

A **soulmate** isn't someone who completes you. No, a **soulmate** is someone who inspires you to complete yourself. A soulmate is someone who loves you with so much conviction, and so much heart, that it is nearly impossible to doubt just how capable you are of becoming exactly who you have always wanted to be.

Bianca Sparacino





# **A Year of Love**

**Taking Risks, Big and Small  
Finding My Soulmate to WIN IT ALL**

**LISA BREARLEY**

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# Testimonials



Scott has been the BEST thing that ever happened to Lisa. I've known Lisa for over a decade, and I see how Scott's love and partnership have supported my beautiful friend in seeing the woman she was meant to be. Thank you, Scott, for this. I love you and all the things you are doing together with Lisa. It is very inspiring.

**Friend, Shalan**

From the very first time we met, I knew Lisa came from her heart in everything she thought and did. However, because of that feeling of fear and "I'm not good enough" and that she didn't matter, she was silent. After all those years of uncertainty in herself, she met Scott. Where once Lisa was tightly wound up in her cocoon, Scott supported her in becoming a butterfly!! Now, Lisa exudes confidence, beauty, happiness and has an anything-is-possible attitude. For Lisa, failure is not an option, only a stepping stone.

**Friend, Audrey**

Some people may be surprised to hear you are writing a book. Not me! You are very good at expressing yourself. I remember when you were young, and you would even make up your own ending to a storybook, which you thought was more suitable to the story. I'm very proud of you and your work and educating yourself and others. I wish you all the best in your writing endeavours.

**Mom, Eleanor and Lisa's Kindergarten Teacher**



# Dedication



This book is written for you. The “you” that deserves a change in your life. The “you” that deserves love in your life. The “you” that knows that love, care and respect are possible. The “you” that knows anything is possible. The “you” that needs someone to believe in you. The “you” that knows life is REALLY about taking a risk. This book is for you.

I have been where you may be right now—in a place of not feeling worthy or deserving, stuck in a place where change seems impossible, a place where I wondered what I really wanted. Was it out there? How could I find it, and how could I keep it?

I have written this book for me and for you.





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# **preface**



Lisa Brearley, the author of this autobiography, grew up on the North Shore of Prince Edward Island, where the seaside salt air and the whisper of the winds influenced her writing creativity.

In addition to her passion for writing is her passion as an elementary school teacher for twenty years. Throughout her latter teaching years, Lisa decided it was time to pursue a reflection of her own life, through which she discovered her ultimate passion: life, self-identification, self-growth and self-gratification.

During Lisa's journey, she found her true soulmate, best friend and now husband. It was fate that brought them together while walking similar paths. Their individual quest for self-discovery continues to make their love and commitment to themselves and each other stronger than the day before. This book will walk you through Lisa's story of life, love and the pursuit of happiness.

Friend of forty years, Sandra Blacquiere



# Introduction



It all started with two souls wanting something better. Myself, a recently divorced (actually, not divorced during most of this “year of love”) woman venturing out into her new life. Scott—a man who is also divorced, twenty years sober, a survivor of cancer and manages his diabetes without medication—is also wanting more in his life. We would meet in a place where souls got vulnerable and stories were shared. We were never the same after we met on August 15, 2021.

Join me on my journey. A year with so many learning moments and points of awareness that I would never have seen coming. I look back at pictures and find one of myself in a canoe with my sister Lana on the reservoir in Calgary, Alberta on August 5, 2021. I would never have foreseen the life journey I was about to take on, the strengths I would find in myself that I never knew existed, the courage I never knew was inside me, the brave soul that bared her soul.

This is a chronological recap of my experiences and *Aha!* moments from August 2021 to July 2022—a true blessing of a year I would never trade for anything and daily give gratitude to. A year that

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was challenging and yet the most rewarding of my life. A year of frustrations, dilemmas, discouragements and points of low; yet a year filled with gratitude, rejoicing, pleasure and so many successes. An understanding that life is the most beautiful when all these emotions can be explored and expressed.



*10 Days Before Meeting Scott. With my sister Lana.*

This whole personal development journey was first introduced to me by a great friend, Carolyn. I had known Carolyn for several years at this point. She, like me, was going through challenges in her marriage. Having just separated from her husband, she invited me over to her house for a visit on her back deck to catch up on how things were going.

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She told me about a three-day weekend course I should consider taking because she saw that I needed some direction in my life. That conversation was where all my growth and own personal development started.

I am grateful for Carolyn. I know now that she only introduced this to me for two reasons: She loved and cared for me enough to suggest it, and she was also in a course herself (which I later attended this year) that promoted “enrolment” into this three-day personal development course.

I took the three-day course in person, just before Covid hit the ground running in February 2020. It was very eye-opening. I made discoveries about myself and took away tools I still use today. I’m so grateful and blessed for that experience.

I am truly grateful to Carolyn and forever will thank her and do it publicly in this book.



*Thank you so much, Carolyn*

## *A Year of Love*

As of August 15, 2021, I have been separated from my husband of twenty-six years. I had decided a year earlier and found some sense of bravery. I didn't tell him I needed a divorce; however, I thought about my words carefully. I had just come back from a walk with my Great Pyrenees dog, Alya, and sat down on the back deck of our house in Calgary. My former husband was enjoying a beer, and I found that ounce of brevity and spilled out a simple sentence. I could not believe this was coming out of my mouth. I said, "I need to move on."

I don't remember what else I said. All I remember was that I didn't need some big fight back, so I did not say, "I want a divorce."

I was at a point in my life where I needed to have simple clarity. He needed no explanation, no long-winded *blah-blah-blah*. It just needed to be simple. I may have even said, "I need to move on for me." That's it. Seven words that were not arguable, not disputable. I thought they were clear and precise.

At that point, I felt a big relief—HUGE. I was making a decision. Me! I was making a decision and sticking to that decision.

Yes, it seems like it may not be a risk to anyone else to state your feelings. However, stating what I wanted and needed was a HUGE thing for me. I feel like I haven't really been heard or seen in most of my life. I had lost Lisa in the forty-eight years of my life.

My two older siblings, Lana and Darren, are smart and have paved their own paths. As the third child, I was to do what was right and learn from any bumps they experienced. You see, I grew up in a great Catholic family where doing and showing "goodness" was a common way of being. Going to church, being a great contributor to the community, having a well-kept, lovely home, doing your best in school and so on. There was no real room for mistakes.



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I married early at twenty-two, with all great intentions of staying married and having children. I had two beautiful children by the age of thirty. I would never change bringing those two beautiful souls into the world. However, at thirty I was losing an understanding of who I was. Children were a priority, and I got lost in that priority.

I slowly started to see my potential when I began to prioritize my health and emotional growth in 2019. I did not fully realize that if I worked on my physical and emotional health, I could show up to life with more me, which meant healthier relationships and bringing more to the table. I also knew I wasn't too old to make a change in my life. No matter my age, I could start over and things could improve.

So here I was in 2020, telling my former husband I needed to move on for myself. Fast forward to July 1, 2021: We had just sold our family home, and I bought *my* first home where my 18-year-old daughter, Brianna, and I moved into.

I was proud of my new home. It was everything I was looking for. Hardwood floors, great community, fenced-in yard for my eighty-pound Alya, a garage and only four steps up to the bathroom and bedrooms.

All of July, I enjoyed organizing my house how I wanted it, purchasing Marketplace items to decorate and buying some new items off Amazon. I was making decisions!

Brianna and I took on a DIY project. I researched floor coverings, and we went on a search for a colour and style we liked and a price I could budget for. Then, we got to work and laid down the laminate click flooring in Brianna's basement room. We worked together as a team, and I think we rocked it! I loved doing this project with her!

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*Brianna and I installing floor*

I spent this month and the next connecting with my sister, Lana, as she and I were in the same boat—divorced and recently in our own homes. I was excited for my “new life” and was looking forward to spending more time with Lana, as my new house was now closer to hers.

I also looked forward to paying bills. Can you believe I never learned how to really be in charge of paying bills? My former husband did all of that. So, I had a lot of learning to do. I am still learning over a year later.

I made myself take on a small mortgage to learn to budget and be responsible for paying a bill. I know it sounds a little odd. However, I needed this responsibility because dealing with finances was (and can still be) a daunting thing for me. I also continue to learn about money and improve my relationship with it.

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During July and August, I enjoyed quiet time in my home—a space with few interruptions. It was a time to be with only myself, have some much-needed therapy with my dog, and attempt to have more meaningful time with my daughter. I made a choice of a new car for myself too. A Toyota Rav4—my first car—known for lasting a long time and being reliable. I made a great choice—a choice and decision that I had never really made before.

I felt great making decisions and feeling confident about my choices. I did not need a man; I was doing great.

I was excited about an upcoming retreat I was about to attend and looked forward to the possible chance to grow and learn. This retreat was the next step in the progression of the personal development courses. At this point, I was excited about opening a richer connection with my daughter and my son, Jordan, who at that point lived with his father.

As a teacher, and not working during July and August, it meant I could focus on myself and not be distracted. I was excited for my week of personal growth coming up in mid-August. Shortly after, it's back to work and teaching Grades 1 and 2.

I was ready to grow. I was ready, and I was so damn scared too.



## CHAPTER 1

**August 2021**



### **The Risk**

With all the changes over the last few years around Covid guidelines and protocol, I found myself attending the same personal development course as Scott, which was held at The Eagles Nest Ranch in Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada. The original location, before Covid threw a wrench in everything, was in California, United States. However, with all the restrictions and such, a new Canadian location was established. Ironically, we both signed up for this course at this location. Who knew the universe would find its way for us to meet?

Taking this week-long course was also a sign to me that making an investment in myself was something new I was choosing. For most of my life, I desired very little and often felt guilty about spending money on what I really needed or wanted. It wasn't until the latter part of my

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first marriage that I started to shift towards spending money on my health and well-being. This was one of those choices for me. Costing under ten thousand dollars, I knew I would experience something I'd never experienced before this week-long course.

The company I was taking this personal development course from has been around for almost fifty years, and testimonials from others were only positive. I knew I had nothing to lose. Little did I really know how this seven-day course would shift my life.

Scott's experience of the three-day personal development course was a little different than my experience of it back in 2020. When he had originally taken the initial three-day course, the presenter finished with the up-sale to the next course. As Scott says, he wasn't really into his three-day weekend. At that time, he was in a state of frustration and not in a good space, having just gone through surgery for cancer. He said he didn't really benefit from the weekend because his emotional state and openness for growth were very narrow. They were up-selling him, and he walked out to his Harley, was about to raise his leg over to get on it and thought, *I will easily put \$5,000 into my bike but will not put it into myself.*

He often retells this story with the fact that he stopped getting on his bike, walked back inside, and bought the seven-day course to the Ranch.

This personal development week at the Ranch in Medicine Hat was a three-hour drive for me from Calgary, Alberta and a ten-hour drive for Scott from Ashcroft, British Columbia. We both began this journey of improving ourselves a few years previous with the three-day weekend course, and this course was the next in the progression of courses.

Most attendees did not know each other prior to the Ranch. Scott and I were not only from two different provinces in Canada, but we also attended two different three-day courses. His course was in Vancouver, British Columbia, and mine was in Calgary. I believe the timing of it all was meant to be. Some things in life are unexplainable; when things happen, they were meant to happen when they were meant to happen.

The time at the Ranch was a time to focus on finding out more about ourselves and who we are and how we show up in this world. With no disruptions, like cell phones, I entered this course with a mindset to work on myself and my relationship with my two grown children—at that point ages eighteen and twenty-three.

I was just a month and a half out of my family home. I purchased my first house and was in my year of separation from my former husband. My goal on this week-long course was to grow and heal, so I could be stronger for myself and thus be more present for my daughter and son.

During that week, I experienced something rather unfamiliar. We were in a forum wherein the more open and honest you were and the more you shared, the more you gained. This is all new for me—coming from a life where everything looked just fine, and I always had a smile on my face. Although hesitant to speak as much as I should, I took, more than typical, opportunities to speak my mind. I remember sharing my worries and fears of not feeling worthy, interesting or smart and how they all kept me in a cage of self-doubt as a woman, mother, partner and teacher.

That week at the Ranch was meant for me. It was a week of growth and to spark a light in my relationship with my daughter and son. After years of feeling challenged with really connecting with my daughter, I knew this would be extremely important for maintaining and improving

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my connection with my kids. It opened my eyes to what I was capable of. I could see sparks of confidence and worthiness. I could start to see that others saw that in me too. This awareness is something I have not seen (or have rarely seen) during my forty-eight years of life.

The week-long course provided a safe space to see what greatness I had and what I still need to work on or see in myself. I knew I was a loving, caring, patient person. However, I had so much doubt about my worthiness and self-assurance, wondering why anyone would want to be with me.

It was a turning point in my life, and I (again) am so grateful for this experience. I would not change it for anything, as it inspired me in several ways. I had very few real friends whom I connected with regularly, and I knew I would gain a new cohort of friends, or at least others who were also interested in personal growth and moving forward, during this course. True enough, I connected with great people, like Audrey, Julie and Shalan, to name a few, and have kept in contact with them over the past year as I continued to work on seeing the value I bring to friendships.

In the first few hours of this week-long course, we had a short introduction (sit and listen) to what the week would look like and the bare bones of what we needed to know. Then, there was really no holding back at that point. We were asked to step out of our comfort zones and share on many occasions—share as much as possible, so we could learn that being uncomfortable was a time for growth and move forward through it.

As I said, the more you shared, the more you gained in this course. However, I was vibrating with fear and uncertainty. At that point, I lacked confidence in my ability to share so others would understand (as I always thought of it, sounding smart or speaking somewhat eloquently).



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Yes, I know I am a teacher, and the act of standing up in front of a bunch of people should come easy to me, but it does not. I can speak in front of three hundred kids. However, baring my thoughts, my soul and my challenges are not only a brand-new venue for me but doing it in front of a bunch of adults also scares the shit out of me.

Scott, on the other hand, seemed to have no fear of sharing, no doubt in his ability to be vulnerable, no worries about what others thought. This was very intriguing and inspiring to me (and as the week went on, I learned he had this effect on others too).

My first chance to step out of my comfort zone was during the first day. It was already a long day, and we were asked to share about ourselves. I don't exactly remember what I talked about—maybe my pity story of not feeling worthy or lacking confidence or my earliest memory of not feeling trusted to help my dad paint the white fence. Either way, the feedback from the facilitator was definitely a stab in my heart (maybe with a little twist—okay, I might be being dramatic. However, that's how I took it!).

“How's that working for you?” asked Cathy, the facilitator.

At that moment, I felt I was reduced to a small ant. I felt like I had no backbone. I felt like I had no legs to stand on. Later, I reflected on that moment and questioned myself, *Why do I feel like this when someone who seems intimidating asks me such questions? Why do I cower?*

To this day, I thank Cathy for bringing me some clarity. I realized that one of my goals in life was to gain more confidence in myself. That I was not the stories I made up about myself and that I was there to kind of “reinvent” Lisa, to bring forth a more confident Lisa. I'm so glad I took a risk on that day. For you, that may seem small. However, the baby steps I took along the way were monumental in moving forward.

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One of the first things that was apparent during this course was that I needed to be honest with myself. An exercise that we were asked to do was make a list of qualities we were seeking in a relationship. I knew what qualities I did not want (that seemed for sure).

The moment after making it, I discovered that this list of what I desired and deserved in a relationship was sitting right in front of me. For some reason, and to this day, it was a bit like an epiphany. I felt like the list of my requirements was sitting right in front of me. I read and reread the list. I looked at Scott and looked at my list. That was when I first thought this list was Scott. I knew, however, I still had to stay focussed on my journey and allow him to focus on his. I was not ready to alter my journey or his for a relationship that (at that point) was uncertain.

I made my list and, as I reviewed it, soon realized that this man, who shared in our group a few times at this point and whose (from what I could see) disposition in life was a picture of someone crying out to be heard, was the list. This “right” partner (on my list) was to possess the ability to share, be authentic, be hardworking, be thoughtful, be independent, have a positive outlook on life and be willing to solve problems.

I had to narrow it down to my top three: sharing, authentic and thoughtful. I knew quite well, at that point, what I did not want in my life. I had ended a marriage where I was not doing well. Communication had to be key in my next relationship. I needed and was looking for a partner who wanted more and better for themselves, who’s open to look at themselves or at the least talk openly about their challenges. With that came my interest in Scott. The list I had made about what I wanted in a relationship was Scott. There he was, sitting right there.

On other days at the Ranch, I took more risks, and my confidence level started to feel a little more even-keeled. This came up when we had to sort ourselves by how much money we made. The reason I bring up this activity is because it is a reminder that I should never judge a book by its cover. I was confident walking in there because of the job I held and how much money I made. When we sorted ourselves by the income we earned, I was intrigued that Scott, whose appearance was quite rugged and rough with his tattooed sleeve arms, had an income more than mine. I was interested in knowing more about this—not because I was any sort of gold-digger, that's for sure. On the contrary, not only did he appear to cover all the areas on my list of requirements for a partner, but he was a financially stable man too.

The week went on, and Scott and I enjoyed lunches and dinners together at a common table with other attendees on many occasions—not truly seeking each other out, but I believe we understood that being in each other's presence was safe and enjoyable. There were many occasions throughout the week when we would see and invite the other for lunch or dinner. On a few occasions, we sat only with each other. I looked into those blue eyes with much interest and was excited to get to know this man.

I found myself being aware of his presence in the room during activities and wondering why he would make certain choices. For instance, there was an event that was physically demanding. To not jeopardize their own health or the success of the group activity, he and several others opted out of it. I found myself wanting to know more and learning more about him and his life story.

There were many moments during that week that I questioned myself: What are you doing? Why are you continuing to think about this man? You just separated from your husband of twenty-five-plus years! You will look like you are just jumping onto the next guy you see!

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You must be desperate in some manner, not taking the time to grow and learn on your own. What will my family think? My daughter? How will it look? Is it just purely a desire thing? Am I just needing love? Why am I not just happy with myself?

So many questions, yet my gut was telling me differently.

The last time I listened to my gut, I told my husband I needed to move on from our marriage, and I was certain about that “gut feeling.” Was my heightened emotional state causing me to not think properly?

I had a lot of self-doubt and a hard time thinking about what I really wanted in life. I needed this journey of personal development to give me some direction on the answers I was looking for.

It wasn't until the last evening, a fun celebration of dinner and dancing, that the two of us better understood that there was an attraction. I was flirting (in that butterfly-printed dress) and was more interested in making a move now that the week was coming to an end.

I felt like it was up to me to make a move. It was time to listen to my gut. I could not let this one go without doing something. I remember putting my mask (Yes, I had a mask for Covid. However, we never had to wear one all week.) in the pocket of his coat, which was hanging on the coat rack, as a memento to remember me by. I didn't know where this relationship was going or if I would ever see him again. However, that never got noticed, and in the end, it was unimportant.

Scott and I both thought the course ended on Sunday. However, it ended on Saturday, and I was not expected to return to Calgary until Sunday. So, we decided to go out for dinner in Medicine Hat (a 45-minute drive from the Ranch). Although, Scott tells the story

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that he asked me out for dinner, and yes, I think he exclaimed, “So I guess we’re going out for dinner!” if I recall.

We travelled in our own vehicles, my small SUV following him behind his big white pickup. I took a picture of his truck when we were stopped at a red light and thought, *Nice ass* (as his was a dually with four tires on the back—ha ha!). *Should I take a picture of this guy’s licence? I don’t really know him.*

I felt very comfortable and safe around Scott—although nervous, as I had not really *been* in a relationship other than my husband of more than twenty-five years; before that, I was a teenager. So, having this *date* (or you might call it a one-night stand) and taking the initiative to be with a man was a crazy idea for me.



*Scott’s dually truck and my SUV*

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We arrived in Medicine Hat, and the chemistry was definitely there. The attraction was there. The need to be together was there. We pulled over in a parking lot, and I got out of my car and hopped into his big, white truck. All I wanted to do was kiss him, hold him, touch him. I felt such a strong connection with him.

This guy was really special. I could not really put into words why I needed to be with him, why I was so attracted to and intrigued by this man. We kissed, which was a bit awkward for me, as kissing someone so passionately was not something I'd done (in a very long time). I think before any words came out, we knew we were not just having dinner. We needed more time together.

As we sat in his truck, we agreed we would get a hotel. I knew I wanted to spend more time with him. I knew I needed to take this risk in my life. You know how you should listen to your gut? Well, my gut was screaming to spend more time with him. I was certain, comfortable and respected in his presence.

There were not too many choices of hotel rooms, and we got a crappy motel room. However, that didn't make a difference because all I knew was that I would spend the night with this man. With my new sense of confidence yet habitual sense of shyness, I must have said many times that this is usually not me; I don't just pick up guys and spend a night in a hotel room. Or maybe that's the tape that played in my head (over and over and over again).

We went to the motel room first. He easily paid for the room, and I (fairly) easily accepted. I thought I would equal out the cost of the hotel room by getting dinner later. Upon entering, I was feeling a little nervous. However, I was completely respected by this new man I hardly knew.

I soon learned of his incontinence (as he had battled and survived prostate cancer and had a radical prostatectomy surgery three years previous). Whereas I was conscious about wearing pantyliners, not knowing when my fibroids or monthly friend would come (pushing forty-nine years old). Nevertheless, we were supportive of each other's "shortcomings" and open to giving each other respect and a sense of comfort as much as possible.

I also had grown into my own body over the years, and the stretch marks I received from having two kids were still something I was unsure about how they made me a sexy woman. I laughed them off and said they were my *tiger marks*—as if I had won some fight. I knew I had a sexy body; however, I was still self-conscious about my behind, always thinking it was a little big. My brother once joked to me to ease my mind (like thirty-five years ago) that it's more cushion for the pushin'. This little piece of advice from him kept me going for many years.

Scott was so gentle yet excited to please me. In many ways, I was turned on by his masculine body and the way he took care of my feminine body. He treated me with such a gentle nature yet turned me on with such passion. As we learned more about each other, I realized I love how Scott had little to no embarrassment about the human body. Feeling a little uncertain about my own body, I saw how he had many scars on his. Throughout the past week, I had never heard about them. However, he was quick to tell me about the many scars on his head, which were a little more obvious.

We were accepting of each other's bodies right away. Why wouldn't we be? There was no need (at our mature ages of forty-eight and fifty-four) to look at superficial marks that make up our past stories. Although, at that point I knew we still had so much to learn from each other. I knew from then that I had so much to learn from him.

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This level of comfort with his own body and this level of vulnerability was something I wanted in my partner. Our first night together was very telling of the sexual partner I was also wanting.

Our time in the room was almost like a fantasy to me. A world of care, respect, attention and desire—something I didn't feel for a long time. I've never felt so comfortable (and so attracted and certain) with a man I had just met. I had no worries about him respecting me and that I would be cared for.

He was respectful and loving and possessed passion and desire right from the get-go. Even though this (a one-night stand) was something I had never done before, I've never felt so loved and respected. I felt like this would not be a one-night stand. And then we went to dinner. (And yes, I paid, as I said I would!)

After the hotel, dinner and driving back to Calgary the next day, we stopped in my community's parking lot (in Calgary) to say goodbye (for now). Saying goodbye a week after we met was hard. I did not want him to go.

Then, Scott was back in Calgary within a few days of our first evening together. This gesture blew me away—a man I had just met drove back seven hours after seven hours just a day before to come back to see me. This guy is amazing! As I learned, driving (or riding) is not a big deal to him. However, the reason and purpose of coming back to see me in Calgary so quickly after just meeting was an immense gesture.



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*In Calgary, after our first night together.*

## **A Little Closer**

When Scott returned to Calgary a few days after our hotel and dinner rendezvous, we attended a relationship workshop given by one of the presenters who facilitated the Personal Development course we were just on for the week.

During the evening of this relationship workshop, we sat close (like a brother and sister) yet kept our “relationship” a little hush-hush due to the no-relationship-within-thirty-days policy we were expected to follow after the seven-day course. We learned a lot that evening, and as I sat beside him, I yearned to share and show how much I cared

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for him. He learned about how he, still being an important part of my life as a partner, was not my priority and that my children always come first. This was a great understanding and very true; however, I also understand that my children are adults and must learn to fail and succeed on their own. The area of children has been a learning curve for us as we spent more time together learning about each other.

We later heard from Cameron, a friend who attended the seven-day course on the Ranch with us, that his wife, who had noticed us sitting beside each other during the relationship workshop, had commented to her husband that we looked like a happily married couple. Very interesting how others see you when the vibes and positive feelings of care and respect are there. I believe Scott and I possessed such positive energy and attraction despite never publicly showing our affection that evening. Cameron's wife did not even know us and only later heard about us after she made that comment to him.

As our understanding that only geographical space seemed to keep us apart, it was time to make plans to book some plane trips. Scott lived in Ashcroft, a three-hour drive to Vancouver, where he would drive weekly (to and back) for work. I would fly into Abbotsford, B.C. or Vancouver every other weekend to see Scott, and he would come to Calgary. I always looked forward to our weekends together. When I arrived in Abbotsford, we often drove back to Ashcroft and other times treated ourselves to a hotel. After several flights back and forth and having to say goodbye for weeks or two in between, Scott had given me a keychain that said, "I love you. One day we will never have to say goodbye, only goodnight" to remind me that flying back and forth would not last forever.

We managed to sort through the flights back and forth. We enjoyed every time we were together. We got to know each other more and more. We did some "normal" things together, like grocery shopping

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and organizing his house. We also spent a lot of time getting to know each other on an intimate level. We both desired each other and loved exploring and accepting each other's bodies. We truly loved holding, touching and having each other in each other's arms. We loved making sure we were physically together as often as we could be.

Before moving on from August, the month we met, I want to share one very important gift that Scott received during our week at the Ranch. As I mentioned before, I truly admire Scott's ability to hold an audience and capture a feeling in a memory. He often proudly retells this story and enjoys helping others in their relationship with this gold nugget he learned during one of our activities on the Ranch. The exercise we had done required us to think of what we wanted more of in our life.

When Scott was asked this question, he replied that he wanted a partner, a relationship. He wanted to share his life with someone. So, Philippe, one of the several senior personal development staff members, required more from Scott. Philippe asked, "What will you ask her every morning when you wake up?"

Scott said (like many, I'm sure), "Good morning, honey. I love you."

Philippe planted a new seed in Scott's head, which has been a cornerstone for our relationship since we have been together. Philippe said, "Why don't you ask her, 'How can I love you today?'"

Scott reaffirmed that this was an amazing idea.

Well, we do this every morning with each other. Some days are heartfelt answers, like "I just need longer hugs today" or "I need you to be patient with me today." Other days might be, "I need you to connect with your daughter or reach out to a friend." And at the

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end of the night, in bed, we ask each other, “Did I love you today?” Sometimes it’s an easy yes. Other times it’s a longer explanation, like “Yes, you loved me when you sent me an email about how you were feeling” or “No, you did not reach out to your friend today as I asked.”

We all learn these little nuggets in life, which we both feel was a great one. Thank you, Philipe. This little golden nugget allows us to close any questions or concerns from the day and feel calm and connected going to sleep.

The months to follow August were riddled with a lot of learning, being open for communication and finding ways to make sure we both understand and respect each other in our growth. We had both just been through our own personal work and are now learning about each other. What a journey we would go on over the next eleven months before our wedding on July 23, 2022.

## CHAPTER 2

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### My First Ride

On our many rides to and from airports, I learned what kind of music Scott liked. We mostly played his music because he was driving and his phone was connected to Bluetooth in his big-ass truck. His selection varied greatly, something I enjoyed for sure. He liked rock from AC/DC to country rap, such as Colt Ford, to some of the oldies such as one of his favourites, Johnny Cash. Scott enjoyed singing along to many of the singer's tunes, and I enjoyed his love for this. He loved having fun with music, and I loved being in this space when it happened and sometimes singing along with him.

You know, you truly come to appreciate the little things like this. It would put a big smile on my face. I still love when Scott sings to music. I love how Scott loves music and loves to groove and sing too

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(even though he claims he's not very good at singing along). I love this carefree spirit—something I value and enjoy myself. I get to be free and express myself too (and I do!). I love music and moving to it too.

With our geographical distance, there was no problem keeping in contact daily. We realized we preferred video chat, as seeing each other's face was the most rewarding and kept our conversations more viable. The only challenge was always having enough data (usually on my end—limited data plan!). When I returned to work in September, I called Scott on Facebook Messenger or Facetime every lunch hour. This video connection was important and talking to him kept me grounded and reminded me that I was loved and respected and that I had a partner who cared about my day and wanted to keep connected. Scott has really taught me so much about improving my communication and that showing love is a priority.

As a teacher, I promoted writing in our gratitude journals at least a few times a week. Through this personal development work and since meeting Scott, I've found myself feeling rich with gratitude and wrote about it in my own journal. With my Grades 1 and 2 students, I often wrote about how grateful I was to have Scott in my life and shared it with them. I could tell they appreciated seeing my face light up and hearing about the things we did, like going for rides on his motorcycle. I often took pics of these written gratitude journal entries and sent the pics to Scott. I wanted him to know I was speaking and sharing about us with anyone I knew, as I was so proud and excited to be part of this man's life. He brought such joy and love into my life, and I glowed so much when I spoke of him. This air of love radiated from me when I spoke of him and our relationship with my co-workers at school.

I remember when I returned to work at Earl Grey Elementary School at the end of August 2021. It was tradition to give teachers time

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to share how their summer went and what they were up to. Well, I'm sure my smile and glowing disposition entered the room before the words came out of my mouth. When it was my turn to share, I talked about the week-long course I was on and how I met Scott that week.

I spoke of how he brought such love and joy to my life and that we are eager to make this work even with the long distance between us. I spoke (and beamed) about how he was such a bright light in my life, and I know other friends and staff at work were happy for me. Many commented how they loved seeing me in this light. They all knew I was doing well with moving on from my previous marriage and were so thrilled to see I was certain about this man and he was certain about me. Some friends already saw Facebook posts or heard through the grapevine about the “new” man in my life, and they were genuinely thrilled for me.

From early on in meeting Scott, I learned about his many accidents, including the first one where he was hit by a car and dragged for many feet when he was seven years old. It took him months to recover. This altered his learning and interest in school. He talked about (and I've witnessed) his challenges with spelling and constructing written work. Despite the lack of attention to spelling or grammatical detail, Scott still possessed a big heart with big emotions and always made sure he got his feelings across to me. On many occasions, he wrote emails to me that just took my breath away. His words were so heartfelt and emotionally driven. Each email he sent made me yearn for him, and I found myself (a teacher for almost twenty years) speechless and unable to equal the emotional level that he wrote. I admired his passion and romantic gestures, another quality I valued in this incredible man.

Scott got my attention one weekend when I went to Ashcroft to see him. He took me on his motorcycle for a ride. Wow! What an experience—exhilarating and scary at the same time. The only way

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I could stay on was to hold tight, which of course, I didn't mind. It was late September or early October, and it was a little brisk to be out riding in the mountains. I'm still learning the terminology and catching myself—it's *riding*, not *driving* the motorcycle. The ride on the green Harley Davidson Dyna was a rush. He has been riding for about thirty-plus years and calls it his freedom.

When Scott later brought this bike to Calgary, my daughter was given a ride on the back. It was hard to tell what she thought of the whole new situation; however, my mind raced. Maybe she thought, *How did Mom find this guy, and what does he see in her?* Either way, Brianna and I believe we both have a bit of a fascination with bikes and speed.



*Brianna's first-time riding with Scott*



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## Meeting the Family

Shortly after that relationship course we attended, Scott asked me if I was 100 percent committed to us. Without hesitation, I said yes. I (we) took any doubt off the table and were ready to commit to each other.

Did I know exactly what that would look like or how I would make sure I held my end of the commitment? No. All I knew at that point was that the connection I had with this man was something I had not experienced before. It was powerful, and he showed me daily what I wanted in a relationship: A man who was genuine, open, honest, loving, caring, kind and down to earth. He was showing up as a man I connected with without saying words but through how we looked at each other, how we touched each other and through our efforts, such as emails or phone calls. I knew I had no problem committing 100 percent to him and to love.

Within a month of knowing Scott, I wanted to share him with my family. He was an impactful soul that entered my life, and I wanted my family to meet this amazing man.

Ever since Covid started in March 2020, my family decided that it was important to connect with each other on a more regular basis. We decided to Skype call every Sunday, which seemed like a challenge. You see, we were mostly in different parts of the world. My sister and I were in Calgary (Mountain Time), my younger brother Dean was near Toronto (Eastern Time), our parents a three-hour difference from Calgary (Atlantic Time), and my older brother was almost a full day ahead in England (Greenwich Time). However, we made it work. Since our parents are divorced, we decided to give Mom and Dad their own time and not make it uncomfortable for them to be on the same video together.

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Well, my siblings and I Skyped one Sunday, and I told them that Scott would be joining us. Lana had already met Scott; Scott and I had gone out for lunch with her. She seemed pretty comfortable with him and happy with my choice (of a new man).

During our lunch date with Lana, Scott expressed to her that he doesn't like how I say sorry a lot. I did say this a lot, and I knew it was a word that confirmed my doubts about my capabilities. I knew that Scott's intention to support me in eliminating my overuse of the word *sorry* was to remind me that what I had to say was important and that I should not have any self-doubt. I started to curb blurting out that word, which made a big shift in what came out of my mouth. Anyway, Lana suggested a *sorry* jar might help curb the number of times I say sorry. I would have to put money into a jar every time I said that word.

Now on one of the first family Skype calls with Scott, Lana was interested in hearing how the *sorry* jar was going. Scott, in his ever-so-wittiness and smart comebacks, said, "Well, Lana, you see, I thought I would bring it up a notch and smack her ass whenever she said sorry. Little did I think she would like getting her ass smacked!"

Well, well, well, well. After that comment, the reactions from my family varied greatly. Lana appeared to not know how to react and didn't say much at all. Dean appeared to think it was funny but a little awkward at the same time. Darren appeared to want to laugh his ass off so hard but wasn't sure if he should. And I believe my mom thought, *I kind of like this guy because I see he makes my daughter very happy.*

The *sorry* jar was never truly operational, and getting my ass slapped was more fun anyway.

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Anyways, that was one of Scott's first meetings with my family. That week was Mom's week, which meant Dad was not privy to the *sorry* jar conversation, and that was probably best. Not sure how the slapping-my-ass comment would have impacted my Dad as a first impression of this man I had just met.