Virginia & Joel

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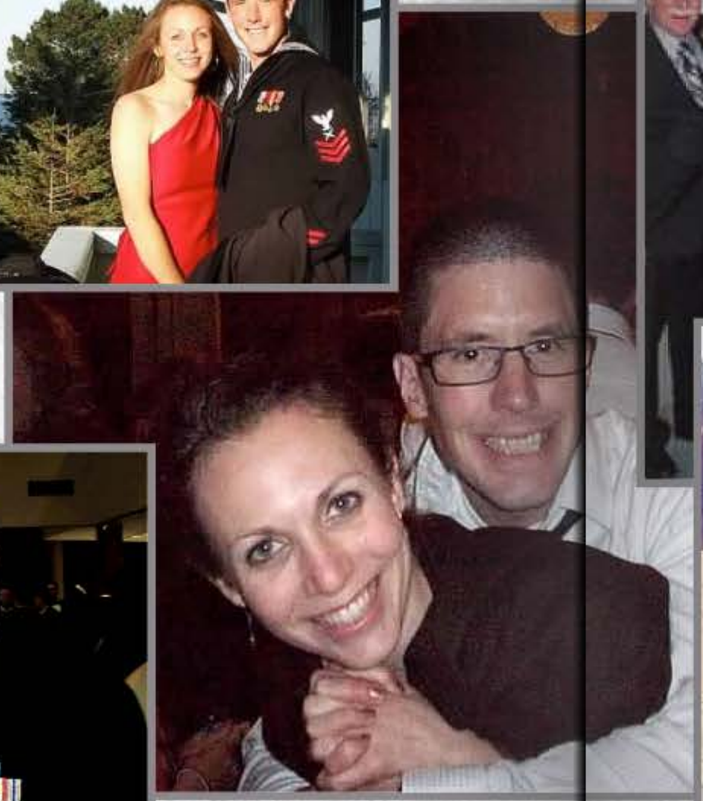
We met in the summer of 2006 while studying Russian in Vermont. While speaking only Russian (the language of love, we like to say), we became good friends. It wasn't until about seven months later, when we were both living in Russia, that we started dating.

Our Story

An Enduring Commitment

Our individual pursuits have taken us all over - resulting in over 4 years of long-distance dating. Sometimes we were just in different parts of the same state; at other times we were half a world away from each other.



However, we always found occasions to come together, such as Joel's military balls, the weddings of friends and family, and vacations like our first trip to Portland, OR, in 2009!

We maintained a strong commitment to one another, even over distant geographies, supporting each other in every dream we had. This made us independent, but also bolstered our determination to find a way to be together, in the same city, eventually!

Our Wedding Day

After 6 years of dating, Joel proposed and a wedding date of

September 20, 2014

was set. We surprised our guests with our own rendition of "The Best Things Happen While You're Dancing" for our first dance.

We married at Virginia's parents' farm in Illinois, a place that she cherishes as a really important part of her childhood.

Traveling

Being silly

Hiking

Visiting friends

Backpacking

Hosting international visitors

Favorite Shared Activities

Meet Joel...

Occupation:
- FBI Special Agent

Hobbies:
- Reading
- Weight-lifting
- Running
- Fitness
- Playing guitar
- Surfing
- Hiking
- Video games
- Strategy games
- Making smoothies

Fun Facts:
- I'm a twin and I have younger siblings who are triplets (2 sisters and a brother)
- I lived in Alberta, Canada, from age 10 to 16
- I meditate every evening before bed
- I spent 15 years in the Navy, 6 years active and 9 years in the Reserves
- I'm a big nerd; I love video games and strategy board games
- I love learning languages (Russian, Arabic, Spanish)

...and his family

My twin brother, Sean, has two kids, my nephew Jonathan and my niece Maya. They live in Alberta, Canada, as do my sisters Lori and Lisa. My younger brother Andrew lives in British Columbia, while my mom and step-father live clear on the other side of the country, in New Brunswick. My other Canadian relatives that we stay close with are my great aunt Pat and my aunt Gail. My dad and step-mother live in Iowa.

Although my family lives all over the place, they are really important to me. I try to see them as much as possible. We travel a few times a year, especially over the holidays, to see all of our family, and we keep in touch over Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp.

Joel's Story

I grew up in a single-parent household with four other siblings. It was often stressful and difficult. There were numerous times where we ran out of food, and we never had the best or coolest clothes or things. We moved around a lot in the US and Canada, and it was hard to make friends and keep them. As a result, I value stability and consistency very highly. The most important thing for me is giving my future children a stable and loving environment.

My twin and I went to live with my great aunt Pat when we were 14, and it changed my life. She is such a smart, kind, and organized person. She was a college professor for many years. Having two teenage boys live with her was probably not pleasant for her, but I learned a lot, and it showed me how to think and to organize my life in a better way.

After barely graduating from high school in a small town in Iowa, I moved around for a year or so, doing odd construction jobs, and joined the Navy in 2000. I didn't know what I wanted to do at first, but luckily I was able to switch to becoming a Russian linguist while in bootcamp and then went to beautiful Monterey, CA, for a year of training. After serving in the Navy for an additional three years in Hawaii (lucky, right!?), I finished undergrad there and then traveled for a few years while working various jobs and serving in the Navy Reserves. It was during this period that I met Virginia.

In 2008, I went to grad school back in Monterey, CA, and then I moved to Washington, DC, and worked in various intelligence agencies. In 2012 I was accepted into the FBI as a Special Agent and went to Quantico, VA, to complete 5 months of intense training. In 2013, the FBI sent me to Portland, OR, where Virginia and I have made many good memories.

Meet Virginia...

Occupation:
Renewable Energy Project Manager

Hobbies:
Traveling
Environmental activism
Languages (Russian, French, Spanish)
Snowboarding
Ballet
Yoga/Pilates/Barre
Sewing
Baking

Fun Facts:
I bike to work every day, rain or shine
I've lived in Russia, Italy, and Switzerland
I ran my own egg business, with 250 laying hens, as a middle- and high-schooler
I grew up on a farm in Illinois, cutting firewood, planting trees, and hoeing corn
As a child, I once appeared on a local broadcast of Reading Rainbow

...and her family

My parents still live at my childhood home in Illinois, although they spend a lot of time in Pennsylvania where my brother Sam, his wife Megan, and their kids (Samuel and Maren) live. My brother James lives in Kansas, and my sister Antonia lives in Illinois. I also have aunts, uncles, and cousins on both sides of my family, primarily in the Eastern U.S.

Virginia's Story

From the age of 2 until I was 17, I lived with my family in rural Illinois, not far from the town of Rushville. My mom was a high school biology teacher who instilled a love of nature and the outdoors in me, and my dad was always a farmer at heart (but actually worked for an agribusiness company) and taught us the value of hard work.

When I was 12 (and my older brother was 15), my parents adopted my younger brother (7 years old at the time) and sister (5 years old) through the state foster system. I loved having three siblings - there was always someone to play with. We spent our playtime running barefoot, sledding, building forts in the woods, climbing trees, and jumping off things. In my tweens and teens, I was involved in 4-H and FFA, took piano and dance lessons, and played on the golf team. Overall, it was a very happy and healthy childhood; I was very fortunate to have a supportive and loving family and community.

After graduating high school in 2004, I went to college in rural Vermont. During the summers after my freshman and sophomore years, I studied at my college's language schools. The second summer I enrolled in Russian school, which is where I first met Joel. I then spent my junior year abroad in Russia.

Knowing that Joel was going to be in California for grad school in 2008, I was determined to find my first post-college job in that state. I ended up working on social and environmental campaigns in SoCal. I eventually moved to Washington, DC, to work toward my originally-intended career path: working for the US State Department. Joel joined me in DC in 2010, but in 2012, I went back to school to earn a graduate degree, which took me to Bologna, Italy, the first year, and to Geneva, Switzerland, for a summer internship.

After graduate school, I had the good fortune of working in a writing/reporting job that allowed me to both travel the world to attend environmental negotiations and conferences, as well as work remotely so that I could join Joel in Portland. Eventually (in 2016) I started working in the renewable energy industry in Portland.

Our Home & Neighborhood

We live in a vibrant and diverse neighborhood in northeast Portland. We love how walkable it is, with parks, restaurants/cafés, local shops, and many amenities nearby. We have schools and playgrounds within walking distance as well. We're lucky to live within an easy drive to the beautiful coast, as well as great hiking and snowboarding in the mountains. There is never any shortage of places to explore, and we can't wait to go on adventures with our children!

Family Traditions

While we aren't a religious family, we use the holidays - especially Christmas and Thanksgiving - to gather with our relatives and relax. Sometimes Christmas is spent at Virginia's parents' (top left), her brother Sam's (top right), at home in Portland (bottom right), or in Canada with Joel's family. One year, Virginia's extended family gathered at the house her grandparents built in Pennsylvania and all wore ugly Christmas sweaters (bottom left) to celebrate together. We also have fun with Halloween (right), but think it would be a whole lot more fun with a kid to dress up and go trick-or-treating with!

Dreams for Our Children

Among the values we hope to teach our children are: kindness, empathy, integrity, honesty, independence, environmentalism, and a strong work ethic.

We will expose our children to the great outdoors through hikes, nature centers, day trips, and visiting Virginia's childhood farm. Through travels, exploring, and education, we want our children to learn about many different ways of life and cultures, opening their minds and creating a natural affinity for tolerance and empathy. Having met through studying a foreign language, we want our children to have that same opportunity from a young age.

We also understand that children will have their own interests, preferences, and hobbies. We plan to open doors for them and support them in the things they are most excited about. This will be our philosophy throughout their lives, as we do not have any predetermined path in mind for them.

Finally, having been blessed with many siblings ourselves, we would like our child to have a brother or sister (or both), and thus we plan to undertake the journey of open adoption more than once. (And, we would also be happy to adopt twins!)

Open Adoption Aspirations

We aspire to raise our children to possess a sense of wholeness and comfort with their identity. We're looking forward to incorporating their background and adoption story from day one, allowing them to identify with both their birth family and us. We know this could take many forms, starting with your - the birth family's - preference for your involvement and presence. We want you to feel at home with us, like close friends and extended family. We'll also do our part to provide our child with access to information and experiences that relate to their specific cultural or racial heritage, if different from ours. We plan to answer questions openly and honestly - to the extent we know the answers. We realize they will have much to learn from you - things only you will be able to share - and we will encourage them to seek your insight (to the extent you would like that!). We are committed to creating an open adoption relationship that brings all of us a sense of joy and fulfillment.

Thank you for taking the time to look through our book and learn more about us. We are sending you warm thoughts and wishes for all the best.