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### Footprints in the Sand

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Jennifer Riley and Michael Dalziel share a passion for beach volleyball. The sun, the sand and the surf figure prominently in who they are and how they see themselves. And it was through this sport that they found each other.

It all started when Jen's friend, Vancouverite Lindsay Barrett, mentioned two "men of value" that she felt Jen should meet. One of them, it turned out, was already seeing someone. The other, a tall mechanical engineer named Michael Dalziel, was unattached. When Jen came to Vancouver in April 2003, she and Lindsay went to Kits Beach to survey this prospect.

"The first time I ever saw him he was playing volleyball," Jen recalls. "He's really amazing to watch. But because Lindsay had given me a bit of his background, I knew that he was kind, thoughtful and really intelligent. He was this undiscovered gem."

Jen relocated to the West Coast, eventually starting her own TV production company. Shortly after settling in Vancouver, she joined a women's volleyball team. During the long weekend of May 2003, she and Mike were playing at a tournament in Vancouver. When the day was done, a group of players gathered a little club called the Side Door. Jen and Mike, who were among the crowd, struck up a conversation. "I'd broken a flip-flop that day," Jen recalls, "and was walking barefoot." As the group left to grab a bite to eat, Mike offered to piggyback her to the restaurant.

This act of chivalry no doubt added to Jen's growing interest. She knew she'd found someone special—someone she wanted to get to know better. Pulling a few strings, she arranged that she and Mike travel together to a tournament in Parksville two weeks later.

"We both felt something that night that I piggybacked her," says Mike. "The weekend we went to Parksville we went to a pub in Victoria. Jen and I got off to the side and spent time getting to know each other. It was great." Parksville put their relationship into high gear. That weekend, they shared their first kiss.

The following September, Mike was recruited to play volleyball in Belgium for seven months. "It was terrible; I couldn't take being apart," says Jen. "I went to visit him one month later. He came back in April, and we moved in together at that point."

"Belgium was really the barometer," Mike says. "I missed her so much while I was away, and I knew that I wanted to be with her. We'd talked about engagement and I was joking that maybe I'd wait until my work bonus the following year to buy a ring. But at that point, I'd already made plans to get a ring."

On September 1st, 2006, they were driving to the Horseshoe Bay ferry terminal, en route to a weekend at





Mike's parent's cabin on Hornby Island. Mike had picked Jen up from work—she is PR Manager with Electronic Arts Sports. "As we were driving to the ferry, he took a right turn towards downtown. He said he had a big surprise: one of the guys from work had rented a plane to Tofino, but wasn't able to go. Because there was no refund on the plane, he'd offered it to Mike, so we had this free plane," Jen recalls.

On the flight, Mike told the pilot that his dad had left prawn traps out in the bay and that he and Jen had to pull them into the boat. "The pilot kept saying that he could take us right in to shore," says Mike "but I said, 'No, no. Dad's got the traps out and he's left the rowboat anchored out there for us. We've got to pull the traps up.' Jen didn't like that; we'd be in this small boat with our bags and she didn't want prawns dripping all over us."

The plane touched down in the bay, and Jen and Mike stepped off the pontoons and into the boat. "We were pretty far out from land," says Jen, "and I asked 'So where are the prawns going to go?' He said, 'Okay, I lied about the plane; I planned it. We don't have to pull the prawns.'" He reached into his bag and took out the ring "I did the best I could, in the small boat, to get down on my knee," he says.

"At that point," says Jen, "I started crying. He said, 'Will you marry me?' and I just kept crying." It took a moment for her to find her voice, but once she did, Jen sobbed, "Yes!"

When Mike finally rowed in, they could see his family waiting on the shore. "As we were pulling the boat in," Jen recalls, "I had my head down because I was all emotional and I was going to cry. Suddenly someone jumped in front of me." To Jen's surprise, it was Stephanie Brown, her best friend, whom Mike had flown in from Ontario to be part of the engagement celebration.

That evening it came to light that Mike's father had proposed in the same bay 34 years earlier. Mike's parents celebrate their anniversary in the small rowboat, affectionately known as the "love boat," every year.

It didn't take long for wedding plans to get underway. Jen contacted Brock House on Vancouver's Jericho Beach that same weekend and booked the evening of September 15th, 2007 for their wedding. "It was important for us to get married with the water and the beach because that's how we define ourselves as people."

Jen and Mike wanted to marry barefoot in the sand. However, they were concerned about the comfort of their guests and family, and thought the beach might pose mobility problems, especially for their elderly relatives. The solution was to bring the beach to Brock House's expanse of lawn: an aisle was made by laying a pathway of sand upon the lawn. It led to the circle of sand which was the wedding dais.

Jen and Mike decided to buck tradition when it came to choosing the members of their bridal party and included the people closest to them. The role of best man went to Mike's sister, while Jen's brother served as her "bridesman." "It was about having the right people, no matter what side they stood on," Jen explains.



Guests arrived at Brock House around 6 pm on September 15th and were invited to don a pair of beach sandals from the baskets of flip-flops sorted by men's and women's sizes. Other baskets held pashminas for the female guests, to ward off the evening chill.

Jen and Mike were married in a simple ceremony officiated by Marriage Commissioner Marilyn Knipp. Afterwards, guests gathered under two tents, artfully decorated by Wedding Design Studio. "They're masters," said Jen of the design and décor specialists. "It was important that the theme spoke to our lifestyle. I wanted something casual but elegant, where you could feel that you could loosen your tie, while knowing that it was a top notch affair." The purple and green colour theme that unified the affair was taken from the cymbidium orchids that Jen loved. Guests dined on pasta appetizers, Fanny Bay oysters and tuna, while seated at tables named after beaches where Jen and Mike had played volleyball. Master of Ceremonies Stephanie Brown kept everyone in stitches with her witty anecdotes.

Following dinner and speeches, Hot Hits Productions cranked up the music and guests hit the dance floor – with or without shoes. At 10:00 it was time to dive into the strawberry and whipped cream crepes that replaced the traditional wedding cake.

As she looks back on her wedding day, Jen remembers feeling utterly elated. "It's quite an experience to have all your family and friends in one place," she reflects.. "It's a gift."





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