

BY DAN DIGMANN

... about my MS wedding

Movie writers would never dream up a fairytale of two people with MS falling in love and living happily ever after. But Jennifer and I have been living this truest of love stories. We started a new chapter when we were married last year, on September 10, 2005.

MS brought us together

Combined, we've taken on this chronic illness for more than a dozen years. Jennifer was diagnosed eight years ago and claims an unwanted seniority over me by nearly 27 months. She has secondary-progressive MS. Mine is relapsing-remitting.

We met three years ago at a special National MS Society program called "Finding Your Buried Treasure." Jennifer was one of the small group leaders at this daylong program intended to help people with MS rediscover the goals and

dreams they'd lost sight of in dealing with the rigors of everyday lives.

How convenient that a National MS Society program manager told me to sit at Jennifer's table. She thought Jennifer and I would have a lot to talk about because we both were younger and were both self-help group leaders.

We wound up talking more about other things: our respective fantasy football teams, how her dog had destroyed her Tom Petty hat, and my passion for Bruce Springsteen's music.

I fell in love with Jennifer the

day we met. Periodic e-mail messages led to regular telephone calls. But one fateful Thursday night, I received a phone call from her brother, who told me they had taken Jennifer to the hospital.

Apparently MS felt it wasn't getting enough attention in our relationship.

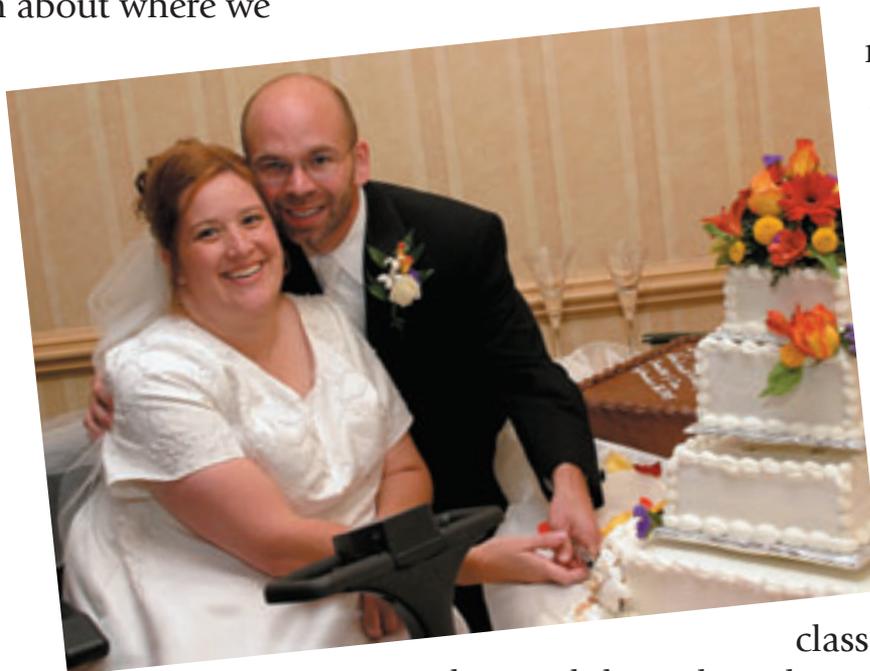


The next step

That weekend I drove more than 200 miles roundtrip to visit Jennifer in the hospital as she recovered from a severe exacerbation. In the middle of a heart-to-heart conversation about where we thought our relationship was going, she let me know for sure in eight words.

“I think I want you to kiss me,” she said as she bit her bottom lip.

Not believing what I had just heard, I sought more direction.



“You mean, like, right now?”

Our relationship took off from there. Jennifer lived more than 90 minutes away from me, so for nearly three years we spent at least an hour on the phone each weeknight, and I’d make that 200-mile roundtrip to see her each weekend. On October 23, 2004, I asked Jennifer to be my wife.

The main event

Anyone who has ever planned a wedding knows it isn’t simple. From caterers and bands to flowers and guest lists, there are so many details. And because most bridal magazines don’t specialize in tips for planning accessible weddings, there were a lot of things we had to figure out on our own.

We held our ceremony and reception in the same hotel conference center. This limited scooter-to-van transfers and made things easier for our out-of-town guests and our friends who also have MS.

A late-morning service and early afternoon reception put us all one step ahead of MS-related fatigue, and a jazz quartet playing at the reception added a touch of

class. It also

thwarted the awkwardness of having to sit out the Hokey Pokey or the Chicken Dance. We avoided a cumbersome buffet line by having a sit-down lunch where wait staff served us all chicken parmesan.

And our honeymoon? We took a week-long trip to Toronto, where we saw the Blue Jays take on Jennifer’s beloved Boston Red Sox.

From my MS fatigue and constant numbness to Jennifer’s spasticity and regular Novantrone treatments, we willingly face every challenge the disease throws at us.

But the MS doesn’t define who we are. And our love story continues. ■

Dan Digmann is a leader of the Gratiot County-area MS self-help group and a frequent contributor to InsideMS.