

A pandemic romance
Featuring Taylor Binnix and Danny Baylus (Est. June 13, 2020)

For Danny, the COVID-19 pandemic cut the season short for his beloved Orioles, grounded flights and cancelled vacations worldwide decimating the travel industry, and indefinitely suspended spring-league softball. For Taylor, the COVID-19 pandemic destroyed her community-based social scene, reduced her to conversations with small talking heads on a 20" LED monitor, and ended the competitive ultimate frisbee season before it even started.

For Danny, internet-dating was an arduous years-long endeavor, riddled with women who ghosted, boring first dates, and money wasted at various bars. For Taylor, internet-dating was previously uncharted territory. Her first experience with dating apps during a life-altering global pandemic led to countless underwhelming conversation starters from potential suitors.

Five days into her online social experiment, Danny made a snarky joke with reference to Taylor's photo at the Great Wall of China. His humor, wit, and political leanings were immediately evident. At the time, Danny was babysitting, playing Candyland with his nieces, and Taylor was speedily pounding emails for items she formerly chatted about over morning coffee. Taylor was smitten with his responsiveness, tenderness, and attention to detail. The initial conversation flowed easily, and they promptly made plans to meet in person.

Danny's dog, Bear, chaperoned their first date: a park walk in the neighborhood on a sweaty summer night in June. Danny was drawn to Taylor's quirky socks and impressive vocabulary. They wandered everywhere. They chatted about money, sex, religion, family, and careers. They lost track of time. Eight miles later, hunger prompted them to get BBQ sandwiches and French fries at an outdoor patio followed by Cheese and Crackers ice cream for dessert.

The casual first meet-up morphed into a full week of memories with joyful laughter, cozy snuggles, and intimate conversations. It was perfect timing: with no obligations on the calendar, Taylor and Danny saw each other every day. The weeks turned into months. Taylor soon met Danny's parents, two nieces, and extended family during a backyard birthday celebration with homemade mac and cheese and a princess cake. Shortly thereafter, Danny met Taylor's five siblings, sister-in-law, two parents, grandmother, and uncle for a weekend day at the beach.

Pandemic dating involved a lot of hiking, biking, and outdoor hang-outs. When the weather turned cold, Danny and Taylor enjoyed new popcorn flavors while streaming movies, virtual happy hours with friends and family, and cooking new recipes. They transitioned from the fresh and exciting Honeymoon Phase of dating to the mutually sacrificial, raw, and emotional process of managing conflict and strengthening their relationship. In December 2020, Danny, a kind Jewish man, experienced his first Christmas in Taylor's crowded childhood home, filled with Christian traditions, holiday baking, and generous gifts.

Danny and Taylor were eager to celebrate the long-awaited New Year's Eve, welcoming 2021 to cleanse the sociopolitical challenges of 2020. In fact, despite the risks of pandemic travel, Danny and Taylor enjoyed their first New Year's Eve together with an international trip to Cancún, Mexico. Highlights included a couples' massage, private pools, and a Romantic Dinner for Two on the beach, which Danny planned as a special surprise.

This couple will be a statistic for those who found their forever partner on apps with business models predicated on preventing exclusivity. In a time when so many relationships were pushed to their breaking point, casual acquaintances and lifelong spouses found themselves lonely, exhausted, and frustrated by this new way of living. However ironically, the fate of Danny's and Taylor's meet cute was perfect timing. They are fortunate, surviving and thriving through unprecedented levels of calculated interpersonal risk, increased use of internet interacting in an era absent personal touch, and newfound strategies for making decisions about with whom to share a COVID bubble. The widespread losses of 2020 allowed time for Danny and Taylor to commit fully, invest deeply, and love wholeheartedly. Their connection was a welcomed and unexpected blessing during a chaotic and unpredictable year, yet they will reap the benefits of this precious romance for years to come. Given the volume of friends recently forced to shift their wedding plans, Danny and Taylor are considering elopement.