

OnLove»

ONLOVE ONLINE

Join us at washingtonpost.com/onlove. Or if there's a love story you think we should know about, e-mail us at onlove@washpost.com.

Online you'll find:

- Our online questionnaire, which couples can fill out to be considered for coverage.
- Videos, photo's, advice and polls. And for more weddings and engagements, check out B.I.O. in Monday's Express.



BY MARVIN JOSEPH — THE WASHINGTON POST

Russo and Fox on the dance floor after their wedding. "I knew that I was going to marry her," Russo says, though the couple hardly followed a direct route to the altar.

The program for Kerilyn Fox and Peter Russo's wedding ceremony bore a passage from "Captain Corelli's Mandolin." "Love is a temporary madness," it begins. "It erupts like an earthquake and then subsides. And when it subsides you have to make a decision."

Apt words for a bride who describes the journey that brought her to the altar as "part fairy tale, part 'Jerry Springer' episode."

Fox, 34, and Russo, 33, met first in 1996. Russo, a native of Queens, was living with a cousin in Morgantown, W.Va., and working as an auto mechanic. Fox, a West Virginia University student who also spent her early childhood in Queens, was plotting a transfer to a school in Savannah, Ga., where she could study interior design.

Friends introduced them during an all-you-could-eat crab feast at a restaurant and Russo was immediately taken with Fox's big smile and open-book demeanor. They began hanging out as friends. Fox was aware of Russo's interest, but distracted by her impending move. When the day came, he showed up to help her pack her belongings and waved as the moving truck drove away.

For the next 3½ years, the two had almost no contact. Fox got her degree from the Savannah College of Art and Design and relocated to Arlington. Russo developed a love of cooking, graduated from the French Culinary Institute in New York and found work at a restaurant in New Jersey.

After a conversation with a shared friend, Fox asked for Russo's number and decided to call just to catch up. He was at the dinner table with another woman when he answered the phone. He was thrilled to hear Fox's voice and when she asked if he was going to a WVU homecoming game two weeks later he answered, "I'm gonna go now."

They had dinner after the game; this time the attraction was mutual. The following weekend Russo visited

In the End It's a Fairy Tale

Kerilyn Fox and Peter Russo

By ELLEN MCCARTHY | Washington Post Staff Writer

Fox in Washington, beginning a long-distance romance that would last more than a year, until Fox said she needed more. Russo agreed to move to D.C., got a job at TenPenh in the District and — after an apartment of his own fell through — moved in with Fox.

Six months later they broke up. Fox had been laid off and was anxious about her unemployment. Russo was working incredibly long hours to prove himself at the restaurant. Their lives were full of friction, so he moved out.

They spent the next few years being together — talking constantly, spending nights at each other's apartments — but not officially dating. Fox wanted the relationship to progress, but Russo was intensely focused on his career. "I knew that once he was ready, he was going to come looking for me," she says. "But I just couldn't wait."

In 2006, she told Russo she was moving on. A few months later she met someone new. And, as Fox had predicted, Russo soon came calling.

"She was in a relationship, but that

didn't matter to me," says Russo, now executive chef at Lia's in Chevy Chase. "Because I knew that I was going to marry her. I knew we loved each other and I knew it was going to happen."

Fox's love for Russo hadn't faded either, but she was, by then, nearly a year into a relationship with another man and felt it deserved a fair chance. Russo persisted with calls and entreaties. He bought her an engagement ring. Fox refused and in January 2007 moved in with her new boyfriend.

To drive home the point to Russo, she went to his house, sat on his couch and told him, in no uncertain terms, it was over.

"She said, 'If you e-mail me, I won't answer. If you text me, I won't reply. If you call me, I won't pick up,'" Russo recalls. "I was devastated."

So he gave up, grieved and tried to envision a life without her. Meanwhile, Fox's relationship began to crumble. No matter how hard she worked at it, it wasn't working. Collapsed on her bed in loneliness one afternoon, Fox got a call from her sister, Kristine. She had maintained ties with

Russo and acted as a go-between, asking if he would meet with Fox, who wanted to apologize for her cruelty.

A few days later, in April 2008, they met at Oronoco Bay Park in Alexandria. Russo, who was also in another relationship by then, sat in the park's parking lot for almost 30 minutes knowing that if he got out of the car, "my entire life now is going to officially change." Because despite his heartbreak, "I was going to do whatever I could do to get her back."

For two hours they argued and cried and talked and embraced. That afternoon, Fox told her live-in boyfriend she was getting back together with Russo. "He said, 'You knew, Kerilyn. You knew it was always going to be Peter,'" she remembers. "Even he knew."

"And this," she continues, "is where it really gets 'Jerry Springer.'"

Two months later, she and Russo got engaged. She continued to live with the other man for two months after that and paid rent for their shared house until December 2008. It was awkward, but she was ecstatic. Life with Russo has felt, she says, "meant to be."

They planned to return to Oronoco Bay Park for their Sept. 26 wedding, but a cold rain forced a switch to a ballroom at the Hotel Monaco in Alexandria. There, they both wept through their vows and dried each other's eyes with tissue.

"It's such a crazy story. With on ramps and off ramps and detours," Fox says. "But in the end it's a fairy tale. I'm marrying the man of my dreams."

How They Did 'I Do'

ON THE WEB | To view a gallery of photos from Kerilyn Fox and Peter Russo's wedding, or to read about details from their big day — from the tarot reader to the surprise serenade — visit washingtonpost.com/onlove.

NUPTIALS



BY STEPHEN BOBB — LOVE LIFE IMAGES

Kaja Snell & Daniel Meade

Kaja Snell, 33, is a gerontologist. Daniel Meade, 33, is a financier. They live in New York.

WEDDING DATE: SEPT. 12
LOCATION: GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH; HOUSE OF SWEDEN
GUESTS: 130

How they met: Anna Järborg, wife of Sweden's consul general, Pontus Järborg, knew Kaja and Daniel from separate encounters years before in Europe. She decided to introduce the two in the spring of 2008. Daniel knew he was going to meet Kaja, but she was unaware of the plan. That first meeting went well: Daniel later drove to Arlington from New York to pick Kaja up for their first date.

The proposal: It took several attempts for Daniel to ask Kaja to marry him. The arrival of Vice President Biden at an inaugural ball foiled one plan. Daniel tried again by making Kaja a custom soundtrack, but she wanted to listen to something else. Finally, he succeeded one evening in Georgetown outside the Ritz-Carlton, where they had drinks on their first date.

The wedding: The reception and ceremony sites were both meaningful to the couple. The church where they had the ceremony was across the street from the Ritz. Kaja, who is half Swedish, was on the board of the House of Sweden, which also is significant because of their connection to the Järborgs. They made a grand entrance for the reception after riding down the building's glass elevator.

Honeymoon: A trip to South Africa.

When they knew: Kaja: "[When] we met. I called my mom that night and told her." Daniel: "She nursed my torn cornea in darkness for 36 hours."

— Becky Krystal



BY CHARLIE SHIN

Vanessa Bilanceri & Jeremy Goldberg

Vanessa Bilanceri, 28, is a communications consultant and a yoga instructor. Jeremy Goldberg, 29, is the chief operating officer of a nonprofit organization. They live in the District.

WEDDING DATE: SEPT. 6
LOCATION: ARTS CLUB OF WASHINGTON
GUESTS: 65

How they met: Vanessa and Jeremy were undergrads at the University of Texas at Austin but met after both came to the District in 2002 for a fellowship that involved a semester of classes and a full-time internship. There were 17 people in the program and all lived in the same place in Rosslyn. Their first date was unintentional: They were the only two people who showed up at the students' usual hangout, Lindy's Red Lion near George Washington University. The relationship took off, but they kept it a secret for a while to avoid the prying eyes of their tight-knit social group.

The proposal: After carrying the engagement ring around Argentina for nearly two weeks in December 2007, Jeremy asked Vanessa to marry him. The setting at a ranch house called Casa de Jasmynes (House of Jasmynes) was so beautiful, Vanessa said, she had decided before Jeremy proposed that it would be the perfect place to get engaged.

The wedding: The couple's interfaith ceremony — Jeremy is Jewish, Vanessa Episcopalian — included nondenominational selections from two novels, "The Alchemist" and "Rain of Gold." Their first dance was to a tango by a group they had first heard in Argentina. Adding to the event's global flair was homemade biscotti to honor Vanessa's Italian heritage.

Honeymoon: Two weeks in Spain.

— Becky Krystal

Wedded to the Idea of Promoting Black Marriages

By ELLEN MCCARTHY
Washington Post Staff Writer

Eleanor Holmes Norton started to become concerned about marriage among black people when her first child was born in 1970. She told those gathered at an Urban League convention there was reason to worry — fully 30 percent of black children were then being born out of wedlock.

Two weeks ago, before a standing-room-only crowd at the Congressional Black Caucus Conference, she provided a startling update: "What was 30 percent then is 70 percent today," she said, eliciting a collective murmur of disapproval.

So many people turned out for the two-hour symposium "Single Women, Unmarried Men: What Has Happened to Marriage in the Black Community?" that Norton (D), the District's nonvoting delegate in the U.S. House, had to "sweet-talk" a fire marshal into letting the line of attendees squeeze into the large room.

"Whenever there are black people standing up trying to get into a room to talk about this subject, I'm going to make it possible for them to get in," she said.

That day's conversation continued 175 miles south of Washington last week, with the launch of Hampton University's National Center on African American Marriages and Parenting, an academic organization focused on studying black relationships and developing resources to improve them.

There's a reason this issue is generating so much attention: "We really are in a state of crisis," Shane K. Perrault, founder of African American Marriage Counseling, a D.C. area counseling service, told the Congressional Black Caucus crowd.

"For the first time, young black women cannot necessarily look forward to marriage as the next natural state of life," Norton said. "They are finding themselves without comparable mates."

To that point, Audrey Chapman, radio host and couples counselor, told the audience she believes black women need what she calls a "rainbow coalition" approach to dating beyond their race. "We're the only group of people who are devoted to a group of people who aren't devoted to us," she said.

Norton said her primary hope for the session was that it would spark follow-up

conversations throughout the country, bringing to light a problem she feels people are loath to discuss.

Linda Malone-Colon's goals are more concrete. Malone-Colon, chairwoman of Hampton University's psychology department, intends for the National Center on African American Marriages and Parenting to become a clearinghouse for research on marriage in the black community and a resource for organizations looking to get involved with the issue.

Malone-Colon recalled working as director of the historically black university's counseling center a decade ago. More often than not, she said, the students who came in were grappling with problems "having to do with relationships, often male-female relationships that were conflict."

Malone-Colon took on the topic as a major area of professional research and developed the curriculum for a black marriage course that is oversubscribed semester after semester at Hampton. In developing the course, she was astonished by how little research was being done on African American relationships. She hopes the new center will inspire other academics to study

various aspects of the issue and generate proposals that might strengthen black marriages.

And, as the college that graduates the highest number of black psychology majors in the United States, Malone-Colon's intention is to use the center to train a generation of professionals equipped to effect real change. She fears if it doesn't happen soon, the problem will become systemic. "Because there are so many more children born in single-parent homes, they're not learning how to be in relationship with someone else — they're not having that model," she said.

The center plans to develop targeted literature and educational programming that can be disseminated to church groups and social centers that work with black families.

Like Norton, Malone-Colon hopes this topic gains some public traction — and community involvement.

"When challenges become very huge, people back away and say, 'Well, I can't do anything,'" she said. "That's in part what's happening with this issue. We're not hearing much about it because it is so huge."

ON FAITH AND LOVE

More than ever, people are dating and marrying partners of different faiths. The Post is launching a project exploring how religious differences play out in our lives and relationships. Have you loved across a chasm of beliefs? We want your stories: about how you negotiated and navigated these differences, how conversions or compromises were made, how it all worked — or didn't. Share your experience (in 700 words or fewer) by e-mailing OnFaithandLove@washpost.com. We'll publish some of the submissions online and in print starting in November.