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Jessie Carter '05 & Russell Sanford '05

A courtship of near-misses that happily didn't miss out.

By Kate Dabbs '09

Jessie and Russell Sanford's relationship is like a fine wine—a bottle that had to age 10-plus years before even considering a taste. What seemingly started as the idyllic Furman romance—brother/sister hall, meeting at an ice cream social, My Tie dates—just wasn't ready to be something more. "I didn't know what I wanted," Jessie says with a giggle, the first of many in our hour spent together on a rain-swept night in October.

The winding tale of their overlapping paths has the makings of a rom-com blockbuster. They went to two Furman homecomings together. They both moved to different parts of Florida but met up a few times to hang out as friends. It was a Ben Folds concert during the romantic heyday of "The Luckiest" that made Jessie finally see Russell in a slightly different light.

"But of course, he started dating someone else," she explains. Thankfully, the

relationship didn't last, and while with a group of friends at the Islands of Adventure in Florida, Russell announced plans to take a trip to Europe. Jessie dropped everything and decided to tag along at the last minute. Still, the magic didn't happen.

After completing law school, Russell moved back to Greenville while Jessie's freshman-year roommate convinced her to move back as well. "He had a new girlfriend as soon as I moved," Jessie

says. "But they only lasted a month before we finally started to date." The year was 2012. They met in 2001.

Their two-and-a-half year courtship before getting engaged was filled with travel (Italy, Amsterdam, Belgium, and Paris); date nights at Monterrey's; and fine cuisine at home—Russell can casually rattle off his inventory of perfected reductions, gastriques, and all things gourmet.

Fittingly, he proposed at the Bell Tower. "I told Jessie my mom wanted a picture of me in front of the Bell Tower. I let her take some awkward solo pictures of me before I proposed," Russell says. And the wedding that was more than a decade in the making, finally happened June 27, 2015.

"If we had dated back then, I wouldn't have been mature enough. I still had to grow up," Russell confirms. But the beauty of a long friendship laying the foundation for their marriage was evident when it took them a full two minutes to think of any challenges faced in the first few months of being married.

"Having known each other for so long—we were teenagers when we met, and we are now in our thirties—we knew a lot about each other already," Jessie says. "But the surprises now are little things that make us laugh. He makes up random songs about anything and everything all day long," she elaborates.

"And she talks in her sleep," Russell chuckles. "We will have a conversation back and forth and she will remember nothing. We do laugh a lot. I don't have to search for a friend who might get it, and that might be the very definition of why we love being together."

"Well, I think you are funny, and I always laugh," Jessie swoons. "And I know that you always will," Russell replies. ●