

The one where Liz & Jeff met

For many couples, the moment they first meet is one they never forget, and Jeff Harkey is no exception. It was the beginning of freshman year at Bridgewater State University when Jeff saw Liz McDonough come marching down the hallway of their Shea Durgin dorm, following five steps behind a guy with a cast on his hand, Liz attempting to help him. “Who is that? I want to get to know her,” Jeff recalls thinking in the moment as Liz passed him in the hallway, rolling her eyes at her erratic friend. “She looked beautiful — and very frustrated with the guy she was following.” But it wasn’t until the two began spending “obscene” amounts of time together in the hallway, as Liz describes, that a close friendship began to form. Displaced by her two roommates who often had guests in their room, Liz frequently resorted to spending her nights in the hallway where night owl Jeff voluntarily set up his video game equipment as to not disturb his roommate. Jeff would help Liz write essays and in between, the two shared long conversations about their pre-college lives and families back home in Millis and Osterville, respectively, the precious bonding moments causing Jeff to quickly fall for Liz. “He was very dedicated to his craft of pursuing me,” Liz quips. A “flirtationship” quickly took shape in the form of Jeff wheeling Liz back to campus in a grocery store shopping cart, to the grandiose way Jeff would wake up Liz for her 8 a.m. classes. “He would come knock on my door and play music on his laptop, happy, joyful music to wake me up, and then he would walk me with his laptop on his shoulder into the elevator and all the way down to the bus where I would get on to go to class,” Liz recounts of the aww-inducing gesture, Jeff even going so far as to stop by the dining hall first to greet her with breakfast. “It was half embarrassing, half adorable.”

With feelings blossoming between them, and Jeff making it clear how he felt about her before she headed home for Christmas break, it wasn’t until Liz arrived home that she realized just how strong their bond was. “The second I was home on Cape, I missed him so much and I couldn’t stop thinking about him,” she confesses. Though he was eager to start a relationship when they returned to school, Jeff respected the time Liz needed in order to be ready for that step. But the nature of their relationship changed on April 20, 2012. As Liz was walking back to her dorm room after class, she was stopped by one of her peers who handed her a small bag of her favorite candy, M&Ms, much to her confusion. A few steps ahead, she was stopped by another stranger who handed her a bag of M&Ms, a pattern that continued all the way to the lobby of her dorm where the security guard was ready and waiting with a bag of the chocolate candies in hand. Seconds later, the elevator doors opened and a lone skateboard came rolling out, carrying the remaining five packs of M&Ms, Jeff appearing from around the corner to officially ask Liz out on their first date. Not wanting their anniversary to be associated with a marijuana-related holiday, Liz rejected the offer — until just after midnight on April 21 when Jeff inquired again, solidifying their future as an official couple.

An elaborate trip to NYC for Liz’s birthday and attending one another’s family gatherings — including a trip to the shooting range that was meant to serve as an intimidation tactic from Liz’s father, Steve — further strengthened their bond. After a year together, the couple hit a rough patch and split up for the summer heading into junior year. But it didn’t take long for them to realize how much they meant to each other. “It was a serious wake up call, ‘I had something really good and I need that back,’” Liz remembers of the time. “Nobody was comparable to him.” “When we broke up, I realized how much I missed her. When I’d go to talk to someone about anything that I wanted to talk about whether it’s my day, something going on in my life or an event that happened or just some news, the first person I instinctively would go to would be her,” Jeff reflects. “The more I dwelled on it and thought about it, I’m like ‘I don’t just love her, I’m in love with her.’ When we got back together, it really solidified it.”

The one where they made it work

After rekindling their romance at the start of junior year, their relationship only grew from there, Jeff realizing that each time his future would cross his mind, Liz was always a part of the vision, so much so, he couldn’t picture life without her. “After getting back together, every time I thought about my future, I was thinking about *our* future, and I stopped thinking about solely just me and I started thinking about we and

us,” he explains. “Anytime I get asked that question ‘what do you see yourself doing in five years?’ I always picture us together.” Eventually, Liz moved back home to the Cape while Jeff returned to his hometown of Millis to work at his family’s liquor store, the couple maintaining their long-distance relationship through video chats and weekend visits. “I knew that we’re in it for the long haul so long ago, but there’s always moments that remind me,” Liz observes. One of those defining moments came at the end of 2018 when Liz experienced a health scare that landed her in the hospital for multiple days, later diagnosed as Crohn’s Disease, Jeff faithfully remaining by her side during rounds of tests and sleepless nights at the hospital. “Jeff stayed by my side the entire time I was there,” Liz says gratefully. “It was a good reminder that he’s a good one and I’ll keep him.” For Jeff, the reality of their lifelong partnership also revealed itself in moments of unconditional love, such as when Liz provided him with the space and support he needed when his grandmother passed away while they were in college. “She was there for me and was very sweet towards me and caring. I needed space at first like a lot of grieving people may need some space, and she was always willing to give that; but without being abrasive or smothering was always able to let me know ‘I am here when you are ready to talk.’ Eventually we did, and I was incredibly grateful,” he humbly praises.

The one with three and one quarter blessings

Though Liz started hinting five years into the relationship that she was hoping for an engagement ring, Jeff wanted to be more practical than impulsive and was intent on living together first before committing to marriage. After surviving a long-distance relationship, with Jeff ultimately moving to the Cape to be with Liz full-time and get a job as a bank teller at Rockland Trust, they both knew forever was in their grasp. Not long after the couple’s 7th anniversary in 2019, Jeff and Steve ventured out for a game of golf. But as they neared the end of the course, the typically talkative Jeff suddenly became tongue-tied as he prepared to ask for Steve’s permission to marry his daughter. “We start walking and I start rambling, ‘so Steve, I really love your daughter and I care for her and I promise to always love and respect her and I will listen to her and communicate with her,’ and he doesn’t say a word,” Jeff narrates. “I literally am rambling the same things for 10 minutes and he just puts his hands up and he puts on his serious voice. ‘Are you trying to ask me for my permission to marry my daughter?’ And I’m like ‘well, yeah.’ And he puts out his hand for a handshake and says ‘well, you got it,’” Jeff recalls of the sweet moment. “I wanted to throw up, but I had such a huge sigh of relief.”

With the golden ticket of his future father-in-law’s blessing in hand, Jeff made it a point to approach Liz’s other family members and ask for their blessings. During a trip to Michigan to visit Liz’s sister Katherine, brother-in-law Brian and two adorable nieces, Sarah and Emily, along with Liz’s bother Will and his wife Aimee, Jeff gained “three and one quarter blessings” from each sibling, as he calls it (plus some financial advice from Will). Soon after, Jeff began plotting the proposal, making multiple trips to Tiffany’s until he found the perfect ring for his blushing bride.

The one with the dream proposal

Days before the start of Liz’s February vacation from school in 2020, the couple booked a last minute, all-inclusive trip to Sandals Jamaica, Jeff knowing that was the ideal spot to ask the love of his life to be his wife. “The reason I wanted to book Jamaica or another tropical vacation was to propose somewhere that I know she loves, and she loves warm Caribbean with those beautiful turquoise waters and palm trees. Both getaways have strengthened our relationship so much when we’re able to just be us away from everyone we know, not be staring at our cellphones. We’re stronger and better for them,” he describes. “More importantly, we have a good time together when it’s just the two of us.” After four days exploring the exotic resort and indulging in his and hers activities ranging from snorkeling and a waterfall hike to a spa day, Jeff knew he found the right moment to propose during a candlelit dinner on a pier overlooking the ocean, complete with champagne, decadent courses and Liz being escorted from their room to the table by a man with a rose in hand. As Jeff began to profess his love, Liz knew the moment she had been waiting for more than five years had finally arrived. “I had to look away because I couldn’t handle it and then when I

looked back, he was down on one knee. It was incredible and I did not hesitate. I said yes and cried,” she shares of the life-changing moment. “It was the best proposal I could've ever dreamed of.”

The one where they grow

In the nearly 10 years they've known each other, Liz and Jeff have grown exponentially, whether through Jeff helping Liz step outside of her comfort zone, to Liz helping Jeff become a better communicator. The couple's future goals include cultivating their roots at home in Massachusetts while devoting time to travel, living their best life surrounded by family and friends who love them unconditionally. But at the core of their love is the commitment to grow in harmony for the rest of their lives. “As one of us grows, it feels like that person will then pull the other person up with them,” Jeff professes. “We're trying to grow not just as a couple, but as decent human beings as well.”