

MICHALA & CHRISTIAN GRAHAM: HIGH SCHOOL SWEETHEARTS FIND TRUE LOVE WHILE ATTENDING RCC

It was a match made in heaven, and it was love at first sight.

Michala Freeman, 26, now Michala Graham, met her husband, Christian Graham, 27, while attending the RCC Early College together. But Christian Graham says he saw Michala when he was just 13 years old and thought she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

"I remember it like it was yesterday," Christopher said. "I didn't know her name, and I didn't know if I would ever see her again. I thought she was cute, and I had a crush on her."

But as fate would have it, their paths would cross again, this time while in high school at the Early College located on the campus of Robeson Community College.

"We had assigned seats," Christian recalls.

"It was in 9th grade English," Michala remembers.

The two say they were just acquaintances, friends, until the last year of high school.

"Being in classes led us together," Christian said. "We hung out more and more, we were in the same group and hung around similar circles... I wasn't confident, I was very shy, but the last year, we hung out a lot more, just the two of us."

"We had free time for first period, so we would go to the library and hang out," Michala said.

"We had a designated seat," Christian pointed out. "That was our place."

"As high school went on, we had more free time and spent more time together," Michala said.

One morning, Christian decided to stay home and go fishing with his Grandfather, and Michala got upset and worried because he was missing.

"That's kind of when I knew," Christian said.

"I confronted him, and that's when we started dating otherwise, we would not have started dating," Michala said.

"She asked me, 'Do you like me?'" Christian stated. "And I said no, but I would date you."

By being brave enough to ask just that one question, Michala unknowingly opened the door to her future of becoming a wife and becoming a mother.

"We dated on through college; she's the first girl I ever brought home," Christian recalls. "We went together with my family to Pirates Voyage, and we've been together ever since."

"There is a lot to our love story," Christian adds. "It's like a math problem; there's so many lines drawn this way and so many lines drawn that way, there's just so much in our love story that it's mind-boggling."

Michala's Story

When Michala started at RCC, she had plans and dreams of becoming a doctor and going to medical school. But as life happened, her priorities changed, and she made a discovery about herself that she could not ignore.

"I realized there was a disconnect with doctors," Michala said. "I didn't want to be a provider... I enjoy being hands-on and being the eyes and ears of the patient."

That's why Michala decided to pursue a career in nursing. With being a graduate of the early college, in addition to receiving her diploma, she also earned an associate of science degree from RCC and went on to complete her bachelor's in nursing at UNCP in just three years.

She also completed her paramedic certification while at UNCP through a dual enrollment program at Robeson Community College.

"I'm an adrenaline junkie," Michala said. "I loved being a paramedic."

Now a full-time registered nurse with UNC Health Southeastern, Michala works in the Intensive Care Unit.

"I love being a nurse," Michala says. "It is my passion, my calling. I love taking care of people, and with being in the ICU, I take care of those that are the sickest of patients, which I love doing because many times those patients cannot communicate, so I'm the one that gets to hold the patient's hand and I'm the one who gets to see the change in their condition."

Michala also says she loves being able to interact with the families of patients. It's a personal connection that she says she would not be able to experience as a provider.

"With being a nurse, we are considered the most trustworthy member of the healthcare team... the patients feel like, you know, if they can't tell the doctor something, they can tell the nurse," she said.

Thinking ahead, Michala is continuing her education and is currently working on her master's degree in nursing education at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. She will graduate this September and has her mind set on possibly teaching at RCC in the future, like her mother, Nancy Freeman, who retired from the Adult High School program several years ago.

"I loved my time here at RCC, if I did love got my 4-year degree here, I would have," she said. "I loved the culture; it's very close-knit. I loved how the instructors said they cared about you, and they actually did... I learned a lot here; it's realistic, and with non-traditional students, RCC is an excellent choice to consider. I believe it's good that our county has the opportunities available that RCC provides."

"RCC gave me a solid foundation for healthcare... they want students to learn."

Christian's Story

While in high school, Christian did not know what he wanted to do with his life.

"I had no clue about what I wanted to do," Christian said. "I was traveling through life. I liked games, computers, and technology, and I thought that would be the direction I would go in."

As time went by, Christian realized that he did not enjoy sitting behind a desk, and as he said, he needed a job where he could know he was making a difference.

That's why he decided to become a police officer and pursue a career in law enforcement.

After leaving Robeson Community College with an associate degree in science, he went to UNCP and completed his bachelor's degree in criminal justice. He then made the choice to come back to RCC to complete the Basic Law Enforcement Training program.

"BLET was hard," Christian said. "It was Monday through Friday, 5 am to 5 pm, and on Saturday and Sunday, I worked from sunup to sundown... but it was well worth it."

Robeson Community College, he says, "is just big enough and just small enough... what I learned at RCC has benefited me so much, and the education was very rigorous."

Now employed as a deputy for the Robeson County Sheriff's Office, Christian says he's found his place.

"It has its ups and downs with being a cop, whenever I come out to talk to you, it's never because something good has happened. It's always because something bad has happened," Christian said. "So, I always see people when they're at their worst, but the thing that gives me the most satisfaction is helping somebody that genuinely needed it... you can go there and reassure them and help them, and make an actual difference, that that's what I love about law enforcement."

Christian credits his father, Heath Graham, who he profiled in 2022, for being an inspiration and role model for him.

"When I was 10 years old, he became a cop," Christian said. "He was always telling these off-the-wall stories, and some made him sound like a hero... I can say he's my best friend, and he is my hero, and that's why I decided to give this a shot."

Christian also says the brotherhood of law enforcement is something that unites everyone together.

"It's kind of like being in the military," Christian said.

Michala and Christian Become One

When Covid hit, there was a lot of uncertainty in the world, and it showed Michala and Christian how fast life could change in the blink of an eye.

"With my background in healthcare, I saw how short life is," Michala said.

"Initially, she said she was going to make me wait 10 years before we got married," Christian stated.

But they didn't wait 10 years; they decided to elope in 2020 at the height of the pandemic and just a few months after Christian completed basic law enforcement training.

"I didn't know when life was going to be normal again," Michala said. "You couldn't have ceremonies; people weren't allowed to gather, so we just took off and got married."

The two eloped in Dillon, S.C., at "the little chapel that everyone in Pembroke goes to," they said.

"My parents got married there," said Michala.

"My parents got married at the courthouse," stated Christian. "But it was closed because of the pandemic," he said, showing how limited their options were at the time.

"I couldn't imagine what my life would be like if I hadn't married Michala," Christian added.

Both Michala and Christian say their parents wanted them to "slow down and take their time," but they had already made up their minds.

"It was one of the best decisions I have ever made," Michala said. "We had no definitive plans; we just wanted to be married."

"I have no regrets," Christian stated. "Everything we did had a purpose from the time we met and even now."

"Becoming a cop and being in a relationship with Michala it brought me out," Christian said. "I was idle, and she made me hit the gas pedal."

"We balance each other out," Michala said as she chimed in.

"I'm the rock, and she's the wings," Christian added.

The happy couple welcomed their first child in 2022, Luna, who will be three years old this March. Luna was a bundle of joy they both say stole their hearts.

"Having a baby for me made me see what was important," Michala said. "When you're young, you get overwhelmed with life and the things you want to do... but having a baby, it hones you in and lets you see what is important."

Christian echoed those statements, saying, "It changed the dynamic of my life. All I ever wanted was a family to call my own, and it has changed my outlook on life... my little girl loves her daddy to death, and I love her so much, I can't stand to see her not happy."

With achieving success, falling in love, and starting a family, both Michala and Christian say it's not easy, but they've learned a lot through it all.

"It takes commitment," Michala says. "Love is never going to come easy; you have to wake up every day and choose love."

"Yeah, nobody gets on your nerves more than me," cracked Christian as he nudged his wife in a moment of levity.

Speaking more seriously, Christian says, "I would say when you're going through school when you're in love, everyone is always in a hurry, and if you don't slow down, and realize where you are, you might miss out on opportunities."

"There's something that my Dad taught me, and it's something that we live by, and that's if you wait until you're ready for a father, you'll never do it," Christian adds. "I have no regrets. I love being married, and I love being a father."

Choosing a life of love, faith, and togetherness, the couple says they'll probably go out to dinner and a movie this Friday night to celebrate Valentine's Day, their love, and their family, thankful for all that God has done.

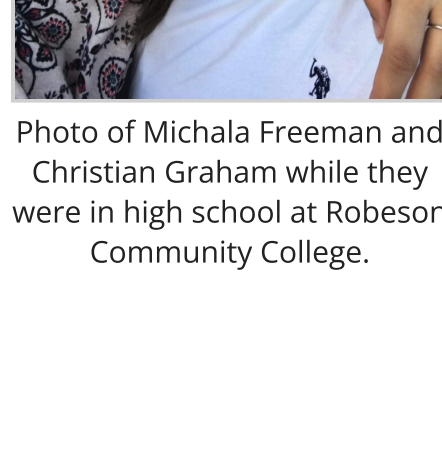
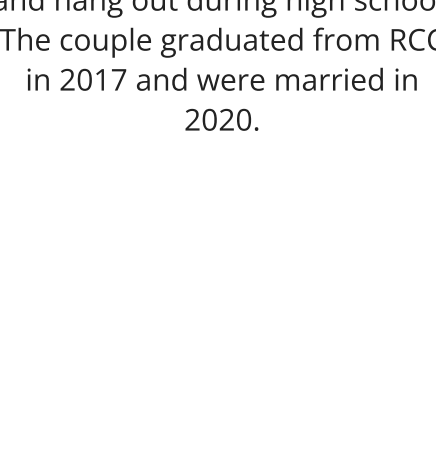


Photo of Michala Freeman and Christian Graham while they were in high school at Robeson Community College.



Michala and Christian say "I do" as they elope at the little chapel in Dillon, S.C. during the pandemic in 2020. No fancy wedding dresses and no suits or ties needed to let their love shine; the two just wanted to be married and share a life together.



Michala and Christian revisit "their place" in the RCC Library where they used to meet to talk and hang out during high school. The couple graduated from RCC in 2017 and were married in 2020.

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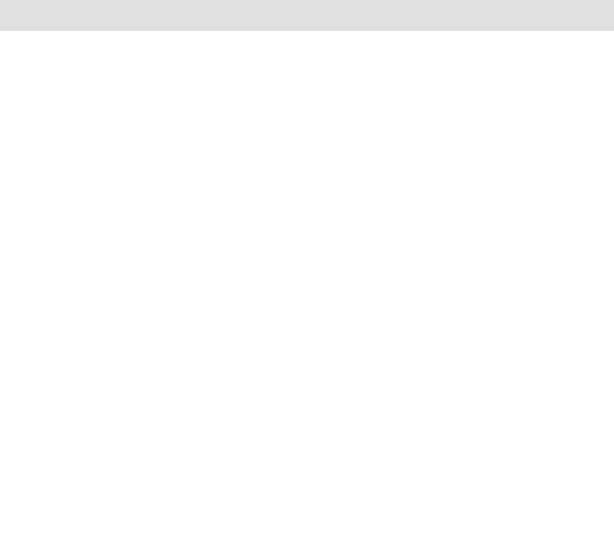
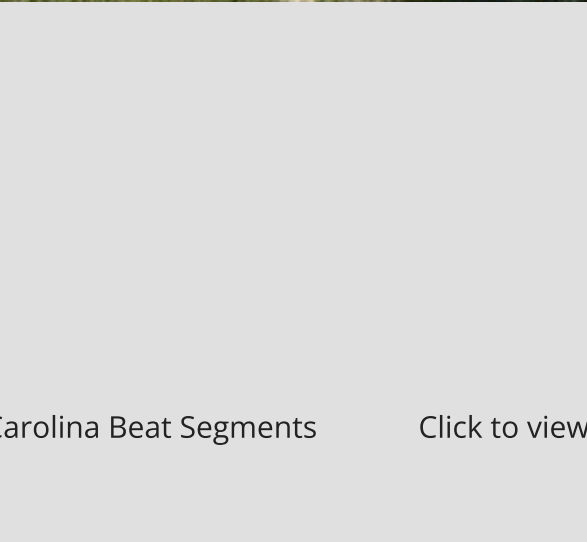
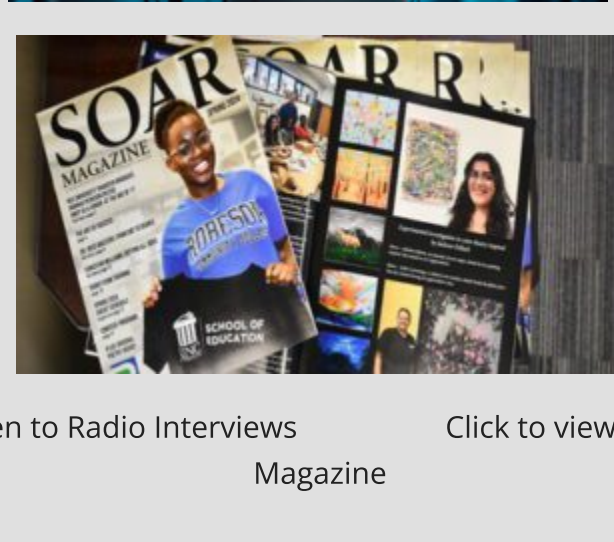
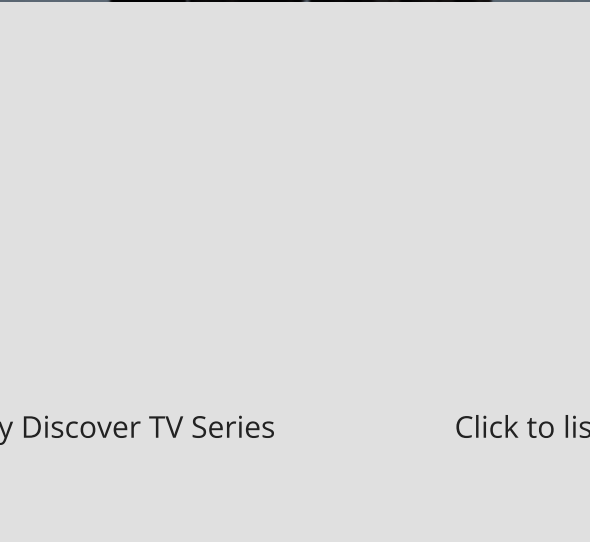
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