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“Teamshipness”: Stories of Love, Loss, and Laughter

Bailey Elizabeth Zallek

College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University

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“Teamshipness”

Stories of Love, Loss, and Laughter

An Honors Thesis

By Bailey Elizabeth Zallek

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Distinction
in the Department of English
at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University
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Preface

In the fall of 2012, a legislative amendment was proposed in the state of Minnesota to constitutionally ban marriage between same-sex couples. It appeared on the ballot on November 6, and it was subsequently rejected by 51.19% of voters ("2012 Referendum General Election Results – Minnesota"). This led to the legalization of same-sex marriage in Minnesota, with the first marriage licenses issued on August 1, 2013.

I was a sophomore in college during this historic breakthrough in my home state. It was both a tense and an exciting time, and I passionately supported the “Vote No” campaign through it all. I myself am a heterosexual cisgender female but, to me, same-sex marriage was never just an LGBT issue; it was and is a human rights issue. After all, love is love.

But what, exactly, does that mean?

Love is love.

This phrase could be heard hundreds of times a day across the Land of 10,000 Lakes during the election season of 2012. It is a simplified proclamation, a sentiment about the equality of all romantic relationships. It is an attempt to explain how any two people, no matter their gender identity or sexual orientation, can and should be allowed to commit themselves to one another. It states that romantic love is felt, communicated, and expressed in the same ways between any two people—no matter who they are.

I heard and uttered the phrase “love is love” so many times throughout 2012 and 2013 that it started to become meaningless to me. I began to question what it really means, what it really implies, and how it could be better understood. I realized that no matter how many times it was said or heard, there would always be people who are unable to comprehend the phrase. I realized that these people would always have barriers to understanding what it really entails.

After all, it is easy for us to fall back on stereotypes—to instantly categorize a person based on one component of his or her life. It is easy to not see past sexual orientation, because our culture has taught us not to. It is easy to not see past the pronouns—she/he, she/she, or he/he.

So I began to wonder: what would happen if we removed the pronouns? What if our lens had to remain neutral when hearing a story, hearing about two people in love? If those language cues were removed, could we all begin to understand what “love is love” really means?

I wrestled with the idea, and I decided to write the stories of real people in various stages of romantic relationships. I talked to my friends and family, and I found 13 people who were willing and able to tell their stories. Some were straight, some were gay, and some were lesbian. Some were married and some were single. Some were young and some were old. But they all had one thing in common—they had all experienced deep, profound, life-changing love.

I explained the concept of my project to them, and they all signed releases stating that they understood the purposes of their interviews and that all names would be changed in the publication. I sat with each of them at different points during the summer of 2014, asking them questions ranging from, “When did you meet him/her?” to “How did you know that you loved him/her?” Some spilled their hearts out, requiring us to take intermittent coffee or bathroom breaks during the interview. Others kept their stories short and succinct. Their personalities and their experiences shone through as they spoke, and I attempted to document their voices as best as possible when re-listening to the recorded interviews and writing their stories.

Additionally, at the end of each interview, I would ask each participant the same final question. I cannot say why I thought of the question in the first place, but it seemed like a good idea and I stuck with it. I would ask, “If you could explain love, or what a successful relationship means to you, in one word—what would that word be?”

I expected to hear a lot of the same answers; perhaps they would offer up some cliché sayings or some sappy lyrics from love songs. But that’s not what happened. Instead, the words my participants chose were insightful, unique, and reflective. Some of them thought of their words within half a second, and others brooded over them for a minute or two. Some of the words were sweet, and some of them were funny. One of them, which one participant’s partner offered up from across the hall of our interview space, wasn’t even a word: “teamshipness.” This word (which does not actually title any of the stories) ultimately became the title of this project, in part because I did not want the collection title to privilege any one story over the others, but mostly because “teamshipness” combines many ideas into a word that does not exist; it captures the feeling of being unable to put love into words. Romantic love is a multifaceted, extraordinary, and complex experience, and sometimes it just cannot be described using the language we have available to us.

But, the strangest thing of all was the pattern (or lack thereof) that began to appear after asking this question only a few times. Without any prompting, *every single participant chose a different word.*

Now this was an unexpected issue for me to process. When love has been the primary component of our poetry and literature since virtually the beginning of humankind, one would think that it would be a little more streamlined. And what does “love is love” really mean if everyone describes it differently?

After contemplating all of this, I began to understand what the stories really revealed. When I looked back at the lives and the stories my interviewees told, there really was no wonder they chose the words they did (which subsequently became the titles for each of their stories). Depending on their life experiences, their personalities, and their stages in life or relationships,

they all had very different feelings about love in the moment the question was asked of them.

Romantic love is not a stagnant concept that can be pinpointed in one word, one experience, or one relationship. It is different for everyone and for every romantic relationship.

As I grappled with this idea, I began to realize that the phrase “love is love” is equally as true as it is false. Yes, we all feel love in the same physiological and fundamental ways.

(Fisher) Yes, we have all experienced, or will experience, the tremendous highs and lows that are associated with romantic endeavors. However, we can never say that the loving relationship between two people is the same as that of another two people. Visible factors—everything from race to income to gender identity—tend to play a primary role in the assumptions that people make about a relationship. Studies of evolution reveal just how quickly our brains categorize people and things; after all, it was once a biological advantage to be able to make quick distinctions between friend and foe. But our instinct to rapidly classify the world around us often leads us to make unwarranted assumptions about people and relationships. It is essential for us to be cognizant of this and to remember that the invisible factors—individual personalities, histories, cultures, and experiences of two people—also play integral roles in a romantic relationship. We cannot look at any couple, whether of the same or opposite sexes, and assume we understand their love.

So, what does all of this mean? Well, it means that we *are* all the same, but we are all the same because we are all different. While we all belong to the same species, every human is assigned an entirely unique DNA structure. Similarly, we all experience love, but we all experience it differently. And nothing—not our skin color, our language, or our sexual orientation—can categorize our love.

Note to the Reader

Removing the gender identity from each speaker is admittedly a risky choice for me as a writer, because one's gender identity is just that—an essential component of his or her identity. I want to be clear that, by doing so, I am not asking you to disregard the speakers' genders. Rather, I am asking you to consider how this ambiguity shapes your experience as a reader and your perspective of each relationship. When you feel the impulse to assign a gender to a speaker, ask yourself—why? What is it about your experiences, your ideas, or our society that leads you to do so? How would your perspective of the person or the relationship change if the speaker were a person of the opposite gender? Most importantly, I do not want this to become a “guess the gender of the speaker” game. The purpose is for us to examine the similarities and differences between all romantic relationships, whether of the same or opposite sexes.

Additionally, you will come across a number of quotes and images as you read. I chose to include these because they represent several of the issues discussed in the text, and many depict world events that were taking place around the time of this project. (It is also important to note that these images do not appear after every story, and they do not necessarily relate to the stories before or after which they appear.) As you stumble upon the images, I hope you take a moment to think about what they mean and how they represent the experiences of the people behind these stories.

Finally, I hope you find this experiment to be important for a number of reasons. We are living in an exciting time—a time when LGBT individuals and couples have more legal rights than they have ever had in the past. However, there is still so much more progress to be made, and not just through legislation. LGBT individuals experience both blatant discrimination and subtle microaggressions, or unintended discrimination, on a daily basis. Even the most innocent

and supportive people can commit harm to an LGBT person, such as a well-intended stranger asking a woman if she has a husband, and not thinking to add “or wife” to the question. It can be seen in everyday conversations, from someone discussing her “gay best friend,” which involves an unnecessary qualifier, to someone using the incorrect pronoun with a transgender friend. (For detailed and helpful information on microaggressions, I suggest reading Everyday Feminism’s article found here: <http://everydayfeminism.com/2014/09/the-many-faces-of-homophobia/>)

While these may all be simple mistakes, many studies have found that the more people experience microaggressions, the more likely they are to report symptoms of depression, psychological distress, and even physical health issues. (Psychology Benefits Society)

Now you might be wondering: *How does this relate to the stories I am about to read?*

Well, by removing the pronouns of the speakers, I am asking you to view each couple as just that—a couple. Not a gay couple, a lesbian couple, or a straight couple. I am asking you to read the experiences of each relationship equally, and to resist the urge to qualify or categorize the people involved. By removing these descriptors, hopefully we can push ourselves to think about all individuals as being truly equal—with or without labels.

“Openness”

I met David my freshman year of college. He’s two years older than I am, and we both went to school for theater. I don’t remember the first real moment that I met him, but I have this feeling that I always sort of knew him. He was always just a friendly face around the department. We weren’t actually all that close until my sophomore year of college when he asked me to be in his senior show. I was really excited because I had seen him in things and he was always really good... and really cute.

I never really had romantic feelings for him because I was dating his roommate during my freshman and sophomore years. David was just a friend, but it was kind of a cool status thing because everyone really liked him.

I became single again right before the rehearsals for David’s senior project started. We were spending a lot of time together for that, and that’s when I started thinking, “Wow, this guy is really sweet and kind and talented.” So I guess I started having feelings for him... but he was dating someone else who was a COMPLETE WET BLANKET.

Story of my life. I liked a guy but he was dating someone else.

So I knew I had feelings for him and I kept it to myself because he was dating someone else. But... eventually I just had to get it out there.

At the very end of that following spring semester, there was a cast party. David had just played the mouse in *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*—and he was so cute in it. We had both had a few drinks at the party, which of course helps to get things started, and we were standing in his kitchen. I found a moment alone with him and I was like, “You know David, you were great today, and you’re just such a good friend of mine, but part of me wishes that things could have

been, you know, *more* between us.” So I was like... I’m not sure if I should be saying this, but I feel this way so I’m just going to go for it.

I told him that and he sort of paused for a second and said... “Come outside with me.” And then he closed the door and just grabbed me and gave me this huge hug. He kind of reciprocated the sentiment, and he said something like, “It feels so good to just give you a hug.” And he just kept saying “I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know,” over and over again... like I had clearly confused him in a big way.

It was odd. There were all these mumbling roundabout sentences and I kind of let him go, you know? I had said my piece and he just kept hugging me... and now it’s all sort of an awkward giggly blur.

After that, we would always end up separate from people at parties. Nothing actually happened, but we would be sort of... physically close. No kisses or anything like that. And that went on for... Oh God, a long time.

So he graduated and went traveling in Nepal for three months. When he got back, my junior year was starting and all throughout my junior year I didn’t see him very much. But he was still dating the same person on campus, so he would come to visit and everyone would be like “David’s in town!” and we would get together and I’d see him and there would be that same chemistry; we would be glad to see each other but nothing happened.

We would go to get coffee together and he would say these sort of cryptic things like... “You know, I’m just doing a lot of thinking about the people I want to keep around in my life. I’m young and... I’m mobile. I’m thinking a lot about who I want to keep in my life...” and I would be sipping my coffee like, “*Moi???*”

He broke up with the person he was dating a few months later. I don't think it was too devastating... their relationship was just kind of convenient at the time.

We totally kissed before they broke up though.

He had come to see his sister in the last show of the season, and... that night we kissed. We made out in the parking lot by my apartment after he... peed behind a dumpster. (Very romantic, I know.) And then people were texting him like, "Where are you man?" and he was like "I gotta get back to the party!" So we went back grudgingly.

The next day they broke up, and the next night we went to the same play together and then we had sex that night. It was so fast, but it totally didn't feel like a one-night stand or a fling thing because we had known each other for years. We were such good friends and I trusted him.

So we kissed, they broke up, and we had sex the next night. *What?*

The next day I expected him to maybe feel guilty or kind of disappear, but he spent the whole day with me. We took a walk by the river and it was really, really sweet.

I made him get coffee with me and I told him "I want you to know that I don't regret what happened between us," and I let him know that it really meant something to me. He was leaving soon and it was nice that we were on really good terms.



A little while later, David called me as I was walking down the street eating a Dole Whip, which is this amazing frozen yogurt thing. It was a beautiful day, and when I got the call from him he was like, "Hey, sorry I had to go last night. I was super tired. But I'm glad I got a hold of you. I need to talk to you." And I was like... "Okay?"

He started saying, “I didn’t tell you, but I was in New York this week and I went primarily to visit my ex. I have to be honest with you...as you probably know, we have had chemistry for a number of years now. We slept in the same bed, and we didn’t have sex or anything, but we did kiss...”

And at that point he was just talking and talking and I didn’t know where he was going with it, and I was like five licks into my favorite pineapple Dole Whip, but I suddenly felt so sick that I just threw it on the ground. You have to know just how delicious those things are to understand how terrible something has to be to sacrifice a Dole Whip, but I guess you’ll just have to trust me.

Anyway, he went on to say, “I have to let you know that I was getting texts from you while I was there, and I just realized that it was you I wanted to hear from and you that I wanted to see. I needed to go to New York to realize that I have feelings for *you*.”

And at this point I was shaking from terror and relief and a brain freeze.

So I said, “I’m really glad you told me that,” but I didn’t know what to say because it was a lot of information. So I added, “I have feelings for you too.”

After that, he would call me and come to see his sister and me, and eventually he started just coming to see me.



Since then, it’s been a year of long distance... which is rough.

This is the third serious relationship I’ve been in, and the last two ended because of long-distance strain. Whether or not they would have ended anyway, I don’t know. Not only were we not physically together, but we were not living the same lives anymore.

Sometimes I feel like it's not fair to David because I still feel that pain and that hurt from the last long-distance relationships. In those relationships, I felt like I really reached out and tried, but the other person didn't have time for me anymore. Being in another long-distance relationship opens up those wounds again. I often forget that I'm not still dating those other people when David is not physically there and I'm experiencing the same struggle.

I've been thinking about it a lot lately because I've really been trying with this relationship. David is worth the effort and the anxiety. I try to pinpoint what it is that's so stressful about the long distance and what I can do to counter it. I guess I just have to understand that, right now, things are weird because it's not normal to not see someone for a month and have that part of your heart close a little bit. You can't be so open and loving all the time when they're not there. You can't be living in the relationship if they're not physically with you. Then when you get to see that person, and there's suddenly someone sleeping next to you and they're with you for every second for a weekend—it's a lot of extremes. That's pretty traumatic for me. I'm an emotional person.

I did myself a big favor, though, and went to counseling when I was still in college. The counselor and I pinpointed that I have this abandonment complex because of my dad, who passed away from a completely unexpected heart attack when I was sixteen years old. I know he loved me unconditionally and that he would never have done *anything* to hurt me, and yet he hurt me more deeply than I probably will ever be hurt again in my life. He abandoned me. Did he want to? No. He would never want to do that to me.

But now I have this complex that says, "Why wouldn't David abandon me? If someone like my father could abandon me, of course my boyfriend could." So that long distance often

feels like that—like I’m being abandoned. I see him and there’s so much love and it’s so intense, and then I’m left behind. It’s a vicious cycle.

I have a lot of work to do about what my dad’s death did to me psychologically. I think I compensated for a long time, and now I have to deal with it. I didn’t have the tools to deal with it before. Just now I am starting to feel like I can begin to process it. I have this general feeling of sadness or fear of people leaving me, but I am just now taking the time to identify it. I need to trust that the people who love me won’t do that to me.

I have never once felt like David was fed up with me or wasn’t giving me the benefit of the doubt. He has never even gotten frustrated with me. I can say any crazy thing or be so upset and he will still give me a big hug and help me and let me know that he’s there to help make things work out. It’s always so shocking to me. I’m constantly thinking, “Wow, he really isn’t going to leave me. He isn’t.”

He really loves me, and he’s not afraid to tell or show me that he does.



My ex Tony and I were both so emotional. He would get really down and then crazy happy, and we both had those huge highs and lows. David, on the other hand, is such a nice middle ground. He’s so stable.

I remember a specific visit to David where things were really awful for me. It was my spring break and the week of his birthday. I had started taking a new medication a few weeks before and, as it turns out, the medication really messed with me. It made me feel weird and down, but I told myself it was just stress. I didn’t really think anything of it. I thought visiting David would help.

I got to Chicago, where he lives, and I had been there for a few days when I was suddenly having these mini panic attacks. Nothing would even be happening. I would just be sitting with David and his roommates (which included Tony, my ex-boyfriend, so that didn't help), and then I would start feeling panicky and sad and I couldn't have fun. I was exhausted all the time and I started feeling sick to my stomach. I wasn't putting together that it was the new medication, so I started attributing those feelings to David. I started wondering if things weren't working out. I would just start crying and he knew something was wrong, and all I could say was, "I'm so sorry. I don't feel like myself. I don't know what's going on." It was terrible, and I could tell he was trying to be supportive but he didn't know what to do. Who would?

I had been there for a few days when things started getting worse. David had to work during the day, so I would just hang out in his bedroom by myself. I called my mom and told her I thought I needed to go home. I finally told David that I needed to go home—on the day of his birthday. We had had plans to go out that night, but I just had to leave. I wouldn't let him help me bring my bags to the car or anything.

Before I left, I gave him his present and a card that I had made for him. I have to admit, it was a really sweet card. But we had just had this terrible week together and I was thinking, "There's no way he will still want to be with me after this." But he read the card and instantly a little tear ran down his face.

Throughout that whole thing, he was as supportive as he possible could have been—even though it was the worst week of our relationship



David actually remembered the date that we first kissed and the date of the first time we said “I love you.” I guess I’m not as detail-oriented. He wrote me a card once that said, “I remember on October 10 when you told me you loved me for the first time...”

But I *knew* I loved him before that. You just know it’s the real thing when you have a “duh” moment... like, “Oh, of course I have this deep love for him.” It suddenly becomes so obvious. I have loved him since we were first friends. When I would see him be so kind to other people or I would watch him on stage—he has so much talent but he’s so humble. The way he treats me and the way he’s so honest with me about everything—that’s why I love him.

On that October day when I first said it, I had been visiting him in Chicago. I was about to leave and I was like, “I have to tell him. I have to tell him.” I could feel it coming up in my throat and I just wanted to say it! But in the past it had always turned into, “I... am so excited to see you again soon!” or something lame like that.

So anyway, it was getting really late and I was like, “I gotta go,” but I wasn’t leaving, and he was like, “You gotta go!” and I was being all weird. I was hopping up and down on his bed and finally I was like, “Hey David, hey David,” and he said, “What? What is it?” and I said, “I LOVE YOU!” And right away he gave me this big hug and he looked right at me and said, “I love you so much.” And it was so sweet and wonderful and perfect.

I guess I always knew I loved him. It just became more and more... *present*.



“
**If someone
is gay**
and he
searches for
the Lord
and has
good will,
**who am I
to judge?**

- Pope Francis

W | Wilson Center



“*Happiness*”

My mom maintains that she picked out Sarah for me. But it wasn't as if I didn't notice Sarah. It would be hard *not* to notice her.

At the time I was living in an apartment in one of my forays into graduate school. It was around Christmas time and I went home to my parents' to borrow a blender because my roommates and I were going to try to make homemade Bailey's Irish Crème. A lot of people don't know that you can actually make it at home. (Quite poorly, I might add.)

So it was about 10:00 at night and our friend Teri, whom my mom and dad had helped through college, was there. She was an amazing woman who had come from a horrible family. Her dad had stolen the money she had saved for college, she had been through foster care—lots of challenges growing up. Anyway, she was there because she worked as a waitress with Sarah.

That night, Sarah's car had been having problems, so Teri was going to give her a ride home. But first Teri had to stop at my parents' place to pick up her laundry. When I came in the front door and saw these tiny little shoes, I thought my grandma was there. I went upstairs to see my grandma, but it turned out to be Sarah watching TV with my mom.

I tried to impress her with some of the tricks I had taught my dog Dingus, which was not the coolest thing in the world, but hey, it got us talking.



The chronology of it all is admittedly confusing. Before I had met Sarah I had been dating a girl who was great. She was fun and intelligent and witty... but she had these competitive values. She was always comparing people. She was a very competitive

individual—kind of status-conscious. Other people had to point this out to me, and they were right.

We didn't bring out the best in each other. To be fair, she's probably wiping her forehead in relief right now too. She was not warm and fuzzy, and I had to accept that I either could or couldn't live with that. I wasn't going to be able to change her.

After Sarah and I had met again and went on an actual date, we went out for about eight or nine months. And then I got scared. It was going too fast. I was 23 and I didn't have anything else decided in my life, and so then we broke up. Well, I mean... I panicked.

Then there was a string of weird girls. There was one girl who came from a strange academic family. Then there was another girl who was an English major and an art model and she wanted to write a book about the person the original James Bond stories were based on. At least... I think that was her. Maybe I'm getting her mixed up with another weird one? Anyway, it was not good.



I knew I loved Sarah immediately. How could you not? She's so sincere. I knew that if I went out with her, I was going to end up spending the rest of my life with her. She was just so wholesome. That's probably why I panicked.

After the string of weird other women, which probably lasted four months or so, I got back together with Sarah. I went down to visit her at her parents' place, when her mom was recovering after back surgery. Sarah was helping with meals, cleaning the house, etc. I had a good time with her while visiting, and one night we just sat out on their front porch. They had a

beautiful place overlooking the Mississippi, where you could watch the barges go by. We just let our feet dangle over the side of the porch while we watched the flickering lights of the barges.

The next night I was driving home while the sun was setting, and everything just felt so right. I remember thinking to myself, “I’m going to spend the rest of my life with her. I have to do that.”

Nothing else was in place in my life, and it didn’t make any logical sense... but it made sense.



As far as challenges go, well... most of the challenges in the relationship have been provided by me. I’m so thoughtful that way.

The early stages of the relationship are tough for a lot of people, and I think it was for us. When you’re living with each other and relating to each other in a whole new way, it can be a challenge. Sometimes your friends are still in the college frame of mind and you’re not. That’s a weird transition.

I’m sure a challenging time for Sarah was when I went to law school. I hated it. I like to say that I was in law school five years one semester. It was a bad time. I went into a pretty significant depressive episode.

I’m very prone to depression. It’s just something I have to deal with. I remember telling Sarah once that she has to tell me when I’m showing signs or symptoms, because when I’m in that state, I don’t always see it—which is very common. I might not always disagree that I’m in a depressive state, but I might not believe how bad it really is. I have to put a lot of trust into her to know when I’m not being myself. She knows me better than I know myself.

There have been challenging times in life, but I honestly can't think of a challenging time in our relationship. I grow in this relationship. I feel like I'm a better person. It's never stagnant. If there were a Venn diagram of my relationship with Sarah versus the relationships I've had with anyone else, the two circles wouldn't even overlap.



One of my favorite times with Sarah was when we were out kayaking on a Friday evening. By the time we were done it was dark, and Sarah was famished. So we went out to eat at a Mexican restaurant and she ordered a margarita. She told them to make it really mild, like half as strong as usual. She's a Spanish teacher so naturally she ordered in Spanish, but apparently they didn't understand. The man who served us appeared to be Latino, but I don't know if he really knew Spanish at all. He could have been a third-generation Italian for all we know.

So she got this really strong margarita, and she couldn't even finish it. Between being very petite and the fact that she drank it before she had food in her stomach, she didn't think she could even walk to the car at the end of the meal.

Eventually, I drove us home. A lot of it had worn off for her, but we still had to bring in our kayak. Sarah is so small that she had to use a stepstool to get her side of the kayak off the top of the car. She wanted to keep her hands free so she could use them for balance, so she decided to rest the kayak on her head. Well, it slid down and her head ended up between the foot-pedal part and the front of the kayak. Once we got it down she realized that she was stuck. Her head was actually stuck in a kayak.

So there I was in middle of the driveway with a drunk wife who had a kayak stuck on her head, and I didn't know what to do. If I had set down my end, I could have hurt her. We couldn't call 911 because it's not like a kayak could fit in an ambulance. And it's not like we could have driven ourselves. We would have had to portage to the hospital.

I was brainstorming different ideas when Sarah finally wiggled her way out and the kayak and it fell onto the concrete. It was *so* loud that I'm quite sure it woke up the neighbors.

And then we laughed. So hard. We were lying on the driveway because we couldn't breathe from all the laughing. And that right there is the type of thing that makes a great relationship. If you're not laughing with the other person, it's no good.



“*Work*”

I met Max at a party, which sounds college-y and cliché, but whatever. I definitely noticed him right away. My friend was like, “This is my friend Max,” and I had a feeling she was trying to introduce us. It was amazing. I drew into it right away. We got to talking that night and he asked for my number and I gave it to him. We texted for a couple weeks and then we went out on an actual date. And then we were a couple.

I knew I loved him when I looked forward to seeing his name pop up on my phone and when I would spend all day looking forward to hanging out with him. I kind of knew I was going to fall in love with him right away, though. He’s so genuine, and you don’t really find that in a lot people. There were a lot of things about him that were so different from anyone else I’ve ever met. It was like magnetism.



Things can be good in a relationship, but no matter what you still have to work at it. God, for the first two years it’s all lollipops and rainbows, but after that it becomes more. There is more to put in to be with somebody. But if you really love them, you do it.

Max was and is very ill—very depressed. He had issues when we first got together, but it just got worse and worse over three years. I told him a couple times that he needed to see someone. I was saying it because I cared.

Unfortunately it inhibited us from ever moving past the same neutral state that we were in. We were in love, and we saw each other about once a week—twice, if we were lucky. But it inhibited him from fully communicating with me. It was hard. I felt like I was always

overcompensating, trying to make him feel better and make him feel loved. But I was left behind.

I had to end our relationship about a month ago because he would never make a proactive step forward. I thought maybe losing me would do that. I wasn't happy, and he obviously wasn't happy. I ended it and said, "I'm not happy, you're not happy, and I don't think you're going to do anything until I show you that I am really concerned for you."

There was always a part of me that thought, "Of course we'll get back together, of course." And we texted a little bit on and off, and then there was a week where we didn't talk at all. That was really hard. When you go your whole day talking to somebody and then it just... ends? It's like pulling a piece out of you. You don't become one person when you're in a relationship, but you become like... 1.75. And having it end is like pulling that extra part out of you, and you have to learn how to function on your own again.



About a week ago I was texting Max and being very straightforward. I said, "When you do work on things, do you want to work on us?" And he said, "Don't wait for me." Then all of a sudden he said, "I don't know how to tell you this, but as my depression has been getting worse, I've realized that I've been falling out of love with you."

I knew it made sense with his mental illness, and I knew it wasn't because of me, but having someone tell you that they're not in love with you is... well, it's the worst thing I've ever experienced.

There was a part of me that still cared about him and was so worried about him that I didn't want to cut ties, but him saying that was the definite, definite end. It wasn't just a break anymore. How do you go back after that?

After that I listened to a lot of break-up playlists on Pandora. It was weirdly cleansing. It was the best thing I've ever listened to. Everything they say in those songs is everything you are feeling and everything you want to say to a person. It's awesome knowing that I'm not a crazy person with all these feelings.



Honestly, I never pictured my life without Max. When I ended things, I figured it was just to get him to do what he needed to do. And he did. He talked to his parents and he started seeing a therapist, and that's great. But when he said that he couldn't be with me over the phone, it was too much. A week later he came to talk to me about it in person, and that was... exhausting. He apologized and said he wasn't in a good place to be with somebody. I told him what it was like having him tell me that he wasn't in love with me, and he started bawling... because obviously I'm very descriptive with my feelings. Like I have no problem laying it out exactly how it is.

And then I was numb. Just numb.

We hugged before he left, and I couldn't feel anything. Then the moment he was out the door, I just fell to the ground and sobbed. I was on the ground, punching the floor and crying. Then I stood up and I was like, "God, that was *so* dramatic." But it was what I needed at the time. I seriously felt like I was in a rom-com.

I very easily relate to movies about falling in love, being in love, breaking up. It's easy to relate to those things. I watch rom-coms because I've been in love, and I know what that's like. The scary thing is that in the movies, you know that there's going to be a happy ending. There is a definite, conclusive ending, and you feel fulfilled.

But life is so different. You can't get closure like the movies in life. There is no sense of finality.



It would have been so much easier if Max had just done something awful. There were bad things in our relationship and it was not perfect. There were constant struggles. But there are times when I just think, *if he had cheated on me, it would be so much easier.*

But now I just have to work on myself. I feel like my life is a fucking Taylor Swift album. Yeah, she's a terrible singer, but she says things that are so *real*. It is insane because I will listen to her songs that are so stupid, but I always think—God, this is so true. It's those feelings like, "We broke up and I hate you but I'm still going to stalk your tweets every day and check to see who you're interacting with and when and compare that to the last time you texted me,"—and that's what makes me think I am a crazy person. I am a CRAZY person. I care so much, and it's probably not reciprocated in the same way. I am totally Taylor fucking Swift.

But I just have to force myself to delete any message Max sends me, because otherwise I would go back and pore over each one, re-reading them a thousand times to try to find something between the lines. Today I deleted his number from my phone, and that was hard. But I'm not doing it because I don't want to talk to him. I'm doing it because I am tired of waiting to see his name pop up on my screen. I miss that feeling, because I don't know how to not be with him.

I don't know how to not be with him.

Even though I'm the one who technically ended things, it still hurts. It hurts so much. I would give anything to be with him... and I did. It makes me feel pathetic for thinking that, but it feels so empty being without somebody you love. It's... blackness. It's a very dark place. You don't want to be with anyone else. Of course I understand that someday I will probably be with someone else, but I'm in a place right now where I don't even want a rebound. I am waiting for the point where I feel better to figure out what my next move is. Right now I'm just trying to get myself through the day and be okay. It's hard. It's so hard.

I guess all I can say is that now I'm looking for someone who is an amazing communicator, almost to a fault. I am very, very open, and I like to know what's going on in somebody's head—even if it's bad. I think I need somebody who understands that, even if you've been through a lot... you can still be okay.



You know, it's funny how life works. My friend Alex also recently got out of a relationship—about a month before mine ended. She experienced all kinds of things. There were nights where she was crying in my arms, and I was thinking, “Fuck, I can't even imagine going through this.” And then a month later I was experiencing all those same things. But that was actually kind of comforting, because it made me realize that everyone goes through the same thing. You will always have the desire to text that person, and you will always want to stalk their Twitter even though you un-followed them.

I actually just called Alex today because I was feeling low. She told me, “There will be nights when you will be up all night just thinking,” and it’s like everything she says speaks to my experience of having a real break-up and losing somebody.

I really take comfort in the fact that my grief is a normal process.



“Among college students at Case Western Reserve, 93 percent of both sexes reported they have been spurned by someone they passionately loved. Ninety-five percent also said they had rejected someone who was deeply in love with them. Almost no one in the world escapes the feelings of emptiness, hopelessness, fear, and fury that rejection can created. ‘Parting is,’ as Emily Dickinson wrote, ‘all we need to know of hell.’”

- Helen Fisher, Ph.D.

Why We Love: The Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love

“*Lightheartedness*”

So I was sitting in my apartment on a Sunday, and my mom called me and told me that she had just been at a funeral for the mom of a friend from high school. But she was all excited, which was weird. She was like, “You need to look somebody up! Get your Facebook open!”

So I said, “Okaaay,” and I opened my computer up. I found Bruce, the guy she was talking about, and she kept saying, “Isn’t he *cuuuute*?” over and over again. And then she left it with, “That’s all! I just wanted to say that!” She didn’t say that I needed to contact him or anything, so I didn’t really know what to do.

At that time I had been out of a bad relationship for about a year. The guy had cheated all the time. It was bad. Just bad. He cheated on me a *lot*. So I wasn’t too anxious to jump into anything. But I decided to message this Bruce guy, and I was just like, “So this is really weird, but my mom just called me and told me that she saw you at a funeral and that you were really cute...”

It wasn’t too long before he messaged me back, and he invited me over to his apartment the next weekend to hang out with all of his friends. My friend from high school was going to be there, so that was kind of a nice buffer to the situation. It was terrifying though. I had never done something like that. It was a total blind date! With friends! And he could easily have been some creeper, you know?

So I drove over there—freaking out the whole time, of course. I went to the wrong house first, so I just kept walking in the dark in the middle of winter. When I finally got there, he answered the door and he was wearing this cute flannel and he was adorable. We hung out and played Catch Phrase and went to a bar and got pretty drunk. We sang karaoke and it was a ton of

fun. I even texted one of my friends from the bathroom and I was like, “Oh my God, I’m like in love with him.”

Of course.



So that night with his friends was on a Friday night, but on our first actual date we went ice-skating, which was the next Tuesday. On the Monday before, though, my good friend Andrew (who I dated in college but have just been friends with ever since) took me to the mall because I didn’t have anything to wear to go skating. Afterwards we went to Noodles and Company, and when we walked in, Bruce was *right there*. Of the thousands of restaurants in the metro area, he was at the exact same one at the exact same time on a Monday afternoon. And he was by himself. BY HIMSELF.

I was like, “Oh my God, he’s going to think we’re on a date!” He saw Andrew and me right away, and he instantly looked so sad. You could see his face drop. So I awkwardly said, “Can we sit with you?” Because he was BY HIMSELF. Eating at Noodles. In the back of my head I was like, *who is this weirdo who eats by himself?*

We went to sit with him, and I immediately explained that it was not a date—that Andrew and I were just shopping for the actual date the next day, and he was like, “...Okay.” It definitely took a little convincing. I was sure that it was all ruined.

The next day, after recovering from the Noodles incident, Bruce picked me up for our actual first date. I was all worried because my nose runs all the time, and we were going to be outside. And of course it was the COLDEST day of the year. It was miserable, and I’m a terrible ice skater. Like really not good.

It actually worked out, though, because nobody else wanted to skate in the cold. We had the place to ourselves. Bruce impressed me with his awesome skating, and eventually I just pulled him toward me and kissed him because he wouldn't do it.

We got coffee afterwards, and then I think we made out on his couch.



We're different in a lot of ways. Bruce is really creative, and he just wants to do things that push him in that way. He will put doing something creative in front of everything else, and I'm more focused on my list of things I have to do.

But I guess we're also really similar. We like to do the same kind of stuff. We like to relax, and we have the same sense of humor. We also live at a similar pace. Sometimes we'll get really motivated and start working out every day or something, and other times we'll just have periods of being really lazy. I guess we're cyclical.

Neither of us is very... political, or anything. We were at a festival yesterday and I took a button from a guy I knew in high school who is running for state representative. Then we ran into my other friend's mom, and she was like, "Well is he a democrat or a republican?" and I just shrugged. I had no idea. She kept saying, "What do you mean? You're just going to wear his button and you don't know?" And I said, "Yeah."

Then she turned to Bruce and said, "Well, aren't you a republican? You're a small business owner!" And he was like, "Ehh, no." And we realized that we really don't care about any of that. I guess we're apathetic in the same ways? That sounds weird. But if he was crazy political, I don't know if I could deal with that.

As far as religion goes, we're both pretty much the same. I think I'm more religious than Bruce is, in that I believe that there's something out there. I don't know what and I don't go to church or pray, but I can appreciate it. And Bruce pretty much thinks it's all bogus.

I think we really even each other out though. Sometimes he's definitely the more practical one. I really want to move, to just go anywhere. I've never lived anywhere else. But then Bruce reminds me that we just bought a house, that he has a lot of contacts here, and all that. But sometimes it's the other way around. When he gets stressed, he'll stub his toe or something and it will be the end of the world. Then I jump in and calm him down. Either way, it always works out.



The best thing that's ever happened to us was getting our dog. It was like adopting a child. It was a lot of work and it made our lives completely different. We couldn't sleep in anymore past 6 a.m. We had to coordinate when we would be home. We became a team.

We were supposed to get her in June because we were moving into our new apartment in June, but then our breeder e-mailed us and apologized because she didn't think there would be any puppies available for us. There were enough, but the one that had been assigned to us didn't have the right temperament for our setting.

We FREAKED out. We both cried. It was two weeks before we were supposed to get her. We only had to wait another month, but it was like having a baby taken away from us.

When we finally got her, she peed blood within a few days. Bruce had just left to go wakeboarding when it happened, so I called him right away, bawling. I was like, "SHE'S PEEING BLOOD!" And immediately he said, "I'm turning around. I'm on my way back."

We drove her to the emergency vet, and they wanted to do all these things to her. It turned out to be nothing. But we were so scared. So worried about her.

We really love her. We're a little family now.



“Easiness”

Seamus and I were in my dad’s debate class in college. He sat behind me, and he would always come in late. He wore combat boots all the time, and he would braid his hair with green rubber bands. He also had kind of orange hair because he used peroxide in it. It was a really bad look. Oh, and he would also mumble at the entire class. And my friend Patsy and I called him Bandana Head.

One day Seamus and his friends got up to debate about legalizing drugs. The three friends were all terrible, but then Seamus got up and was... *amazing*. Like *really* incredible. My dad said that Seamus had to debate with me because my partner was graduating in December, and I was really, really, really not happy about it because he was so weird. I obviously did not like him, but I did it anyway.

As it turned out, Seamus continued to be phenomenally good. During our first debate ever, I made a total fool of myself. I had nothing prepared. I had NOTHING. I used up our entire prep period, and then I just had to wing it. Some of my arguments actually contradicted each other. But then Seamus got up, and he *murdered* the other team. It was incredible.

I realized then that it was so awesome to be around someone who could just... fix everything. It was a remarkable feeling. He could fix anything! I wouldn’t say it was “love at first sight” or anything, but it was really, really awesome.

Oh, and I was also already married.



My marriage was never good. The biggest problem was that we got married when we were 18, and that is just way too young. You have no business being married when you're 18. You have no clue what you're doing.

Actually, there were a lot of reasons we had no business being married. My husband Terry was such a jerk, it was a terrible relationship, and our families are so incredibly different. His family is super racist, for one thing. (Like... they won't eat at China Buffet because his dad was in the Vietnam War. It's messed up, to say the least.)

The real tipping point, though, came not too long after my first debate with Seamus. It was when Terry went on a ski trip to Colorado. Keep in mind, we were dirt poor. Like dirt, dirt, dirt poor. We had two kids, and he worked at a lumber place.

While he was on this ski trip, he spent *all* of our money. He left me with two dollars and forty cents in our checking account. Terry's friend Chris had decided not to go on the trip at the last minute, so they were able to downgrade to a smaller room at the lodge. But instead of keeping the money they saved, Terry spent all of that money on skiing outfits. And keep in mind, we lived in *South Dakota*, the flattest place on earth. They were full spandex ski suits—one blue one and one yellow one. I can still see them. They were so gross; they were like the “sexy Flanders” ski outfit from *The Simpsons*.

I was like, “Oh my gosh. I hate you,” and I decided that I just couldn't handle the relationship anymore. For some reason, those skiing outfits were just the last straw for me. I told Terry I wanted a divorce, and he said something along the lines of, “Oh, that kind of bums me out.” Then he said, “Well I never really wanted to get married in the first place,” which is not even partly true, and then he added, “but now I've gotten used to you.”

Okay. Ouch.

And then I totally took the bait, which was dumb, and I told him he was lying. But then he said, “Well I only did it because I didn’t think anyone else would marry you,” which did not even hurt my feelings because, again, it was not even close to true. It was just dumb.

But this is the terrible part: I told my friends that I wanted to divorce Terry, and they didn’t support me. They kept saying, “But you have kids!” and I kept saying, “Trust me, I’ll find someone better!” (My youngest didn’t even *like* Terry.) My best friend said, “I grew up with a single parent, and that just wouldn’t be fair to your kids,” and I said, “It also wouldn’t be fair to have a parent who buys ski clothes instead of paying the rent.”

Once Terry realized that I was serious about getting a divorce, he started getting all weird about getting back together. He would leave me these strange notes around the house about his life goals, and he was constantly leaving little gifts for me. But obviously it didn’t sway me at all. Once your heart is hardened, it’s hardened.

One day, Terry told me that he was driving home from work and almost hit “eight deers.” (For some background information, you should know that I have this terrible fear of suicide because there was a string of suicides in my high school when I was in seventh grade. Terry knew this, so he used it just to freak me out.) It made me so mad. I said, “Fine! Fine! If you want me to stay just because I’m afraid of you killing yourself otherwise, I will. Is that what you want?” And he said, “Well, I’d rather have it be for another reason, but yeah, I’ll take it.” And then I took it all back. It was so stupid. He was just using my fear of suicide against me.

He kept saying, “Well what can I do?” But the truth is that there was nothing he could do. I didn’t like him at all.



At about that same time, Seamus had lost his job. He was a cook and the manager of a restaurant, and the restaurant closed out of the blue. Suddenly Seamus did not have a car or a job, so he was just going to stay in an apartment without any heat and not go back to school. When I told my dad about this, he said it was ridiculous and invited him to live in their basement apartment. He didn't even tell my mom about it before making the offer. I told her, "It's fine, it's fine. You're never even going to see him." Well, that turned out to not be true.

On the first day that Seamus moved in, he called my mom at work and said, "What do you want for dinner? I just cleaned out the refrigerator and I found some chicken so I was thinking of making that." After that, she just *loved* him. They were best, best friends. And with Seamus living there, she never had to cook again... which was her dream.

One night when we were walking back from class to my parents' house, I was telling Seamus about Terry saying that no one else would marry me. Of course I was hoping that Seamus would say something like, "That's crazy! I would marry you!" but obviously that never, ever worked. It was so incredibly dumb and embarrassing. But we did become best friends.

During all of this, I was in this super hard intro biology class. It shouldn't have been hard, but it *was* really hard because it was this professor's first time teaching. It was horrible, and I never got any sleep or homework done because Terry and I were up late fighting every night. Obviously I had to pass the class because it was a requirement, but I was also struggling to keep up with my biblical literature class.

Between school and the kids and staying up every night fighting with Terry, I was so, so tired. There are no words to describe how tired I was during this time in my life. It was so bad. But the divorce hadn't made any progress because I hadn't gotten a lawyer yet.

Anyway, one night I took my kids over to my parents' house to be babysat, like usual, and Seamus was there. When he saw me he told me I looked terrible and that I should take a nap, but I told him I couldn't because I had to read an entire book for biblical literature that night. Now I'm a great reader, but this was a Paul Tillich book. It was not exactly something I could have breezed through; it was super dense and difficult.

But, after a while, Seamus wore me down and convinced me to take a nap. I fell asleep at around 7:30 p.m., and I didn't wake up until 2:00 in the morning. It was crazy.

I came out of my room to find Seamus. Not only was he still awake—he had also *written my paper*. He had read the *entire* book and written the whole paper. It was the most amazing thing anyone has ever done for me. And on top of it all, I got an A+ on it and the professor said it was the best paper “I” had ever written.

Even though I was still technically married, we immediately started dating.



One day, after Seamus and I had been dating for a little while, he and my dad were working on the roof of my parents' house. My dad didn't know that we were dating, so he went on and on about how he didn't think Terry and I should get divorced. He kept saying that Terry and I were going through a “rough patch.”

Then Seamus told my dad about the previous summer when he had come into the Safeway where I was working and seen me with a horrible black eye. The whites of my eyes were completely yellow, my eyebrow was split, and I had 16 stitches. I told him the truth about what happened, and he was the *only* person who ever knew. And I made him swear not to tell anyone because it was terrible. But the truth was that Terry had hit me.

I didn't know how to deal with it at the time because, to me, people who were abused were stupid and poor. I had a very strong stereotyped belief against victims of abuse. But suddenly I was one. I lied to the doctor about what happened, but that was easy because it was during the middle of our local bike week.

Anyway, when my dad heard all of this, he literally jumped off the roof of the house. He came over to my house, with his roofing hammer still in hand, and he told me that I had to leave Terry. It was so embarrassing and I was sad and angry and confused.

Because my dad was a debate coach, he knew a ton of lawyers because practically all of his students went on to become lawyers. So he hired me one right away, and then I was finally getting divorced.



One weekend, when Seamus and I were living together and Terry was finally out of the picture, Seamus took the kids out to cut down a Christmas tree. The tree was great at first, but then it turned out to be weak and wobbly, and the ornaments kept falling off of it. So the next week, I threw it out. However, this was the same week that Terry happened to come home and surprise the kids (without telling me) with the help of his mom. I didn't know any of this because all that his mom had told me was that she wanted to play with the kids for the afternoon.

So when the boys came back home from being with their awful dad, they saw that the tree they had cut down with Seamus had been replaced. Plus Seamus happened to be gone. My youngest son saw the new tree, ran into his bedroom, and cried and cried and cried. I had no idea what was going on, and at this point I didn't even know that Terry was back. But apparently my son really thought the tree meant that Seamus was gone and that Terry was going

to be his dad again. It broke my heart. But I assured him over and over again that I was never, ever going to get back together with Terry. Ever.

I ended up having to pay off a lot of Terry’s student loans, but I honestly didn’t care. There is no money that is worth being in a really horrible marriage. I would pay anything if it meant not being married to him. I *really* resent when people say, “You just have to work at your marriage,” because you know what? Being in a bad marriage is literally no work. Just staying on that terrible trajectory of a bad marriage is no work. Getting *off* that boat and going through all the trouble and expense and heartache of a divorce takes way more courage. I do not like that, in some people’s brains, that idea is reversed. Try going through a divorce and then tell me which one is more work. You can either go through the motions of a sucky marriage every day, or you can decide that your happiness and the happiness of your kids is worth the time and effort to make a change.

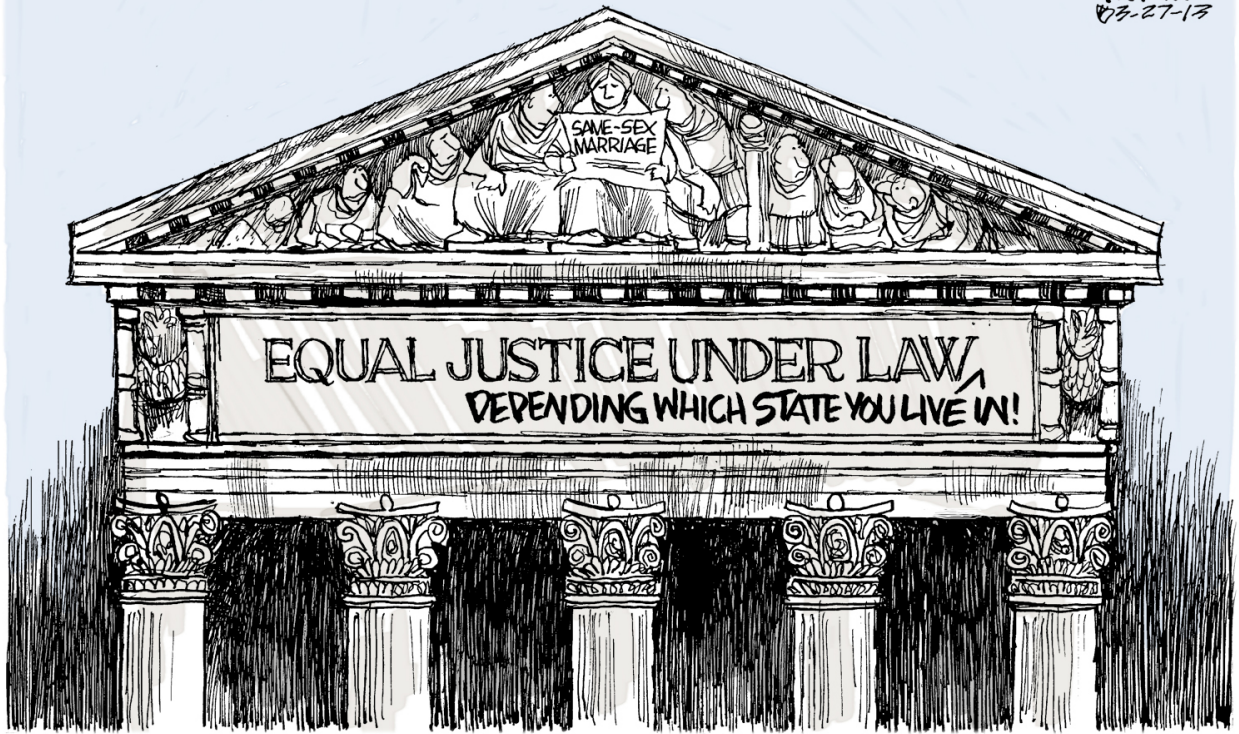


Looking back on it all now, I definitely knew I was in love with Seamus after he wrote that paper for me. The whole thing says so much about him. He can and *does* fix everything. If there’s something he can fix, he won’t sleep until it’s done. There’s something amazing about being with someone who can fix anything—and I don’t mean handiwork or anything like that. It’s like he can see the one thing that would make my life easier, and he does it. And when you meet that kind of person, you’d be an idiot not to spend the rest of your life with him.



The Miami Herald

MORAN
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“Communication”

Peter and I were set up as a blind date. We were both professional dancers in Las Vegas at the time, so we had mutual friends. This one friend of mine kept telling me, “Oh, Peter is such a great guy, and I think you’d really like each other.” I wasn’t really dating at the time, but after saying “no” a lot I finally agreed to meet with this guy Peter—mostly to shut my friend up.

It was my first blind date and Peter’s first blind date as well. I was 34 and he was 33. Both of us were kind of cautious about starting anything. He had just been in a not-so-great relationship, and I hadn’t dated for about a year. We kind of took it easy, and after our first meeting we agreed to meet for lunch or a movie—casual stuff. We wanted to really get to know each other. The more we got to know each other, the more we realized how much we had in common. He’s from a big Catholic family and I’m from a big Catholic family, so we found that we had a lot of similar traditions and stuff like that.

We took it really easy. I wouldn’t say it was “love at first sight” because we weren’t really in that mode. It developed into a great friendship, and then it all kind of blossomed from there. Emotions started getting involved, you know? Once we were maybe four or five months into it, we finally said how we really felt.

I love that it started out as such a strong friendship. When relationships start by sleeping together the first night, then everything is based off that sexual experience. And I didn’t want to do that this time. I wanted to get to know him. We really made sure that it was what both of us wanted.

And now we’ve been together for 20 years.



Peter and I definitely have the same family values and the same work ethic. We have similar upbringings—it involves a lot of family and a lot of food. We love food, we love to cook, we love our families—it's great.

Coming from a dance background, we are both very physical. Even when we stopped dancing professionally, we got a home gym in our basement and we never stopped working out. Diet and exercise make us both very happy, and it's an important part of our lives. We're very healthy, and I think when you're healthy you feel good about yourself and it makes everything better. Your sexual relationship is better, and it makes all aspects of your relationship healthier.

We're also different in a lot of ways, though. We definitely think differently. Whereas I'm a little bit mellower, laid-back, soft-spoken, Peter can get more anxious or worried about things. He's a little more high-strung than I am—not in a bad way though. He just has a lot of energy. He's like a little rabbit. If he has too much down time, he goes crazy.

The best thing about our relationship, though, is the time we get to spend together. When we were performing in New York and Vegas, there was a lot of working at night and weird hours so we really looked forward to the time we got to spend with each other. But, you know, you have to live your life and you have to go to work.

When we moved to Minnesota for his new job at a university, our lifestyle definitely changed. Peter was working constantly—always doing something. I went to cosmetology school our first year here, but I had a lot more down time than he did. So when we were together, it was a great thing.

When I went to school, I was with a bunch of 18- and 19-year old girls who had just graduated from high school. Being 42, it was a little hard to make friends. Peter always worried

that I wasn't happy, and I had to explain how hard it was to not have the social circle I used to rely on. It wasn't a huge problem, but it made things a little difficult.



I don't remember the last time we had an argument. I really don't. In the whole time that we've been together, we've really never yelled or raised our voices. I see relationships that use all kinds of profanities and cuss words, and I don't understand that. You should never talk to the person you love like that. Peter and I have always had a lot of respect for each other, and we have always emphasized communication. If more people communicated, they would save themselves a lot of heartache and a lot of trouble. We have never ever, ever fought about things like finances. It has never come up at all. I think it's because we are just constantly talking. It makes things so much easier if you're both on the same page.

Compared to past relationships, my relationship with Peter has a lot more respect and honesty. We're both very positive people, which makes me realize that there was a lot of negativity in past relationships. Peter and I can talk about anything, even if it might be upsetting.

Peter's parents are going to be celebrating their 60th anniversary next month. My dad passed away when I was young, but if he was still alive I know my parents would still be married. I know they would. I think both of us coming from strong marriage backgrounds has had a very positive impact on our own relationship.





“Collaboration”

Jackson and I met at work about four years ago. We both worked for the same company, and he was actually engaged at the time. We joked around a lot and hit it off pretty well, but I was like, “Whatever. He’s getting married. You can’t win ‘em all.” He worked there for about six months and then was transferred so I didn’t see him for a long time. Later that year, he got married.

I feel bad now because at one point when they were engaged I was joking with Jackson in the office and I said, “Oh, you guys are high school sweethearts? That’ll never work.” And sure enough, two years later they were divorced.

During that time we never hung out or anything, but since we still worked for the same company I would see him at meetings and stuff. Then I found out he was getting divorced and in my head I was like, “Well I TOLD you that would happen.”

I don’t really remember how we started hanging out after that or why, but it probably started through a mutual friend. When Jackson was going through his rough divorce patch, we found out that we lived by each other, so we started hanging out even more. We would stay up late watching movies and drinking wine, and it just kind of... developed. It wasn’t anything like, “Do you want to go out?” I don’t think that happens so much in this day and age. There isn’t so much courtship anymore. It was more like, “Hey... I think we’re a couple now.”

After he got divorced, a lot of rumors about us dating started flying around. It was hard because, after all, he *had* just gotten divorced. It may sound a little pompous and I don’t mean it in that way, but I’m very well known in the community. I know a lot of people and I’ve been

here for years and years. So when I go out with people, rumors start flying. It's everywhere the next day.

Anyway, one of our coworkers saw us together at the mall before we really wanted our relationship to be made public. I quickly tried to dash into Bath and Body Works, but it didn't work. The news about us being together went viral, and Jackson didn't deal with it well.

It's been a year now though, and everything has been worth it. He had to move about an hour away for work, so that's been kind of tough. Plus I have a new job, so our schedules don't mesh well. We don't see each other a whole lot—only about two or three times a month. But we talk every day. Like... constantly. People think we're crazy. We're one of those couples who will text all day long. And we love it.



Honestly, I think I knew I loved him years ago. It was instant. It was one of those moments where you're just kind of like... *whoaaa*. It was a connection that I had never felt with anyone else. I'm 32, so I've dated a lot, but I had never felt that instant, deep connection with someone before. And of course I felt bad because he was engaged at the time.

Little things throughout the time that we've known each other have solidified those feelings. There are so many little things that just make us get each other. It could be the dumbest thing in the world, but he gets it.

One time I was having a really terrible day and my friend texted Jackson about it. He drove down for an hour and showed up out of the blue. I couldn't believe it. It was so sweet. But I would do that too. I would drive anywhere for him.



We're very similar in that we're both complete idiots. One day we decided to go for a walk. It seemed nice outside, but once we got going we realized how terribly windy it was. Like...blistering wind. But instead of turning around, we just kept walking. We ended up walking for like eight miles! We'll just do ridiculous things. We never plan; we just do. Our favorite thing is to meet up at a candy store and spend hours there. We don't like to be predictable or structured.

As far as our differences go, well... Jackson is definitely more physically fit. Most people would look at us and not think that we're together. He runs a lot and he lifts far too much... but I'm not complaining.

I'm definitely more open than he is too. I think that happens a lot in relationships—you have the extrovert and the introvert. He would be fine with staying in every day and watching movies. I, however, would think that's fun for two days but then I would NEED to go out.

We're also different in that Jackson comes from a very strict Catholic family, and that has caused some issues for our relationship. His divorce definitely did not go over well with them. And his mother is like a wasp; she's quiet, but she'll sting ya. She is definitely not a fan of me. We deal with it though. I'm not rude, and I'm not mean to her. I'm respectful, but I'm not a shrinking violet either. I challenge her, but not in an inappropriate way. I'm a very patient person.

I would say that Jackson and I are two sides of the spectrum, but we really balance each other out.



This relationship feels so great, especially when I compare it to past relationships. I was actually engaged to a guy named Sam almost ten years ago. It didn't end well. We had been dating for four years, and then I found out that he was cheating on me with a friend of mine.

I could tell something wasn't right at the time. Things weren't meshing. I would come home and Sam would be real different. One time I got a flat tire and it was a *huge* deal for him to come out and help me. It was little things like that that clued me in. Another time in our relationship he apparently broke up with me but never told me! We were at a movie with friends and I tried to hold his hand, and then he got really angry and said, "Hey, we're broken up," and I was like, "Really? When were you going to tell *me*?"

So I slowly but surely figured it out. One of my roommates was actually behind the whole thing; she was helping my fiancé cheat on me. Needless to say, I lost a few friends during it all.

I went into an intense denial phase, and then of course I blamed myself for it for a long time. I didn't know what my friends or family would think. Luckily my mom came over the night I found out, which made Sam terrified—and rightfully so. She has this primal mother side like, "If you mess with my cub, I will kill you." So he left immediately. I had friends come over and console me also. It was devastating, but it taught me who my real friends were.

Then I went through a "Holy shit, it's not me, it's him!" phase. I got really, really angry. I went a little batty. One day, I was trying to collect my stuff to move out of the apartment and attempting to be civil, but it didn't really work. Sam was showering when I walked into the bathroom to get my stuff out of there, and right then and there I ripped down the shower curtain and said, "This is mine too."

It never got physical or anything, but I definitely let myself get angry. I took all the clothes I bought him and pulled a Beyoncé—everything of his I put in a box to the left. I actually used to play that song so loud when I was packing my stuff. It was my mantra. There was also that song by Kelly Clarkson, “Never Again,” that really spoke to me. The lyrics said, “I would never wish bad things, but I don’t wish you well.” That was EXACTLY how I felt.

After that, I basically disappeared off the face of the earth for a while. I changed my phone number, I changed my address, and I told people I would contact them when I was ready. I needed a moment. I was shattered like a puzzle. I didn’t know where I was going or what I was doing; I didn’t know what was up and what was down.

I remember one day I was going shopping with my friend, and suddenly a song came on and I had to pull over because it made me start bawling. She was like, “Okay, how about I drive from now on.” But I swear, every song that comes on the radio after a break-up makes you start crying. You hear things so differently.

Eventually though, I learned to let it go. Now, of course, when I say that all I can think about is Disney’s dang song, but you know what? That song is true too. You have to just let it go for you to move on. All the crap you hear about on movies and TV is true. It really is. You have to allow yourself to let it go.

You definitely have to learn your lessons and grow from those. The definition of insanity is repeating the same actions and expecting different results. And you’d be insane to go through that shit again.



“Equality”

When I moved to a new city, I started working at an athletic club. As it turned out, Jennifer was actually a member there. I knew who she was and she knew who I was, but we never, ever talked. Then, about eight months later, a mutual friend finally introduced us. Jennifer was like, “Oh, you’re that trainer!” and I was like, “Oh, you’re that member!” and then we started hanging out. We instantly became really good friends.

To be honest, I had a crush on Jennifer from the first time I saw her, so I was pretty excited when we actually met. Plus, it was nice to actually learn her name because, up until that point, I had always just called her “bandana girl” because she always kept her hair back with a bandana. We’ve talked about it a few times, and she said she also had always known who I was and had wanted to get to know me too. She’s actually 10 years older than I am, but it hasn’t been an issue at all. We make jokes about it.

We instantly got along really well. We didn’t start dating right away; we just became really good friends. To be honest, though, we ended up having a random hook-up one night. We were both a little intoxicated. Then we kind of backed off of our friendship for a while, and then about six months later we started hooking up frequently. From there, it was kind of dramatic because she didn’t want to date, but after a few months I realized how much I liked her and that I really wanted to date her.

We had a long discussion and decided that we were going to actually try dating. And I have to say, it’s going really well.



Our first real date was one of the best things that has happened in our relationship. We tried to pretend like we didn't really know each other, like it would be on a normal first date, but it was weird because we already knew everything about each other after being friends for a year. But it was fun, because she hadn't seen that side of me and I hadn't seen that side of her before.

Jennifer and I have very similar interests, so it makes dating her really fun. She's an athletic person as well, and we just... click. We know how to joke around with each other, we're both really laid back, and we like to go on adventures together. It doesn't matter where we go; we can always make it fun. We could go spend a weekend in a hotel somewhere or stay at home and it wouldn't matter—we'd have just as much fun.

We joke about how different we are in a lot of ways, though. I'm a Capricorn and Jennifer is a Cancer, and those two either get along really well or are totally opposite. I don't follow that stuff much, but she does. I will say that she has definitely gotten me to be able to verbalize and communicate more, though. I internalize a lot, and she's very verbal. She's also very social and has no problem making friends wherever she goes, and I like to be comfortable. It's not like I don't have social abilities, but she's definitely more extroverted.

We balance each other.



Like most relationships, we've had a few challenges. Our schedules make it really hard to see each other because Jennifer works two different jobs and my new position requires crazy hours as well. Unfortunately, I'm on one side of the city and she's on the other. The relationship we have, though, makes everything worthwhile. Even if we only see each other for 30 minutes, we make each other so happy that it doesn't matter.

We haven't had a fight or anything, because we talk about situations when they occur. We don't let things escalate. The biggest roadblock for us was probably when her friend had some jealousy issues after Jennifer and I started dating. They had kind of had a thing in the past, but it was all very complicated. I was upset because of the whole situation and she was questioning everything, but we talked it through. It wasn't the best time, but she reassured me many times that she made the right decision to be with me.



As far as the future goes... well, we have already talked about moving in together, but that won't happen for a while because of my lease. We have also talked about marriage, so I definitely see this going a very long time. It's a really, really good feeling.

Compared to past relationships, this one just... feels right. I don't really know how to explain it. I've been in a few different relationships where I thought I was in love, but now I can look back and know that I definitely was not. As we age, I think we figure out different things that happen in our lives and we learn what's right and what's wrong for us. There is just so much more to a relationship that has a strong emotional connection—one in which you would do *anything* for that other person.



“Acceptance”

Pauline and I met on the library steps at college. Well, I thought it was a pretty building; she knew it was a library. You might say we had different approaches to education.

A mutual friend introduced us to each other. We said hello, but I was dating someone else at the time. Neither of us can remember exactly how it all played out, but eventually I was single and I took Pauline out to see my horses.

On our first official date, we were back home and we stopped at a stoplight near a really junky motel. Pauline turned to me and said, “I wouldn’t go there if you paid me!” And then it got dead quiet for a while. Finally I said, “Well... I’m glad we’ve got that straight.”

I’ve never let her forget that story.



How did I know when I loved her? Oh God, I don’t know. How do you ever really know? All of a sudden there’s just... nobody else you want to spend time with. It isn’t anything that really strikes you out of nowhere. I think it was fun that we started out as friends first. That really strengthened our relationship.

I credit my sister a lot for my relationship with Pauline. I grew up with a very smart, very pretty sister, so I think that’s why I was immediately attracted to Pauline. She intimidated a lot of other people, but not me. I’ve always had fun with her. She’s so smart that it’s fun to try to get her trapped in a joke or something she can’t figure out.

The best thing about our relationship is probably the fact that it’s lasted so long. There’s a luck factor, especially when you consider the fact that 50% of relationships don’t make it.

Plus, we're both very strong personalities. That presents challenges in and of itself. Pauline can be kind of stubborn—she's very English, after all. But we always get things worked out. We're very fortunate that we have made it so far. I'm proud of our relationship.

For love to work, I think the other person has to be some kind of a challenge. I don't mean in fighting or anything, but in intelligence and growth. Sense of humor, too—that's very important. You have to be able to laugh and not take things too seriously. I think you also have to know the other person's personality real well and decide that you can accept that personality. You have to decide that you can understand and accept that person as they are and live with it. If you marry someone with the idea that they're going to be changed, it's not going to work.



The toughest time in our relationship was probably when our parents were aging. My mom was very ill and we had to give her shots regularly, and then my dad got sick as well. Then Pauline's parents and sister also became ill. There was a period of about ten years when we were losing lots of people, and it was very hard. It's very difficult to balance things when you're devoting all that time to other people and you still have to work and you have a family to take care of.



I've always admired Pauline's intelligence, and I have to say that she was always very smart when it came to parenting as well. Our son used to always leave his closet door open, and

that drove her crazy. So she finally put a full-length picture of a nude woman on the outside of his closet door, so that way he had an incentive to shut it. And it worked! She's funny that way; she thought it was better to have her teenage son look at naked lady than to reveal his messy closet. And you gotta love her for it.



THE ROMANCE

Said the pelican to the elephant,
"I think we should marry, I do.
'Cause there's no name that rhymes with me,
And no one else rhymes with you."

Said the elephant to the pelican,
"There's sense to what you've said,
For rhyming's as good a reason as any
For any two to wed."

And so the elephant wed the pelican,
And they dined upon lemons and limes,
And now they have a baby pelican,
And everybody rhymes.

Shel Silverstein



“Compromise”

We went to college together. We met when I was a senior and Laura was a junior. She was a math teaching major, and I was a math major. We had some mutual friends from high school because we were from small towns right next to each other, so I always kind of knew who she was, and I always kind of assumed that she knew who I was. That’s the way small towns work.

I had been abroad during the fall semester of my senior year, and when I got home I worked as a computer science tutor. Laura had to take a computer science course for her major, so I ended up tutoring her one night when she was in the lab. I didn’t really think anything of it. She was talking to me about what classes to take and stuff like that, and later she added me on Facebook. Then she messaged me on Facebook to see if I would be around over spring break. She’s super social so I was like, “Sweet! Something to do over spring break!” I was just going to be working otherwise.

Eventually it kind of worked out where she came over to my house and put a movie in, and we got to talking. I was thinking, “What’s happening right now? Am I on a date? Am I not on a date?” Then we talked until about three in the morning. And then she kissed me before she left.

She later told me that she had had this crush on me for forever but that she thought I had graduated (because I was gone during the fall semester). Apparently she thought she was never going to see me again, but then I came back and I was her tutor so she wasted no time.

A week later, we were inseparable.



Things developed very quickly. We hit it off so well right away. It's one of those relationships where you're just instantly comfortable. I felt like I had known her forever. We spent tons of times together from day one. We were together almost every night, with only a few exceptions. It was kind of zero-to-sixty, which scared the crap out of me at first. I wasn't intending to get into a relationship.

As far as when I knew I loved her, well... It's a weird story, and it doesn't probably make sense. After I had gotten to know her, I'd get drunk with my friends and be like, "You guys, I shouldn't say it because we've only been dating for two weeks, but I think I might 'L-word' her. It's insane." But that was kind of flirty, puppy love.

When it really hit me was a little while later when I was working on a project for my art class. I had to do some perspective drawings, and Laura stopped by to bring me food and stuff. I was getting really frustrated because I just couldn't get my picture right—I couldn't get it to work. I'm stubborn, and so when I get frustrated I tend to stay that way. Anyway, Laura came over and looked at my drawing and kind of walked me through how she would do it. She was so nice about it and would do funny things like offer me candy while she looked it over. And I instantly calmed down.

Suddenly, I wasn't frustrated anymore. She showed me how to do it, and it made perfect sense. Normally I am so stubborn and the mood I'm in is going to be the mood I stay in, but I quickly realized that she was probably the only person in the world who could have that calming effect on me.

I just knew right then that this was special. This was different. She gets me.



In the beginning, it was difficult because we took everything so quickly. I always had the “Don’t get married young” philosophy, and I wanted to take my time. Laura came from a very different background though, and she thinks you should live your life and dive in and embrace everything. So we were on very different timelines, which kind of caused some problems. She wanted to move in together right away, and I didn’t. That was kind of a big deal. She wanted to spend every waking minute together, and I didn’t think that was healthy. I wanted to do it right, do it slow. It was a point of contention at first, and we would fight about it early on in our relationship. But I think we kind of both realized that we were going to have to meet somewhere in the middle on that. It took a lot of conscious effort to put ourselves in the other person’s shoes.

I think as we grew up, we grew together. I started seeing things from her point of view and realized that I don’t need to be so independent anymore, and Laura started realizing the benefits of establishing your independence and getting things settled—not rushing into things and building a stable foundation for a relationship.



Laura and I both have pretty relaxed outlooks on life. I think we both like to keep things in perspective. We don’t take ourselves too seriously, and we realize that life is not worth living if you’re just going to be stressed out. We don’t feel the need to achieve wealth or fame or fortune. We’re both pretty grounded that way.

We're driven at the same time, though. We both want to be successful in our careers, and we want to be able to live comfortable, stable lives. We love kids and we want to have a family, too—she has five-year old twin brothers and we both adore them. We have similar hobbies and interests, like we both like to watch football and be active. All of those things bring us together.

We are also pretty different, though. Laura and I grew up in very different environments. We both come from small towns, but she comes from a *small* town. She also has a huge extended family and tons of cousins, and it all has this “community or die” vibe. They also don't value education quite as much; Laura was the first one in her family to go to college. She really had that small town life growing up without ever really traveling out of it, and I didn't so much. My dad was in the Air Force so I've always lived everywhere and we've always traveled. I was actually born in Japan. So we definitely differ in our views about certain social issues our things about the world. You can tell we grew up in different environments.

I think I really push her outside her comfort zone. (She eats sushi now, so we're making progress!) But the great thing is that she also keeps me grounded. It's a great balance. I can get a little esoteric or go off on tangents, and Laura will bring me back down to earth. It works out pretty well.



The biggest challenge in our relationship goes back to our different expectations. Laura believed that we were going to live together when she graduated. I had been thinking about it on my own and I thought that it would be good for her to have a year on her own to establish herself as a person. Plus I wanted some more time to live with my friends.

So I told her what I was thinking at probably the worst possible time. We were driving home from my sister's place in Iowa during a *blizzard*. Like, a terrible, terrible blizzard. She was crying because I wasn't ready for our relationship to go that far, and there was nowhere for us to go. That was one of those moments where I thought, "If we're so different about stuff like this, will we ever get over it?" I didn't know if it was just a test or a no-compromise situation. It was just... bad.

We managed to make it through, though. It took us a few weeks to get over that fight. She felt like I had been keeping things from her or that I hadn't been honest with her. I think we just had to reestablish that trust. I had to understand why it upset her so much, and she had to understand why I felt that way in the first place.

We fought early in our relationship, but now we just fight about dumb little stuff. Like, we're both really competitive. We'll play Mario Kart or something and it will end SO badly. Again, maybe a year ago it would have been different and we would have pouted about it, because neither of us would want to give in about anything. But we've gotten so much better and we realize that stupid little fights are just that—stupid and little. We're much quicker to admit that we're acting silly and we'll apologize or laugh about it.



For Laura's graduation present, we did a downtown Minneapolis extravaganza. We got a hotel room for a couple nights, we ate dinner on the rooftop, we went to a bunch of concerts, we went shopping, and we walked around the city. We spent the whole weekend together, and it was the first time since she'd graduated that we had really been able to go out. There was no more stress about school or finals for her, and I took time off of work so I could relax. It was

just the two of us, and we obviously don't have a ton of money, but it was fun to just kind of spoil ourselves for once.

It was like there was no one else in the world that weekend. We turned our cell phones off and we just made it about us. I think it says a lot when you spend 48 hours straight with only one other person and you never want it to end.



Wednesday
August 1, 2012



Chick-fil-A® Day

Show your support for the traditional American family values professed by Christian family owned Chick-fil-A, by taking your family, friends, and colleagues to Chick-fil-A for all three meals (or at least one)!

"We are very much supportive of the family - the biblical definition of the family unit. We are a family-owned business, a family-led business, and we are married to our first wives. We give God thanks for that... We know that it might not be popular with everyone, but thank the Lord, we live in a country where we can share our values and operate on biblical principles."

Dan Cathy, CEO, Chick-fil-A

“Unconditionality”

Just recently I met a guy named Arnel through a friend. I’ve been in this place where I’ve been teasing with my friends that my biological clock is TICK-TOCKing—not for babies, but for a man in my life. So I was telling my friend this and he said he might know someone.

Arnel and I met and sort of had a whirlwind of three days of hanging out and having fun and talking about what we want in a relationship and in our lives, and then somewhere things got a little lost in translation. He started to think that when I said what I wanted, it meant him! He’s been on this trip for about ten days now, which turned out to be good timing because we couldn’t communicate or see each other. He’s texted me things like “Oh I miss you, I’m thinking about you all the time,” and I’ve responded like, “Yep!” I’ve tried to make it very non-committal.

From previous relationships and experiences I’ve had, I’ve really learned to be a little more cognizant about my boundaries when getting into a relationship, especially when I just meet somebody. Being 31 years old now, there’s a lot of experience I’ve had prior to meeting someone that has given me a lot more understanding not only about myself but the world around me. I’m just pickier.

For example, a few weeks ago I went over to Arnel’s house. I was supposed to go over at a prescribed time, and when I left work, I texted him saying I was on my way. But then I never heard from him. When I got to his place, I still hadn’t heard from him. So I left! I went to my friend’s house and said, “He has ten minutes to call me and tell me that he’s home and wants to hang out, or else I’m gone.”

He did end up calling me so it was cool and everything, but yeah... I'm picky. I'm not going to wait around for someone. If you make plans with me, you better show up and be present.

Arnel actually called me yesterday and we had a little discussion about seeing each other when he got back from his trip. And then he totally regressed. He picked up on what I was throwing down. He said, "Whatever happens when I get back, I just want to make sure that we get to know each other." And in my head I was like, "YES! Now you are on the right track." I told him I was excited to get to know him too.

When you have clear expectations on your boundaries like that, I think it allows for a lot more authentic growth. You don't have that running script in the back of your mind like, "This is perfect, this is the one, oh my God, I'm planning my wedding..." You're just in the moment, getting to know that person. You're not projecting into some fantasy future.



I would say that I tend to come to decisions quicker than most people. A few years ago, I made the choice in my mind that I could love a guy, Anthony, a lot sooner than it came out for both of us. It was after about three months that we really said that we loved each other.

It goes through phases though. After about 11 months, I really felt like I knew what I wanted and that I really, really loved him. I think he felt the same way, and ultimately that was maybe one of the reasons we couldn't continue our relationship. He was a little younger than I was—and not to say that age always makes a difference, but I don't think his maturity level was able to handle that level of commitment to somebody.

Once in a while he'll still text me and be like, "I still love you" and I want to say "I TOLD YOU!" but I have strong boundaries. It's not even a thing anymore.

I had been seeing Anthony for 15 months when he ended things. We were living together, and we had communicated that we were going to be there for each other no matter what. We also had this thing between the two of us where, at times, we would feel really alone and that the other person was really the only other person there for us. So the fact that we knew we had that expectation of each other to be there for each other no matter what—and for him to just turn his back on it all and walk away—it was really hard for me.

It definitely affects me now when I get into new relationships. I make a character judgment when I look at other people. I think, "Is this someone who has been able to have an experience in their life that they're proud of and that they talk about and communicate saying, 'It was tough but I stuck it out and I finished it,'"—that's an important aspect of knowing someone now to me.

If the other person in the relationship doesn't care or doesn't even try to care, it's not worth it. I have this mantra: "Nobody caaaares!" and "Nothing maaaatters!" because the world is a fucking long-ass piece of history. The earth was formed, dinosaurs roamed the earth, they died, and humans came around. And even after a long, long time after my small little life, the earth will still be going on. Sometimes it's easier to have that perspective, and sometimes it's harder. But I feel like if a person has a good intention and that's their consistency, who cares if they forget the groceries or if they're kind of a pig? That kind of thing doesn't bother me because *nothing maaaaaaatters!* As long as the other person tries and has a good heart full of good intentions, that's all that matters.



I had this other boyfriend named Thomas. I hadn't been seeing him very long, but he and I went to my family's Christmas. One of my Christmas gifts was a nice little stack of cash from my parents—it was very sweet.

Thomas told me that he had to get his stuff out of storage, so I rented us a truck when we got back from Christmas and we drove it to his storage unit. He told me it was going to be \$100 to get his storage unit out. Well, it was \$400, and he used all of my Christmas money to pay for it. I was pissed. I was PIIIISSSED!

It was just sitting there and he took it. I was like, "Excuse me!" and we talked about how he would pay me back, but that never happened. That was shady.

It's now a rule that whoever I date has to have a job. I'm kind of a caretaker, so it's easy for me to look at someone and think, "Oh that's cool, I can take care of this person," but now I am MUCH more focused on how they can take care of me. I know I can take care of myself...but it's nice to have help.

I have a lot of hope in a lot of people, and I can see it in them sometimes... but if they don't recognize that and they don't want to fulfill their potential, then there's nothing I can do. And BOY is that hard to feel.

Some people are just really scared of their own success.



In the case of my last boyfriend, Joseph, we were both similar in that we were both deeply emotional and personal. People who are willing to bear their depth of emotion and be a

little vulnerable—that works for me. I’m able to manage that really well, but some people aren’t. They’re either too emotional or have these incredible ups and incredible downs. It’s all about moderation.

What made us different from each other? Well... I am white and from privilege. I’ve got privilege problems on both ends of the stick. Sometimes it works for me, and sometimes it catches me off-guard, and sometimes it takes me out of the market for things. But I am highly overeducated and I’m white and I like black guys. I tend to like guys who are a different race. That can cause problems because the whole set of cultural and socioeconomic problems that the people I like to date have don’t always exist in the same circles that I have. But I appreciate that difference. While I find it valuable, it doesn’t always jive with the other person’s environment—whether that’s family or friends.



So... here’s a fucked-up story.

In 2011 I was dating this guy Marc. We were actually engaged and we were going to move to New York City. Things started to get a little intense between us, and I ended up breaking up with him.

I didn’t see him for one month, and then he showed up on my doorstep one night. We both confessed that we had been miserable for that month, and we decided that we would try to move to New York again. I helped him get a place, and it was partly my place.

A few weeks into him living there, Marc called me and said, “I have some bad news. I went to the doctor today and I tested positive for HIV.”

It was really overwhelming. I left work, went home and thought about it, and called him again later. We had this whole conversation about how it was fine and that even though it changed us, it didn't change us. We said, "I love you, I love you, I love you," about a million times and vowed that we would get through it because we already had a terrible month apart. Love, love, love, cry, cry cry—the whole thing.

The next day I went to the doctor and got my test and it came back positive. So I called him and told him it was positive.

Then he said, "Oh my God, I can't fucking believe you."

I was so confused.

He said, "Okay, well I've got something that you're not going to like to hear. Yesterday when I told you that I went to the doctor and tested positive, I was kind of lying. I wanted to test you and make sure that you really loved me through anything and everything."

What?

So the next words out of my mouth were,

"Fuck you.

Fuck you FOREVER.

You think that it's okay that yesterday we were in this situation and it was *you* who was positive and *me* supporting you and telling *you* that I would be there for *you*... and today it's the same situation only reversed and NOT A LIE and you're trying to tell me that you're mad at me and that you don't want to be with me?

Fuck you.

Fuck you forever.

And your family.

You will be cursed for generations.”

He got really quiet and he did apologize, but... wow, did he turn out to be such a fucker anyway.

I do know that he is HIV positive now, but to this day I don't know if he was positive at the time. I don't know how he got it or how I got it. But I do know he is the biggest fucker I've ever met.

He wasn't a citizen so I actually called customs and said, “Listen, this guy is here on a student visa and it shouldn't be that way.” I mean, they're not going to go after him but it made me feel better.

Last April, when I got back from a long trip, I got a call from Marc out of the blue. At that point it had been three and a half years since I had last seen or spoken to him. He said that he was living in Minneapolis and wanted to hang out, and as it turns out he lived about five blocks from me.

I told him that I was staying at a friend's and that he could come over but he couldn't come in the house and all this shit... and he came over and he was basically like, “I know that all this stuff happened between us, but now that I'm here and you're here, I'm just saying that I could be there for you.”

And I was like, “FUCK NO. HELL NO. You just go on with your bad self and your bad life and don't tell anyone that you know me.”

I just laid it down because I couldn't believe he was asking that. It was *messed up*.



“Respect”

George and I both went to the same college. I saw him around, and... well, I thought he looked interesting. George was a junior and I was a freshman, so I asked one of my upper-class friends if I should ask him out. My friend immediately said, “Nah, I don’t think you want to do that,” and I said, “No... I think I do.”

The next week I asked George out. We hadn’t really met before; I just asked out of the blue. I don’t know what made me do it, but I think it was because I had seen what a good dancer he was. He was a *really* good dancer.

Anyway, George couldn’t go out with me because he was away for a track meet. He then wanted to ask me out in return, but he was running for president of a big organization on campus at the time and wasn’t sure if it would be good for his image. Apparently George asked his campaign advisor if he should go ahead with dating me. The advisor said no because I had a reputation for being a really boring bookworm, but George didn’t take that advice either. So he asked me out to a movie.

After the movie and a long night of dancing, he took me back to my place. He was being kind of shy and very polite, so as he was about to leave I just grabbed a hold of his collar and kissed him goodnight.

He says that was the moment that sealed the deal.



There was one moment that really told me a lot about George. When we had been dating for a while and he had just gotten elected president of a big organization, a couple of my friends

came up to me and said, “George is getting to be a pain in the neck. You need to do something about it.”

I figured it would either make it or break it, but I told him what they said. He thought about it for a while and said, “Okay, I’ll check it out.”

He decided to research whether or not people had been frustrated with him. He came back to me and said, “Well... you were right.” And he immediately changed his ways. That was not an easy thing to do, and it really impressed me.



George likes to think he’s handy, but he never has been. When we had our first studio apartment, he was determined to put in new flooring. He bought a prefinished floor, but he laid the whole thing upside-down. So then he had to sand the *whole thing*. He also wanted to run an extension cord from one place over to another, so he plugged it in, measured how far it had to go, and cut it in two... while it was still plugged in. It melted the knife! Thank God it had a wood handle so it didn’t electrocute him. I think I recognized right then and there how we were different. I like to fix things, and he definitely doesn’t. To this day I do everything technical, but it works out because he does the laundry and grocery shopping.



Our family owned a department store since its establishment in 1868. We had to close it in 1992, and that was one of the most challenging things we’ve ever done. We didn’t see it coming. Life was changing. There were 23 different stores our size all over the United States

that were part of the same buying office. After the buying office had been closed for a little while, we were cleaning out our office and found a list of those 23 stores. After looking over it, we realized that there were only two others left in business. And we weren't aware of it. They had all quietly closed their doors.

Malls had started taking over. Malls that were 100,000 square feet were replacing the stores that were 20,000 to 30,000 square feet. The mall that opened up near our store was 1,200,000 square feet, and at the time our whole town had about 1,200,000 square feet of retail in total. So when they opened up, they sucked out all the other businesses.

It was a stressful time in our lives, but it honestly wasn't very stressful for our relationship. In fact, I really can't think of any real lows throughout our relationship. I attribute that to our family—having people around us who are very supportive. We have never gone to bed mad. But then again... we never get very mad.

I think what makes our relationship so strong is that we each bring different assets to the table. It's also always been a real close relationship. We do everything together. And we don't have a whole batch of friends we run around with—it's our kids and our grandkids that we like to spend time with. I think that's very unusual. I think we enjoy doing the same things, and we enjoy being ourselves. We like each other's company.

He is an extrovert and I'm an introvert, but that blends pretty well. We know how to balance it. But then again... we *have* had 62 years to work it out.





MICHAEL TRAM VIA GETTY IMAGES

“It was only when I started
TO BE MYSELF
that the music started
to flow and people started
to listen. - *Sam Smith*”

HUFF
POST
HuffPost

“Balancing”

I met Emily when I was a senior in high school and she was a freshman. I was interested in her, but we didn't do much. Her folks were pretty restrictive as far as what we could do and how often.

I worked pretty hard on her. She was not instantly into me by any stretch of the imagination. I don't think she was even necessarily interested in dating anybody seriously, like the way I wanted it to be. But on New Year's Eve that year, we made out on the floor so much that we both had chapped lips. I didn't even know that was possible.

Growing up, other kids had phones lines in their rooms and they would spend the evenings talking. I wasn't allowed to talk on the phone at my house, and Emily was still on a party line. There was no way I was going to have a phone in my room, according to my parents. We could either be at her house or my house and rent movies.

Emily's parents liked me, which is the funny part of the story. Initially they didn't like me because I was older, and I had started to party with kids around town and what not. I could have been considered a little more... well, not “dangerous,” by any means, but I wasn't a “just say no-er” anymore. I used to joke that “just say no” isn't really about saying no. It's about saying no long enough so that you're not drinking when you're 14. It should really be, “just say not yet.”

Anyway, the summer after I graduated from high school, for whatever reason, Emily just changed her mind. We had a great summer. We were just two young kids in love.

Then I went to school at University Colorado-Boulder, which was about a three-hour drive from home. We wrote letters. We would try to write every day. I remember getting to the

point where you just didn't have anything to say. It was, "love you, miss you" over and over again.

She would come to visit, and she says that she perceived that I was embarrassed of her, which was *so* not the case at all. Not at all. So that was always really interesting to hear. It was largely going on in her brain.

But by the end of that year, it was clear that something wasn't right. It wasn't working, really. The first two weeks after term I went straight to California with my roommate. When I came back, Emily and I went to play golf, and we ended things.

Emily says it was mutual, but she dumped me.



A while afterwards, I found out that there was this other interest of hers. It was unclear if there had been any overlap between us. They kind of dated, and I immediately went into a tailspin of fuming self-loathing. I was a lifeguard and a swim instructor and all I did that summer was work at the pool and ride my bike. That's all I did.

We didn't speak. The difference between most of our friends' high school romances and ours is that when they would break up, they would have contact within two or three days and they would either fight or get back together. That was the cycle. They'd never be out of contact for more than two weeks.

For whatever reason for Emily and me, that was it. I didn't see her. She didn't see me. I went back to school, and we had no communication for a year. She sort of dated someone else, and I ended up dating a girl from Chicago very seriously.

I really did love Emily, though. I still remember seeing her walk down the hall for the first time. It was this absolute, instantaneous, higher level attraction than I had ever experienced before. I really liked her right out of the gate. And we got so serious so quickly, and it was so painful to lose her. But what made it so much worse was that the other person she dated was the POLAR OPPOSITE of me. Like... SO DUMB. I received senior science student of the year, you know? So that was devastating. And insulting. Something like that cuts right into what you think your girlfriend liked about you. You start wondering if it was all in your own head, and that's harmful. Those are things you like about yourself the most!

So we hadn't spoken for a year, even though we had this massive history. The year of getting over her was just a mess. I was so sad.

Eventually I developed another very, very serious girlfriend. But here's where it goes down.

This other girl, Hannah, was from Chicago. We went to school in Colorado, so at the end of sophomore year, I helped her bring her stuff to her storage unit and took her to the airport. But there were a few things that couldn't fit in the storage unit that I was going to keep for her since I lived nearby.

So I drove back home and (why do I do these things?) I opened the top box and there was a composition notebook right there. And it turns out to be a diary. DANG IT.

So of course I flipped to the beginning and I started to read it.

The entry was written well before the two of us had started dating, but it described a sexual encounter with someone else and I was like... *really?* I knew who it was, and it really caught me off guard. It bothered me a lot. I was fuming all afternoon.

That evening I told my parents I was going to go drive around. It was raining. It was a very “Say Anything moment.” I needed to think through this whole Hannah thing. I ended up idling the car past Emily’s house, got out, walked all the way down the road, started picking up small, non-threatening pieces of rock and started plunking her window. It was surreal. I might as well have been watching myself do it.

She came out and she was like, “What are you doing?”

We hadn’t seen each other for a year.

I said, “Do you know who I am?” and she said “Yeah. What are you doing?” I said, “I don’t know. Do you want to come down?”

And then she came down. She popped right out of the house. She stood pretty close to me, and I vividly remember thinking “If this doesn’t work, I am probably not only back to ground zero with getting over her—I’m probably three or four steps even deeper in the hole. This is either the greatest thing I’ve ever done or the dumbest thing I’ve ever done.”

I said, “Do you want to drive around?”

She said yes.

We drove and talked until two in the morning.

The next day, we went out. And it was like... back on. Immediately. The only reason that got shut down was, well, Hannah.

So... the next day I was on the phone to Chicago.

“Remember Emily? The girl I’ve talked about? Well... probably not as over her as I thought I was. Yeah. Deepest apologies.”

I think I told Hannah the story about the diary. I said something like, “I saw your diary and it made me mad, so I went and looked up Emily. And she’s still interested in me, and I’m

still interested in her. So, you know, bummer.” I was young and I probably wanted to shift some blame.

And at that point, Emily and I were back on and we never looked back.



One of the scariest moments in my life came soon after that, when I was at school. A lot of my friends had started smoking pot, but I was not going to go there. I was going to wait, for better or for worse. And it ended up being for worse. I was by no means a “lifestyler,” but it was Boulder, it was college—whatever.

During junior year, my roommate’s friend from California started growing and tried to dry it and ship it to us. Turns out, it had molded, which makes it very psychedelic—which I didn’t know.

My whole family had baseline anxiety to begin with, so this wasn’t going to help.

But my friends were like, “Come on, one more time,” and I was like, “Oh, fine.”

It was so bad. We went to the place with the weed, had to leave the place, and woke up the next morning in a fog. I didn’t think anything of it, but my roommate was freaking out. Apparently I had been moaning and screaming all night. My friends didn’t feel right. We got all worked up. Bottom line: I had a massive, full-blown anxiety attack.

I couldn’t function. It led to constant anxiety. I wasn’t functioning for months, and eventually I had to work up the courage to tell my aunt and uncle, who lived nearby.

After that, I took a semester off to get it together. Of course my folks had me see the family doc, only to have him do an MRI to make sure I didn’t have a brain tumor. Then he asked if I was exercising. Okay. Thanks. No counseling.

So I ended up working for four or five months, and I tried so hard to hide the anxiety. I had just gotten Emily back, and I couldn't fathom losing her.

I already didn't believe in God. That happened in high school. But during all of this I remember lying there in bed and thinking, "If I can just find a way to be functional through the day." That was the goal. And of course now I know that that's textbook diagnosis.

At this point Emily was a senior in high school and I was back home. I worked long days with a guy who didn't talk at all. He probably said 20 words to me total, but that was fine.

Slowly, slowly, slowly, I got better. I would have windows of normalcy, and then those stretched and became better. Then that was my normal state.

Thankfully, Emily stuck by me through it all.



Now, 20 years later, we've been through so much. I joke around that when you hit your 30s or mid-30s, that's when half the lives of the people you know fall apart. They've gotten married, they've had kids, they're in their jobs, and suddenly there isn't anything that they're "working for" anymore. At that point, whatever you've built with someone either works or it doesn't.

Emily and I have talked about that and why it's worked for us. Have we had our moments? Absolutely. But here's the key—neither of us has ever expected each other to change, but we've both expected change. You can't create what you want the other person to be, but you also have to know that you haven't bought a product off a shelf. It's a journey. We both got to that same concept, and I think it's been instrumental in the strength of our relationship. Almost a

day doesn't go by where we don't talk about how great our relationship is. I'll be like "Ahh it's so good," and she'll be like "I know, it's so good!"

As far as challenges in a relationship go, I think you have to learn to escape the script that you develop. Good and bad, you develop behavior patterns. That can be as simple as mini fights that you slip back into over and over again. There have been times when we've been really good, but a key word can make us slip back almost instantly into a conflict. Being mindful of that is what really helps us.



We're each comfortable. Over time, everything has just worked out. I cook, and that happened because one summer we both wanted to work at Barnes and Noble. They interviewed me on Tuesday and said they'd call me the next day. They interviewed her on Wednesday, and they gave her the job on the spot. So I didn't have a job, but eventually there was a local restaurant needing a whole new kitchen staff. I told them that I didn't know how to cook, but I knew how to work, and they told me to show up the next night at 5:30. So that summer I went from being taught how to run a knife to running grill or sous. So now, not only do I do the cooking, I love it.

We also both love to garden, but we didn't know that going into this. I have made efforts to learn about things that she's interested in, and she's made efforts to learn about things that I'm interested in, and occasionally we find things that we're both interested in. And now we've discovered that there's nothing we love more than weeding. We so look forward to the weekends where we can be side by side on our knees weeding a bed. We love to weed! Who knew?



Emily was always very, very introverted, but her professional choice forced her out of that. I technically am introverted but, oh my God—I need my alone time. We are both very private people. We will have people over and entertain, and we like it, but it's work. We want small numbers of people in our lives at a much deeper level.

We love our weekends, and we both love rituals. Most weekends we know that on Saturdays we're going to get up, have a cup of coffee, put the kids in the car, drive to the Holiday gas station and get a couple gas station breakfast burritos, donuts, and more coffee. Then we drive around for an hour and just look at stuff. And that's what we do. It's perfect.

Emily is organized; I'm not. Her house will never be clean enough for her. I'm very good at picking up, but I'm less good at noticing the dust. Everything can be pretty good overall, but she can come home and lose her damn mind. Once the one thing is keyed in on, emotionally the whole place is a disaster.

She's also the hardest working person I've ever met. Not only is she the hardest working person, but she also needs to work harder than anyone else. She will use the fact that other people don't work as hard as she does against them, but then if they did, she would just have to work harder. I, on the other hand, am endlessly trying to create mechanisms so that I am where I need to be when I'm supposed to be. I need deadlines. I have to have deadlines with *almost* not enough time to get things done in order to get things done.

She focuses a lot more on little things. She needs that to make her world right, whereas I could spend my entire life cleaning a house and it would be a total waste of my life.



We went through a challenging patch when we had to redefine our roles in the relationship. We always both worked, we were always both in school, and then she became a high earner. I always found odd jobs while she worked as a physician. Then all of a sudden Emily's income exploded and we decided we wanted a child. We decided that we could either pay for daycare and I could work, or I could stay home. The net gain would have been another \$5,000 a year, but I wouldn't have been raising our daughter.

A relationship is about balancing—always tweaking. We have an incredibly strong relationship. The one thing you can fall back on when it's a bummer—when it's hard and you're driving each other crazy—is that commitment. When you know that there's that commitment and you're in it for the long haul for real, when you know that's there—you can stomach the rest of it. I can't imagine what it would be like to get in that hard moment when you're frustrated or you feel hurt or insulted or slighted and then to be unsure if the other person is really even committed to you. That would be undoable.

When things are good, there's nothing like it. And we both know it is what it is because it's built on so many years. It's so awesome that we have known each other for 22 years.

You know, in a relationship you often end up spending a lot of time just playing out your life in the same space. But one of the indicators that you're particularly in love is when *laughter* starts to show up. When Emily and I are feeling very much in love, we start to laugh. A lot. What I love the most is when we have a really big laugh about something that is so nuanced and is totally an inside joke—something nobody in the *world* would find funny but us.

That's love.



Letter to the Participants

To My 13 Fabulous Interviewees,

First of all, I want to thank you again for agreeing to be a part of my project. You all took time out of your very busy lives to sit and talk with me (and some of you even fed me!), and I will always be grateful for that. You opened yourselves up to discuss very personal parts of your lives, and that is definitely not an easy task.

I want you all to know how much I have learned about life and love through my conversations with you. With some of you, your interviews were more like therapy sessions. We dove into some deep, emotional issues and tried to process the experiences together. With others, our conversations were mostly filled with laughter and the occasional discussion about your relationship. No matter what I discussed with you, though, I always left feeling like I had a better understanding of what love is and how it is so similar (and yet so different) for everybody.

By completing this project I hope to make a difference, even if it's a small one, in the way people think about love. I hope it persuades people to consider and value the experiences of every type of romantic relationship. And while many of you, myself included, do not belong to the LGBT community, I firmly believe that the rights and respect of individuals are not just LGBT issues; they are human issues.

Thank you again for your participation, for making this project a reality, and for sharing so much with me. Thanks to you, I now understand that love can truly take countless shapes and forms—from drunken kayak excursions, to gas station breakfasts, to photos of nude women plastered onto closet doors. No matter what your experiences, you all seem to find love to be a pretty wonderful, hilarious, and powerful thing.

And you know what? I can't help but agree.

Best Wishes,

Bailey

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