

Gold Rings and Silver Linings

A Personal Essay

"I gotta get to Utah." Not a typical first thought in a pandemic. Not a typical first thought ever.

Almost 200 years ago thousands of pioneers thought the same thing. Fleeing persecution, they sought freedom in the mountains. What am I running from? What am I seeking? Well COVID19 for one, and eternal marriage the other.

What's in Utah? My fiancée. We met at a church barbeque. She was an intern at Chubb (an international insurance company?) in Old City, Philadelphia, and I had just begun my third-year rotations at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital. We dated instantly, and continued the courtship when she went back to Utah to finish school and more internships; while I was whisked away as third-year medical students are.

Our wedding date is set for April 10th in Salt Lake City, Utah. That is the Friday before I begin fourth year rotations. While it certainly is not ideal to begin a marriage 36 hours before flying across the country, it beats planning a wedding during what's soon becoming a pandemic.

It was 6:00 PM Friday the 13th, March 2020, when the email arrived saying student rotations would switch to an online format. Online meant virtual, virtual meant remote, and remote meant, hopefully, with my fiancée. I just had to get to her. What would our wedding look like? Would we keep the original date? Who would be able to come? Would anyone even be allowed to come?

Earlier in the week we had made the difficult and necessary decision to postpone our reception. A reception venue, no matter how quaint, was not the place for grandparents and loved ones to congregate at this time. My grandmother, who we all call "Nanny," phoned me distraught, two days prior informing me that her and Granddad would not be making the trip. Many of these interactions followed from family, friends, and mentors. We called and emailed those we hadn't already contacted. Like a funeral, it had a purging effect: connecting us to those we loved while physically being separated.

Seven days, seven cancelled flights, and thousands of COVID19-positive patients later, I made it to Utah. The mountain west had not been heavily attacked yet, so our faces were still free and breezy. However, the writing was on the wall, and many stores, shops, and public places had been closed. Throughout the week, the temple we were to be "sealed" or married in, sent updates of new policies. Most were shutting down. We had changed our reservation to a different date and temple than originally planned, and it was still open. Interestingly, it was closer to her parent's house than the original venue. We survived the weekend and were married in the freezing rain on March 24, 2020.

So, what now? Now, we wait in Arlington, Virginia. We quarantined together in Arizona for a month and then drove our Ford Focus across two-thirds of Interstate-20, and eventually found ourselves outside the nation's capital. She has a position with an investment firm in downtown DC and her job started remotely last week. I am still remote learning and now feel like a fourth-year by technicality. She will stay here and work while I relocate from rotation to

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rotation, as fourth year medical students do, even though not even that is certain this year. We live one day at a time, cherishing the time we never would have had together if I had to be rotating in Philadelphia and her working in DC. That time is coming, but we will worry about that later. For right now, we will enjoy our golden wedding rings and the silver linings.



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