of his life, at Mt. McGregor in the Drexel Cottage, Grant penned a final note to his loving wife of 37 years.

Look after our dear children and direct them in the paths of rectitude. It would distress me far more to hear that one of them could depart from an honorable, upright and virtuous life than it would to know that they were prostrated on a bed of sickness from which they were never to rise alive. They have never given us any cause for alarm on this account, and I trust they never will. With these few injunctions and the knowledge I have of your love and affection and the dutiful affection of all our children, I bid you a final farewell, until we meet in another and, I trust, better world. You will find this on my person after my demise.

The report of an 1896 interview Julia granted to the Literary Digest had this to say about her:

She is thoroughly wrapped up in her family, her children, and her grandchildren, and in her love for General Grant. In speaking of him she refers to him as 'the General.' She has a good memory and she tells many interesting stories concerning him. No married couple ever lived closer to each other than did the General and Mrs. Grant. She was, perhaps, his only real confidant. The two were one in almost everything, and their life was a most beautiful one.(3)

Finally, the last paragraph of Julia's Memoirs -- "For nearly thirty-seven years, I, his wife, rested and was warmed in the sunlight of his loyal love and great fame, and now, even though his beautiful life has gone out, it is as when some far-off planet disappears from the heavens; the light of his glorious fame still reaches out to me, falls upon me, and warms me." (4)

(1) Coates, Foster. The Courtship of General Grant. Ladies' Home Journal, October, 1890.
(3) A Talk With Mrs. U.S. Grant. Literary Digest, 1896.