

# Love out of nowhere

## Relationship grew at secluded family pond

By RAY COONEY

The Graphic Printing Company

It's often said in small towns and rural settings that there's nothing to do.

Being away from busier parts of society couldn't have worked out better for Emma James and Brad Muhlenkamp.

They started dating in May 2020 — May 23, Brad specifies — when many coronavirus shutdowns were in effect. So dating in the traditional “dinner and a movie” sense was not a possibility.

“That whole summer — he lives out in the middle of nowhere — we just hung out all summer back at his pond,” said Emma.

“Out in the middle of nowhere” is set back in a woods east of county road 850 East in the northeast corner of Jay County.

When Brad proposed about two and a half years later, he took Emma back to the pond to do so.

“That was really special because that was kind of our spot,” she said.

\*\*\*\*\*

As is often the case in small towns and rural settings, Emma and Brad met years before they got together as a couple.

They were “friends of friends” and someone he was with asked her for a ride home.

It wasn't until more than two years later, when Emma's twin sister was dating Brad's friend, that something sparked.

See **Nowhere** page 5B



Photo provided

Emma James and Brad Muhlenkamp started dating in May 2020, at the height of the coronavirus pandemic. With typical dating not an option, they spent the summer together at a Muhlenkamp family pond in northeast Jay County. It was there that they returned when Brad proposed in December 2022. They'll be married Oct. 12 at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in rural Bryant.

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Dylan Messersmith of Blackford County and Molly Ault of Jay County met at a church camp the summer before they headed into middle school. A relationship never crossed their mind then, but some prodding from Dylan's mom nine years later led to a text. Since then, they've adopted a dog — Tilly — and are planning their wedding for this summer.

## 'No time had passed' Couple finally came together after 9 years

**By BAILEY CLINE**  
The Graphic Printing Company  
Molly Ault and Dylan Messersmith met once in 2011 at a church camp. Nine years later, they reconnect-

ed and started dating. Now they're getting married. Dylan and Molly, both 22, will wed July 20 at Bearcreek Farms in Bryant. The Blackford and Jay County natives didn't anticipate a serious romantic relationship when they first connected. "The first time we actually met was the summer before our sixth grade year," said Molly. See **Time** page 3B

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## Time ...

Continued from page 2B

They both participated in the same small group sessions at Camp Real Me, a week-long event in Versailles State Park. For Dylan, sparks started flying immediately.

But they didn't stay in touch. Over the next nine years, Dylan and Molly went their separate ways.

"I think there was definitely like, we had been in the same room at basketball games and things like (that), but I don't think we ever stopped and (talked) to each other," Dylan said.

Their lives continued apart until some time in 2020 when Dylan's mother, Maudlyn, ran into Molly while she was working at The General Store in Pennville.

"My mom kind of knew of Molly because (she) helped at that summer camp," explained Dylan. "My mom asked me if I'd ever thought of Molly — 'She's a really nice girl.' I messaged her one night after work on Instagram, and everything just started rolling from there."

With the COVID-19 pandemic looming and Molly's sophomore year of college upon her, Molly recalled she wasn't looking for love at that time.

"I really wasn't looking for a relationship, but obviously, here we are now," she said with a laugh.

Molly and Dylan started dating in September 2020. About two and a half years later, Dylan popped the question.

"Everything just felt so natural from the beginning," said Molly, noting they knew each others' families and other small details. Dylan agreed.

"We had seen each other on Instagram because we followed each other since that sum-

mer," Dylan said. "We kept up with each other's lives, but ... when we first started talking, (it felt like) no time had passed."

A Pennville resident and 2019 Jay County High School graduate, Molly is a kindergarten teacher at Blackford Primary School in Hartford City. She has a bachelor's degree in elementary education from Ball State University.

Dylan, a 2019 Blackford High School graduate, works at The Andersons in Dunkirk. He received his associate's degree in general studies from Ivy Tech Community College.

Although they're cur-

rently living in Muncie, the couple recently purchased their first house in rural Blackford County near Dunkirk and plan to move in February.

They've enjoyed several trips together over the years, creating memories that Dylan cherishes most. That includes their visit last year to Hocking Hills State Park in Logan, Ohio, when poor cell reception allowed them to focus on one another.

Together they also adopted their now nearly 3-year-old black labrador, Tilly.

"She just brings so much joy to our relationship," said Molly, noting their pooch has been through some surgeries

recently but is recovering.

Dylan recalled that his grandmother died shortly after their romantic relationship began.

"(Molly) came into my life like right when I needed her," he said.

"I love her heart and her personality," Dylan continued. "I just feel like she always knows how to make my gray days go away."

As for what Molly loves most about Dylan, it's a matter of compassion and loyalty.

"I love just the way that he cares for me and about me at the same time," said Molly. "I know that there's nothing he wouldn't do for me."

***"My mom kind of knew of Molly because (she) helped at that summer camp. My mom asked me if I'd ever thought of Molly — 'She's a really nice girl.' I messaged her one night after work on Instagram, and everything just started rolling from there."***

—Dylan Messersmith

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Tribune News Service/The Denver Post/Hyoung Chang

Trevor Bazley, left, and Lexxa Kever take part in a rehearsal for their wedding in the University of Denver's Daniels College of Business, room 300, in Denver on Sept. 1. The couple decided to get married in the classroom where they first met.

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## Accounting for romance

By ELIZABETH HERNANDEZ

The Denver Post  
Tribune News Service

DENVER — Lexxa Kever and Trevor Bazley did the impossible: They extracted romance from an accounting class.

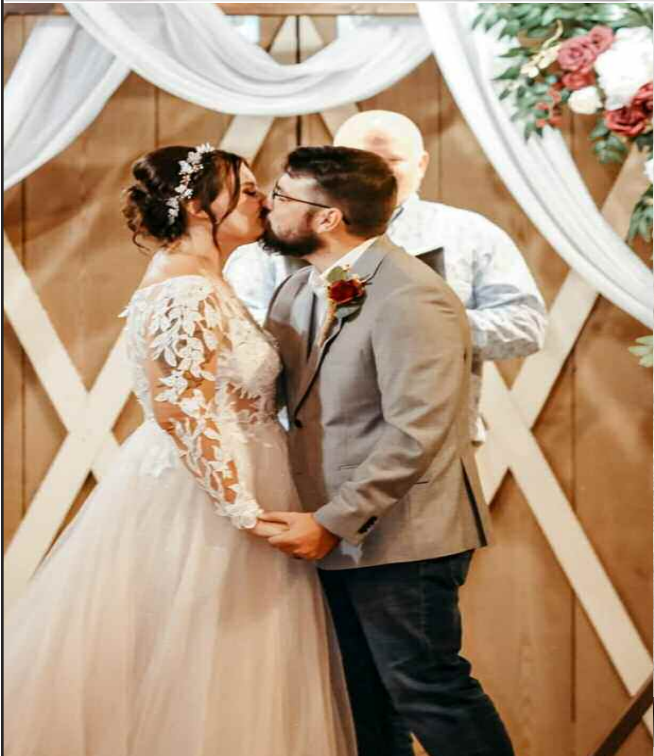
The newlyweds met in 2013 during their first accounting class while working toward Master of Business Administration degrees at the University of Denver. Running late, Kever rushed to sit in the first empty chair she saw, unknowingly plopping down next to her future husband.

**Couple got married in the classroom where they first met**

The rest of their love story, they say, is history. No history courses were involved, but the couple couldn't shake that accounting class.

The amphitheater-style configuration. The wood-lined whiteboards at the front of the room. The bright windows.

See **Accounting** page 5B

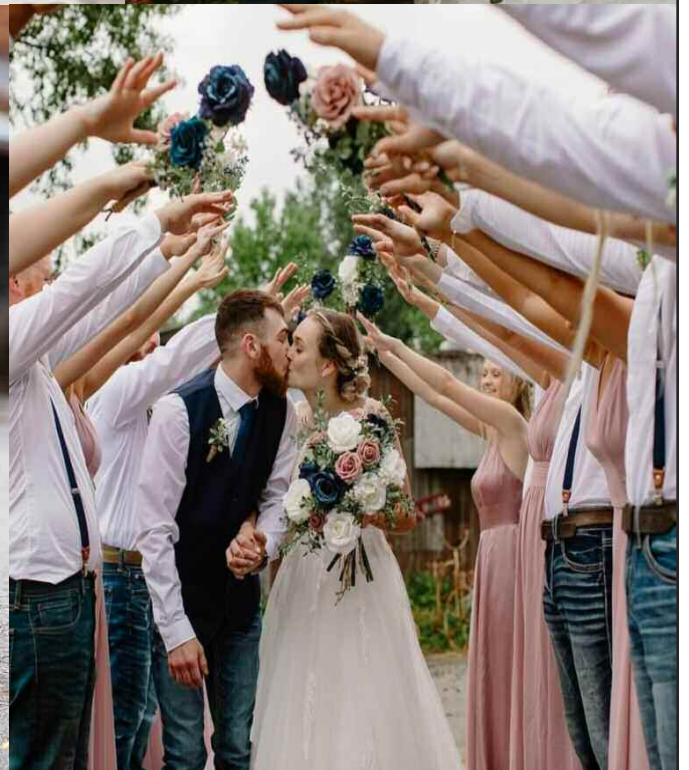


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## Nowhere ...

Continued from page 1B  
Brad had joked with his friend that they should go on a double date with the James twins.

"So I texted him, 'Oh, you think we're going to go on a double date?'" said Emma, 22, a 2019 Jay County High School graduate.

Brad didn't realize the message was going to get relayed. But it did, sparking the text from the girl who would become his fiancée.

"Sure enough, I was sitting there and a message came up," said Brad, 23, who graduated from JCHS in 2019. "And I was like, 'Oh my.' I was very excited."

The double date never happened. Instead, Brad and Emma got together on their own.

By the end of their COVID summer, they had some decisions to make. Emma was leaving Portland for nursing school at IUPUI in Indianapolis. Brad was staying in Jay County.

"We had spent the entire summer together," said Emma. "And it was like, 'This is real. We are make or break. We either stay together or we break up.'"

They sat down and talked about what a future together would look like.

"Well, I can't picture it any other way," said Emma, remembering what she thought at the time. "So, it's like, I think we're doing this."

"He is the most outgoing, charismatic person I've ever met," she added. "If we're out with our friends, he always wants everybody else to have a good time. He's always throwing himself out there, including people. He just cares about a lot of people and everyone around us. That really stands out to me."

Brad knew there was something different about Emma and his relationship with her.

"She's very, very outgoing," he said. "She's always quick to forgive and she knows how to work through things very well. And she's very compassionate. She's passionate about what she's doing."

"I just realized that everything I did, I was constantly thinking about her," said Brad. "I would go to bed thinking about her; I'd wake up thinking about her. And I'd never felt that before."

Since that first summer — together in the middle of nowhere — Emma and Brad have been mostly apart.

During the school year, she's in Indianapolis.

He's back at home, working nights in the maintenance department at PAX Machine Works in Celina, Ohio and helping on the family farm.

Their daily time to talk is his 20-minute lunch break.

"We've navigated it well," said Emma. "Week-ends we get to talk to each other more. Every time I can come home, I do. And every time he can come to Indy, he does."

They try to not let the gaps between their in-person visits stretch any more than two weeks.

"It all comes down to great communication," said Brad.

"Great communication and showing up, showing up for each other," agreed Emma.

They'll continue to lean on those communication skills as they enter their new phase of life — living together for the first time.

"I feel like that's the biggest learning curve for a relationship," said Emma.

Emma has been spending her breaks from school — she'll become a registered nurse and has an interest in cardiac and intensive care — working on wedding details.

"As of right now, I have everything done," she said of the ceremony set for Oct. 12 at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in rural Bryant and reception at Wheel & Spoke Antique Mall in Portland. "Everything that needs to be done is done. ..."

"It's just finalizing details come this summer and then I'll be done."

When Brad is not working at Pax or on the farm, he's building their house.

He was working on roofing in early January.

"That's what I've been working hard on," he said. The house is located on family land on county road 600 North.

After it's complete, Brad and Emma plan to cut a path about a half-mile to the north to allow them to walk to their spot — that pond in the middle of nowhere.



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## Accounting ...

Continued from page 4B  
Room 300 in DU's Daniels College of Business served as more than a repository for financial know-how to Kever and Bazley. It was their intro class to the foundations of love.

The classroom just had to be their wedding venue, Kever said.

On a recent Saturday, Bazley and Kever aced the assignment, tying the knot in Room 300 surrounded by their loved ones.

"A lot of people might not have the option to go back to where they first met each other and recreate that moment, so it's really special to be able to spend the time remembering that moment and what life was like and how good and fulfilling life is now," Kever said in an interview a few days before their wedding.

### 'A meeting of past and future'

For Bazley, the wedding venue was a meeting of past and future.

"We basically have DU flowing in our veins," Bazley said of himself and his family.

Both of Bazley's maternal grandparents attended DU. His sister is a DU alum along with a number of extended family members. His father John Bazley — an exchange student from England — ended up falling in love with Bazley's mother and staying in the country, eventually becoming a notable DU accounting professor whose textbooks were still referenced in his son's courses decades later.

"When my dad had to teach a class, I'd go sit in the back playing with my Matchbox cars," Bazley said.

His father died in 2011. "I'm not a particularly spiritual person, but Lexxa was never able to meet my dad, and I'm sure having it in the classroom, there's going to be a feeling that he's involved," Bazley said. "That's going to be really special."

Back in 2013, the couple's accounting professor one day pointed out to the class that Bazley's father had written the textbook they were using, prompting Kever to jokingly whisper to Bazley if he could slip her the home-

work answers. The conversation turned vulnerable when Bazley revealed his father had passed away.

"It was our very first personal moment," Kever said.

While the couple developed a relationship inside and outside of Room 300, they took dating slowly since Kever had plans to move away post-MBA.

But even after Kever moved to Arkansas, they couldn't quit talking to each other, sending each other songs back and forth that reminded them of one another.

Eventually, they decided they didn't want to be apart any longer. So Kever moved back to Colorado in 2018 and talk of marriage arose not long after.

### Classroom matrimony

Once they had their hearts set on the location, they had to ensure it was actually feasible.

Mikalah Guyton, conference and event manager at DU, is familiar with planning weddings on campus — but a classroom venue was a first for her.

"Most of our weddings are held in a chapel on campus," Guyton said. "I really appreciate the level of nostalgia associated with the classroom, and I think it's very fitting for their love. I like the unique factor."

Logistically, there were some head-scratchers when it came to planning a wedding in a college classroom.

The couple had to work around class schedules, for one. Kever was assigned a nearby classroom to get ready in. The discussions around deco-

rations took some creativity.

"Trying to imagine the space as an event space was a little bit weird," Kever said. "I had to get my head out of what a traditional wedding looks like and lean into the fact that it's a classroom because that's kind of the whole point."

At first, Kever considered hanging string lights all over the place, but she decided that trying to transform the classroom into a non-academic space defeated the purpose of the setting. Instead, the couple landed on an artistic rendering of "Mr. & Mrs. Bazley" drawn out on the whiteboard in dry-erase marker. Photo placards from their travels together adorned the polished, wooden desks encircling the room, along with vases of flowers.

A homework assignment sat off to the side of the room beckoning the 35 guests to draw self-portraits of themselves on small cards and include advice or well wishes to the happy couple, to be kept as keepsakes.

"I thought it was really romantic," Guyton said of the nontraditional venue.

The couple tied the knot this month, adding another milestone to the sanctity of Room 300.

"We really took the wedding advice we got into consideration," Kever said. "People were telling us to find whatever is personal to you or feels important and make sure that you pay attention to those things and do something really special for yourselves that you're going to want to remember," Kever said. "It ended up working perfectly."

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