

How Romance Begins

Who needs a dating app? Not these folks! A lucky 13 Bergenites tell how they met the one who turned out to be “the one.”

Alas for love-seeking singles, science still hasn't developed a foolproof formula for finding lasting romance. Yes, it helps to keep your eyes open, be alert to cues, look your best and “put yourself out there,” but there's a certain serendipity to meeting the right person at the right time that cannot yet be willed. (And we all have the dating-disaster memories to prove it!) The best we can do for now is to collect, around Valentine's Day, inspiring anecdotal evidence like this:





**They met...
at the Jersey Shore**

"Steve and I met in our senior year of high school in 1999 at a mutual friend's party in Seaside Heights. We went on several dates that summer but went our separate ways until 2004, when we reconnected over winter break while I was getting my master's degree at Rutgers and Steve was in Army training in Maryland. Steve was deployed twice to Baghdad, Iraq, between 2004 and 2008, but we spent time together in between deployments in Texas and New Jersey until Steve completed active duty in 2008. After a very long-distance relationship, we were finally together in New Jersey and got engaged in 2010. We got married in 2011 in Long Branch since we shared so many happy memories at the Jersey Shore. We truly believe that 'absence makes the heart grow fonder,' since our relationship had been tested time and time again. We now have two daughters: Emilie, 6; and Claire, 4."

—Allison Sans, Park Ridge

They met...as small children

"My wife Samantha and I have known each other since we were 5 years old. We both grew up in Wyckoff and graduated from Ramapo High School in 1995. Our story started even earlier, in the early '80s—our moms had a mutual friend, so as kids we used to get together and play every so often. In middle school we were really good friends. I remember my dad always saying Samantha was a great girl—a keeper. I was into sports and hanging out with my buddies at this point—it didn't really register that she could be my girlfriend. Our freshman year of high school was pretty much the same thing—we were really good friends but there was nothing romantic. Samantha always had a bunch of the football guys over after our double sessions so we could recover in the hot tub. Halloween 1992 was the exact date our relationship changed. She had a killer Halloween party, and I remember being in a heated game of pinball in Samantha's basement with my buddy Jason. She asked me to help her bring food downstairs or something (I remember not being thrilled about being pulled away from the game) and we had our first kiss. We've been together (on and off) during high school and college ever since. We were engaged in 2003, married in 2005 and have three beautiful children, Olivia, 12; Luca, 11; and Tessa, 7. Our relationship has gone through a ton of twists and turns, but ultimately my dad was right. Samantha has always been 'the one.' We've shared so much in our lives and honestly, being friends before we ever dated helped lay a foundation for our relationship now. I can't imagine my life without her."

—Darren Magarro, Franklin Lakes



They met...in middle school

"Steven and I grew up together in Tenafly, so we technically met in sixth grade in 1994. During our sophomore year of high school we attended our semi-formal together—but with different dates who ultimately ended up together. My father passed away when I was 21, but he got to meet Steve, because we have pictures from semi-formal night with both of our families together. Steve and I lost touch after high school but reconnected in 2009 when we were 25 at a mutual friend's father's funeral, eventually got married and now have two little girls. We have our challenges like every couple, but ultimately we are soulmates because we found our way back to each other. Steve is everything that I cherish about my childhood and what I want my children to experience."

—Jessica Vanderlinden, Oradell



They met...through her sister

"In 2009, when I was 28, Reuben saw pictures of me at my sister's office desk and asked how she knew me because he thought I looked familiar. Turns out we both attended Rutgers University at the same time but didn't know each other. Later that year, Reuben and some of my sister's friends came to my birthday party. We exchanged hellos and had a couple of drinks but nothing else. We didn't cross paths again until March 2011, when we ran into each other on a train going into Hoboken. This time we made sure to exchange numbers so we could meet up. We went on our first date about a month later and have been together for 10 years and married for six. We now have two beautiful daughters, Ruby, 5; and Rosalie, 2; and a fur baby. It's funny, because while we never spoke to each other in college or lived in the same town, when looking back, Reuben was there all along—he's sitting behind me in my graduation photos, and we both attended the same events over the years but never once ran into one another. Fate stepped in multiple times to get us here, and it is up to us to stay here."

—Natalie Santos, Wood-Ridge



{ LOVE STORIES }



They met...via a matchmaker

"Our love story began with a Jewish matchmaker who was based out of a JCC [Jewish Community Center] in Newton, Massachusetts. I had purchased a package of six dates. Sean Levin was my second. On our first date in 1996, Sean and I met at a coffee shop. I was a recent law school grad studying for the bar; Sean had already been practicing law for a few years in downtown Boston. We discovered a series of serendipitous coincidences between us: We had both grown up in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Our fathers, both attorneys, had worked on the Hill [Capitol Hill] the same year. We had had the same childhood dentist, we both raised miniature schnauzers as children, and, most startling, my husband's high school best friend, Jason, was *my* friend, Jason, from elementary school! That first date ended with a promise from my now-husband: "I'll call you." And call me he did—just about a year later. He explained he had needed therapy to get clear within himself. He asked me out, and I said yes. Then I got a stomach flu, and had to postpone twice. He thought I was letting him down easy, but I wasn't. I really liked him. When I was finally healthy again, we went apple picking. Eleven months later, over Labor Day Weekend 1998, we got married. We now have two sons; one will be leaving for college next fall, the other the year after. We have not had a conventional family life. Our older son is autistic; our younger son is gifted and has gone through very intense and difficult periods. I left the law. Family came first. I'm glad I made the choice I did. A lot of couples have to rediscover each other when the children leave the house. Sean and I will simply continue to discover each other. We have come through trauma and tremendous challenges. But our home is filled with love, honesty, humor, shared experiences, support, music, creativity—and schnauzers. And I still thank G-d for that matchmaker at the JCC."

—Susan Levin, Montvale



They met... at a bar (twice)

"It was 1998—I was 31 and single. I went to my shift as a bartender at Red Rock West, a rowdy biker bar on 17th Street and 10th Avenue in NYC. I waited on a group of Lehman Brothers employees all evening. A guy kept buying rounds of drinks for his co-workers, giving me a big smile and tip every time I waited on him, and asked for my number. Normally I wouldn't give a customer my number, but he looked familiar...Three years prior I was in a relationship and not very happy. I went solo to a birthday party for a fellow actor friend at a now-defunct bar in the East Village. Everyone at the party was an actor, with the exception of Charlie, who was a singer in a rock band. We had a great conversation. When I left the party, I thought, 'Charlie's girlfriend is so lucky to have such a nice guy.' In 1998, both of us now single, I ended up giving Charlie my number at Red Rock West and we went out. We got engaged a few months later and were married within a year, just like a psychic had predicted I would be. It's our destiny to be together. We have two beautiful girls. Our oldest child has autism and we work together as a team to support her and her younger sister. We cannot imagine this journey without each other."

—Kim Cristo, Waldwick



They met...at a shiva

"Andrew and I share family but are not at all related—my father's cousin is married to Andrew's uncle. We both attended family bar mitzvahs as kids, and we have pictures together playing 'Coke and Pepsi' on the dance floor. Andrew's father was also my dentist! But Andrew and I did not officially meet until 2005, when we were in our 20s, at his family home in Cresskill for his grandfather's shiva. We dated for a few years and got married in 2009, and now have two children, Ryan, 9; and Faye, 6. We love having an unconventional love story, and know it means we were meant to be together."

—Heather Eisler, Woodcliff Lake



They met... via a personal ad

"I was 24 years old and not meeting anyone who had potential as a lifelong partner. I was living in Alexandria, Virginia, and worked in downtown D.C. A family member convinced me to place a personal ad in *The Washingtonian*, which reached all of the Washington, D.C., Maryland and Virginia areas. The 'In Search Of' ad appeared in the September 1985 issue. After about a week or so, I had not received any responses. I visited *The Washingtonian* offices, which were a couple of blocks from where I worked, and asked how I'd get my responses. A woman there said that 10 letters were sent to me the week before; she was perplexed why I hadn't received them yet, but she checked my box and there was one more letter. I hid in the bathroom at work to read the letter, lest anyone think I was desperate because of placing a personal ad, and opened the only response I had. The note basically said, 'Hi, I'm Rob from Brooklyn and I like...' Rob answered my ad by citing back everything I had said I was looking for in a guy. There was also a photo and I thought he looked pretty cute. Even though it wasn't such an original letter, I decided to call him. We spent hours on the phone talking, like we had known each other for years. We met the following night for dinner and saw each other several times after that. We quickly discovered that Rob lived directly across the street from me in Alexandria. I eventually received the 10 letters that were sent to me initially and another package with 14 more letters. But I was invested in Rob and starting to feel like we were meant to be. Rob and I got engaged three months after we met, and we got married on August 31, 1986. We just celebrated 35 magnificent years together. Through this time, we raised two fabulous children, enjoyed some amazing highs and dealt with the curveballs that life throws, as most couples do. Through it all, our love never wavered and we came out stronger together each time. Our kids complain that we set the bar for 'happily married' too high, but I can tell you that Rob and I are still each other's best friends, and we can only hope that our children find the same type of love we found. I wouldn't change a thing."

—Caryn Schulsinger, Ho-Ho-Kus



They met...when he was kissing her roommate

"I met my husband in 2006 while he was kissing my roommate, Alyson, at her birthday party. At the time, I was still deeply involved in a seven-year college relationship, but apparently Chris kept asking Alyson for my number. Maybe we connected because we have the same name? I didn't want to go out with him and make anyone uncomfortable, but I finally agreed and we had our first date that October. We got married in 2008—and Alyson was my bridesmaid! We have four children—Chris Junior, 11; Chester, 9; Eve, 6; and Joy, 3. Eve was the first baby girl born to my husband's family since the year 1860. I'm a COVID nurse in NYC and this hasn't been an easy two years for any of us, but we are still here. Still standing. And still in love after all these years."

—Christine Charles Ziobro, Ridgewood



They met... at a Jets game

"My husband Greg and I met at a Jets game in 2000. I was a senior in college at SUNY Oneonta, and Greg had recently graduated from Oneonta as well. My roommate started dating this amazing guy our senior year. One week, they invited me to a Jets game, but I didn't want to go. Strangely enough, my dad called that same week and asked me if I wanted to come home for the weekend and go to the Jets game with him, so I went. My roommate and I drove down to the Meadowlands to meet up with her boyfriend's friend Greg, his mom and a few of Greg's other relatives, and I met up with my dad there too. Greg and I ended up hitting it off and talking the entire night. We didn't exchange numbers since I was hours away in college, but I couldn't stop thinking about him. We saw each other at one other Jets game. Then, another year went by and I had now graduated and was living with some friends, and I ended up going to another Jets game with my roommate, her boyfriend and Greg. The following weekend we had an alumni weekend in Oneonta, and Greg was there too. We had the best weekend together but nothing came of it *again!* We ended up driving home at the same time but in separate cars. We got onto the highway from the back roads and Greg pulled into a rest stop. I followed him. We both got out of the cars, he kissed me, we exchanged numbers and the rest is history. We have been together for 18 years, married for 14, and have two amazing children—Lillian, who is 11½; and Garrett, who is 8."

—Rachel Schanck, Norwood



They met...at Garden State Plaza

"My husband Emanuel and I first noticed each other in the spring of 1988 at the Garden State Plaza. I was 23 and working in a clothing store and he was working at a pizza shop in the food court. During my lunch break, I went for pizza with a co-worker who also happened to be a friend of his. On our way back up to work, Emanuel called her over to ask about me, but she didn't tell him much since she liked him. Later that day, we crossed paths on the escalator and he asked me out for coffee—not drinks, because he wasn't 21 yet. Our first 'coffee date' was on June 5, 1988, at the Land & Sea Diner in Fair Lawn. We got engaged seven years later at that same booth at the diner! One of the things that makes our story unique is that we are an interfaith couple. I'm Jewish and he is Catholic and first-generation Italian. Some family members tried to talk us out of being together and were unsupportive, but we didn't let others interfere with our decision to start our life together. We listened to our hearts and are still going strong after being together for more than 30 years. We raised our two daughters, Marissa, 23; and Gabriella, 22; in an interfaith family, and truly have the best of both worlds."

—Jodi Stellacci, Washington Township



They met...in the middle of the night

"I met Dan at the Mousetrap Bar in Rochelle Park on July 22, 1978. We met just after midnight and talked until 3 a.m. I had to be at work at the Pathmark in Fair Lawn at 7 a.m. As I punched in at the time clock, a friend asked how my Friday night was. I told her I met the guy I am going to marry. It took Dan seven years to propose and figure out what I knew in three hours. We finally married on Aug. 30, 1986. We have two fantastic adult daughters, Kat and Sam. We live in the same house we bought in August 1985, which we purchased about a week after we got engaged. And yes, we are total opposites!"

—Rosanne Hurley, Paramus



They met...coaching high school sports

"Dan and I met at Westwood High School in the summer of 2006, when I was 22 and he was 24, at a volleyball practice that I was coaching. He was the middle school coach at the time. This was my first and his third year teaching/coaching at this high school—I teach math and coach volleyball; he is a physical education teacher and coaches bowling. We became good friends while working together that year, and started dating the following year, in January of 2008. We were engaged in 2010 and married in 2011. We even coached softball together as the varsity and JV coaches for about five years until I had our first daughter, Kylie, who's now 6. (We also have a 3-year-old daughter, Ryan.) Ironically, we met the same way my parents met in 1975; they both taught at Pascack Valley High School in Hillsdale for 36 years before retiring. They live in the town that we work in, and we now live in the town where they worked! Our daughters will one day go to the high school where they worked. It's special to work with students and to share that with your spouse."

—Lindsay Rattacasa, Hillsdale