

Friends connect

Brumfield, Barcus built bond long before becoming a couple

By BAILEY CLINE
The Commercial Review

Abby Barcus and Simon Brumfield have known each other since high school.

The Jay County High School Class of 2017 graduates met during their sophomore year and both visited Spain on a school trip in 2016.

But it wasn't until four years later they decided to take things to the next level. A budding romance quickly sprouted between them near the end of their college years, and now, the couple plan to wed May 12 in South Carolina.

"We've always been really close," Simon admitted. "We never really had much of a (romantic) relationship ... in high school."

Abby, a Portland native, and Simon, who is from Dunkirk, spent time together during their teen years every now and then, often visiting places like Dairy Dream, but nothing initially clicked. They would

have phases when they saw each other often, and then there were time periods when they didn't talk much.

"So we were kind of in our awkward stage," Abby noted.

"Cringey teenager stuff," Simon added.

They both also shared an interest in sports. Simon participated in high school football, wrestling and track. Abby focused her efforts on volleyball, becoming one of the top attackers in Jay County history, helping lead the Patriots to Allen County Athletic Conference regular-season and tournament titles and being named an AAU All-American prior to her senior season.

After graduation, Abby headed to Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, where she played volleyball for the Raiders. Simon continued his education at Wabash College in Crawfordsville and was a member of the track team.

Three years later, Abby graduated early with her bachelor's degree in psychology and a minor in human resources.

"I think it was around that time when Simon asked me a question," she recalled.

Simon had texted her asking for the name of a movie they watched together in high school. It was called "Seven Pounds."

He recently explained, "While I was genuinely curious about that answer, I was ..."

"(He) probably could've Googled it," chimed in Abby.

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The Commercial Review/Ray Cooney

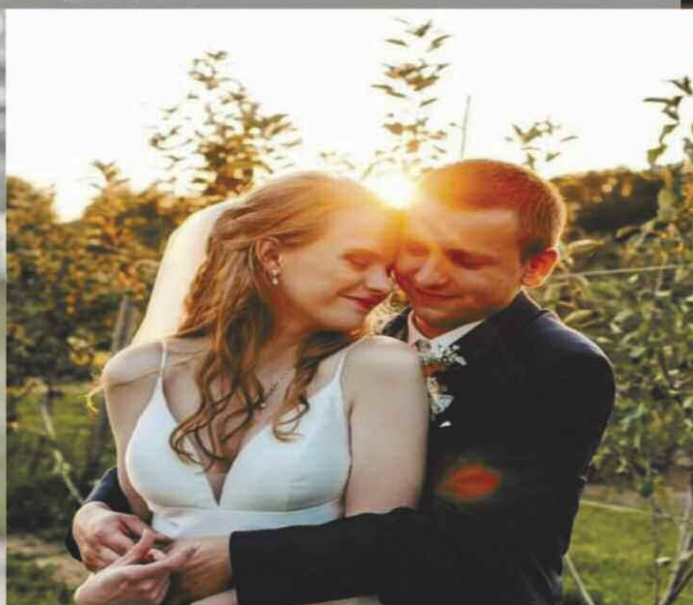
Simon Brumfield and Abby Barcus were friends after they met as sophomores at Jay County High School, but nothing sparked until after they went their separate ways for college. They were engaged in December and are planning a May 12 wedding in South Carolina.



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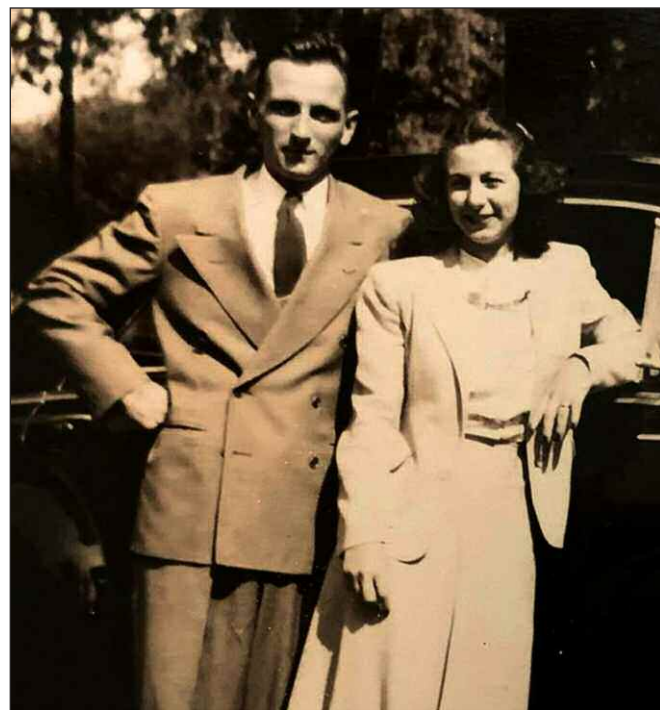
Couple celebrates 77th with long overdue keepsakes

By **MARIA LUISA PAUL**
The Washington Post

By 1944, the Allied forces were gaining victories while World War II raged on. But on the other side of the Atlantic, a soon-to-be-deployed Air Force pilot and his high school sweetheart were saying "I do" in Oelwein, Iowa.

The Sept. 16, 1944, wedding at Grace United Methodist Church was quick and simple — Royce King was on a two-day leave before serving overseas. Frankie, his betrothed, wore a tailored suit instead of a gown. A photographer was not there to take snapshots of the loving couple.

A war, two kids, four grandchildren and several great-grandchildren later, the couple in their 90s celebrated their 77th wedding anniversary this year. The lack of an extravagant ceremony had not hampered their life together, but when staff members at St. Croix Hospice — who take



Sue Bilodeau

In September, staff members at St. Croix Hospice hatched a plan that included a vintage dress, 1940s hits, lots of photos and a cake to help Royce and Frankie King celebrate their 77th wedding anniversary. Pictured at the top of the page, the couple kisses with Frankie donning a vintage dress and Royce in his U.S. Air Force uniform. Above, Royce and Frankie are pictured as a young couple in the 1940s.

care of the couple at their Oelwein home — learned there were no photographs to commemorate the Kings' special day, they hatched a plan that included a vintage dress, 1940s

hits, lots of photos and a cake.

There were no dry eyes on Sept. 24, said Sue Bilodeau, the Kings' daughter.

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Continued from page 1B
“Well, I definitely could’ve Googled it,” Simon laughed. “It was just an excuse to talk to her again. Thankfully that question worked out pretty well.”

The friends reconnected and soon, sparks started flying. Their relationship took off in August 2020.

“Ever since then, here we are,” Abby said, sitting next to Simon with a smile on her face. Dating during the coron-

avirus pandemic wasn’t easy. At the time, Simon still attended Wabash College. His school enforced restrictions on visitors, making it difficult for Abby to see him regularly.

When restrictions loosened in the next semester, Simon had track meets nearly every weekend. Some schools in his conference were near Dayton, so after a meet, he would stop by to visit Abby.

“We figured it out,” he said.

Two months after Simon’s graduation — he earned a bachelor’s degree in history with a minor in education — the couple found a place together in Dayton.

Around three months later, on Dec. 5, Simon proposed.

They had planned to go out that night, and he asked if Abby would like to “put a little twist on it and go out as fiancés.”

She thought he was kidding. “I was definitely not expect-

ing it, to say the least. Just was not expecting it that day, I suppose,” Abby clarified.

Regardless, she said yes, and the engaged couple then spent the rest of the evening like their typical date night: they had dinner at Olive Garden and did some shopping.

Since then, they’ve planned out most of the details for their May wedding at Fred W. Symmes Chapel in Cleveland, South Carolina. (After trying on

five different gowns, Abby found her wedding dress Saturday.)

Simon and Abby have discussed holding a local reception, but no dates or plans have been made yet.

Abby noted it wasn’t one particular aspect of her future husband she adored but the sum of “little things,” such as opening the door for her, making her laugh or cooking dinner.

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Revisted ...

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“It was definitely one of the most special things ever,” she said. “When Mom mentioned she didn’t have time to plan a big wedding and didn’t have a photographer, the St. Croix staff members worked together to make sure they could get their special day.”

The couple’s backyard served as the venue where the hospice’s staff held the celebration — complete with a wedding cake with two seven-shaped candles. They decorated an arch with flowers and made a bouquet for the 97-year-old bride, who was clad in a vintage 1940s wedding gown and sporting a new hairdo from the salon. Bilodeau, who happened to be visiting from Chico, Calif., helped her mother into the dress.

Like in other weddings, the groom was not allowed to see his bride before the ceremony. Royce, 98, was helped into his Air Force uniform by staffers, and waiting outside with a handkerchief over his eyes for the big reveal.

“We walked Mom down the back steps and across the yard, and then she stood in front of Dad, and I said, ‘Are you ready to see your bride?’ before taking off the handkerchief,” Bilodeau said.

The couple and staff were transported back

through the decades as the Kings’ music therapist played 1940s tunes on his saxophone and guitar during the celebration. Hilary Michelson, who works at St. Croix Hospice and is a part-time photographer, snapped the loved-up couple throughout the day.

“Absolutely no shame in the fact that I had a hard time keeping it together behind the lens,” Michelson wrote on Facebook.

The staff members at St. Croix Hospice have provided care to the Kings for almost a year, and their bonds have blossomed, said Trish Matthews, a case manager at the hospice who has gotten to know the Kings closely after visiting the couple at least twice a week.

“They really are a fantastic couple, and it is such an honor learning from them,” she said.

Amid the constant flood of gloomy news that has overtaken the year, the event exemplified to Heath Bartness, St. Croix Hospice’s CEO, “how there’s still so much kindness in the world.”

“The team really wanted to do this, and it’s amazing,” he said. “They provide such a wonderful care that can truly impact people.”

Royce and Frankie met each other in high school, where they both played in

the band, their daughter said. They had been engaged for 20 months, while Royce was stationed in Lawrenceville, Ill., and Frankie attended Cornell College and the University of Iowa.

“He had always dreamed of flying,” Bilodeau said. “Then, during World War II, he was a carrier pilot in a Douglas C-47 plane with operations over the Himalayas.”

Royce, his daughter said, is a doting husband and father who loves to strike up conversations with “anyone and everyone.” Her mother, she said, has the “gift of making everyone feel at home” — often delighting guests with homemade hoskas and kolaches, baked goods nodding toward Frankie’s Czech heritage.

“Together they demonstrate that a great love takes kindness and perseverance,” she said.

That love was evident when Royce’s handkerchief was lifted from his eyes and he was able to see the woman who has been by his side through war, peace and everything in between.

“He was just absolutely beaming,” Bilodeau said of her father looking upon his bride in a wedding gown — a sight he did not get to see 77 years ago but will be able to cherish in a photo album his daughter is compiling.

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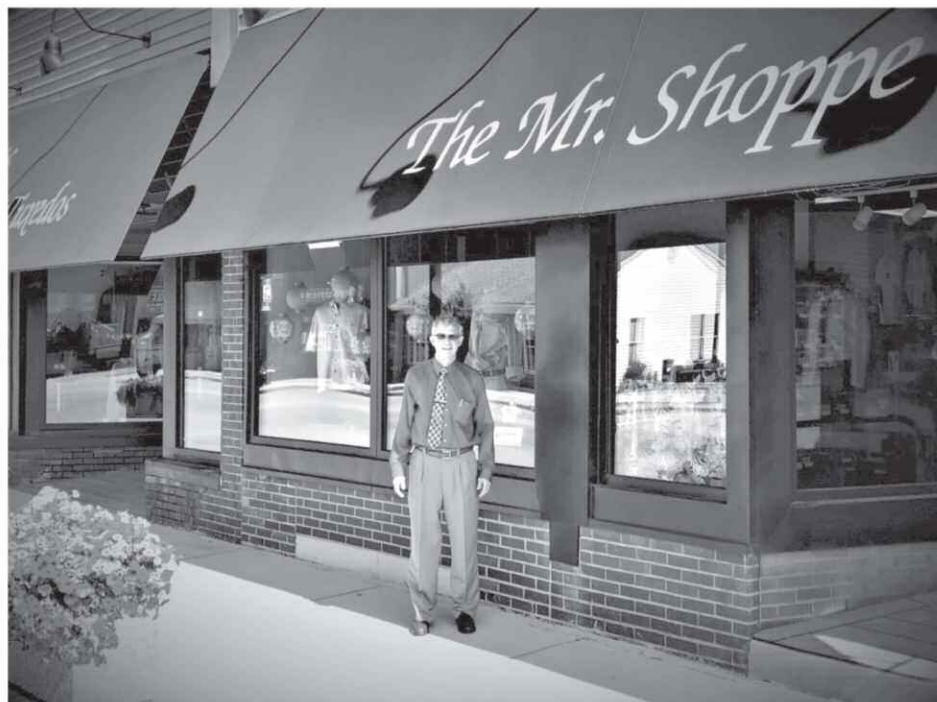


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Gary Bruns

Overbooked and overwhelming

Wedding photographer was busy in 2021

By **ASHLEY FETTERS MALOY**
The Washington Post

If 2020 was the year of wedding-postponement misery, 2021 was the year of sweet, sweet delayed gratification — of long-planned events finally coming to fruition and bursting out of every venue that could possibly host one. Couples were scrambling to lock down vendors, prevent coronavirus outbreaks and manage their ever-fluctuating expectations for guest turnout. Guests themselves were exhausted.



Michael Cassara Photography

Michael Cassara photographs a Sept. 11 wedding at Flowerfield in St. James, New York. After lots of postponements in 2020 because of the initial waves of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, 2021 was a busy year in the wedding industry.

Michael Cassara, 35, is a wedding and lifestyle photographer based in Long Island — emphasis on the “wedding,” as nuptial celebrations are famously big and fancy affairs in the region and make up about 85 percent of his annual business. Photographers bore wit-

ness to 2021 weddings in all their cathartic, frenetic, superspreading glory — the “craziest wedding year of all time,” Cassara says.

He spoke to The Wash-

ington Post about his experiences, including shooting amid social distancing requirements (spoiler: you should make it look as normal as you possibly can), dodging

covid droplets in big crowds (a strategy that worked until it didn't) and pulling way more “doubleheader” weekends than usual.

The following has been edited and condensed for clarity.

.....
His wedding calendar was packed

I shot 46 weddings this year. A normal year is around 30 weddings. Twenty-four of my weddings this year were rescheduled from 2020, and I had already booked 18 weddings for 2021 before covid hit.

My busiest month was September, where I had 10 weddings in four weeks. One weekend at the end of September, I had two weddings, one at Pellegrini Vineyards, the other at the Vanderbilt Planetarium (more than an hour's drive from each other).

See **Overwhelming** page 5B

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Even before they started dating, she added, he's always been there for her, she said.
"Then after all the little things, I found my best friend in him," Abby said via text.
Simon emphasized that their earlier friendship always had a sort of bond they couldn't define.
"It was one of those things like I feel like you could always just kind of like feel ... a con-

nection, but I just don't think either of us were ever able to identify it," he said.
They have enjoyed living

together and are excited to — a few years down the road — start a family.
For now, they're looking for-

ward to traveling and doing other activities as a married couple.
"I mean, we've always been

really close, so, it kinda just seemed like a no-brainer," Simon said. "This is where we wanted to be."

'It was one of those things like I feel like you could always just kind of like feel ... a connection, but I just don't think either of us were ever able to identify it.'

—Simon Brumfield

Overwhelming ...

Continued from page 4B
I was driving all over the island, back and forth. I probably did 400 or 500 miles of driving that weekend.

Some were second-, third- and fourth-time's-the-charm weddings

The most postponements I've seen was, I think, three: rescheduled from May of 2020 to July 2020, back when everyone was like, "Yeah, we'll be out of this in a few weeks," and then they went from July 2020 to May 2021 then decided in May to reschedule again to November.

The best was the weddings where they had these Etsy signs saying, like, "Our first date! Our engagement date!" And then, "Our wedding date," crossed off. "Our second wedding date," crossed off. And now, "Our third wedding date." I was cracking up. You almost have to laugh at that point, right? You finally made it.

There was double the anxiety this year from my clients. I would get texts from my brides ahead of the wedding, like, worried about the weather. You kind of calm them down, beforehand and throughout the day, and that's part of the job.

The year began with pre-vaccine, heavily-restricted events

In January, the first wedding I shot of the year was probably the most stringent. There were "dancing squares" in effect, where you could only dance with people in your household or the table that you were at. The couple could

move around the dance floor if they wanted to, and go table to table, but they couldn't have the guests in the middle of the dance floor. The venue was very strict about it. They were monitoring the whole time. If you did get up from the table, it was only to go to the restroom. You couldn't go to the bar; servers had to serve you alcohol.

There were a few members of the bridal party that were immunocompromised, and they wanted to wear their masks for photos. But what you try to accomplish as a photographer is: How is this going to look as normal as possible? The couple is going to look back in 10, 15 years and forget that there was even a pandemic going on.

But weddings changed after the vaccine arrived

Right around April or May, weddings started getting back to normal. I would say 75 percent of weddings I shot this year felt like weddings in 2019 — one required that vendors be vaccinated and wear masks this year, but the majority really didn't care about the risks as much as you would probably think.

Weddings went hard this year. You could tell people were cooped up for a year, and they wanted to get out and party and let loose. This year, I've seen everything from people mosh-pit stage-diving off speakers to one wedding where they brought in a gigantic jump rope and the bride and groom were jump-roping. I'd never seen that before. I've had grooms breakdanc-

ing, guests breakdancing. I've seen a nine-foot dancing robot come in, with LED panels and smoke cannons.

There were day-of nightmares

I do recall bridal party members missing the wedding because they had covid. And parents of the bride or groom who had covid but they were adamant about coming to the wedding. They were forced to not come, and that caused a little bit of drama. I've also seen other vendors who've had to drop out a day or two before a wedding day. Florists, for example: The couple's floral arrangements were compromised.

I didn't hear too many stories, at least on Long Island, where the bride and groom got covid, but I heard a few — like the day after, they got tested because they weren't feeling well and it ended up they probably had covid the day of their wedding. Thankfully that did not happen to me.

And the deluge took an emotional toll

It took a heavy toll on a lot of my friends and a lot of other vendors. My clients were phenomenal, absolutely phenomenal. But with a lot of people that were inquiring, or were scheduling their dates, there was a high level of demand, especially from parents of the brides and grooms. At some moments it was almost like they didn't really care that you're a small business, or that you're busting your butt for your client.

See **Overwhelming** page 6B

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Michael Cassara Photography

Grace and Chris Agapite kiss during their Sept. 25 wedding at Pellegrini Vineyards. Photographer Michael Cassara shot 46 weddings in 2021, more than half of which were rescheduled events from 2020.

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Continued from page 5B
They want results and they want them quickly. Meanwhile, we were doing double the work that we would normally do for a calendar year.

I know a handful of other photographers who — this broke them. I'm relatively new to the industry, in terms of being a full-time wedding photographer. So I think I still have my mental sanity. But others, they've been in this for 20 years. And they're just like, "Yep, I'm good. I'm done. I'm checking out."

Not to mention a physical one

We call it the wedding hangover, or vendor hangover — where your body

just decides to say, like, "You're done." Basically you just shrink into a chair and collapse for the whole day on Sunday. This year I invested in a massage gun for my muscles. Great investment there.

I caught covid at my second-to-last wedding of the year, the one wedding where I probably got a little lax with my mask. Four people got it at that wedding, and it forced me to miss my last wedding of the year. Thankfully, I have a very capable team of photographers that filled in and did a phenomenal job. But in the world we have today, you almost have to plan for that to happen.

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