

Stan and I had both been divorced about 3 years when we met. For your first jaw-dropping piece of information (for most of you anyway) we met on the Internet. Not on a dating site though. We actually met in a country music chat room. I think we were both branching out (finding ourselves single after 25 years of marriage) to see what it was like to talk to people of the opposite sex without having to actually MEET someone. It was Jan 11 when Stan “popped” into my life via an IM. He always joked that he was challenged reading my profile where I was clearly “wrapped in barbwire and not wanting to let anyone get very close”. We both felt that the distance between us (I was in Florida, he was in PA) made our conversations “safe”. Ha!

I should say he “had me at hello” but that wasn’t the case really. We chatted casually online for months and then one night while we were chatting, suddenly the lights went out in half my house and I got scared. I can still hear him say “Well, I can help you but you’re going to have to trust me enough to let me call you.” GULP. But I did and that was the real beginning of our feelings for one another. I thought he was hysterical to chat with (spelling was not his best thing but coupled with his personality, which shined through his comments, even his misspells were charming!!) but he was even funnier on the phone. I was totally drawn to him. His personality was irresistible. I know now that the moment when phone conversations were introduced in our relationship was one of huge relief for him because if there’s anything he hated to do it is TYPE!! I realized that he was working soooooo hard in our early days when I would only chat online.

After a few more months, we decided to meet. There was a Line Dance event in Philly and he said “I’ll pay your way up here and pay your hotel if you’ll come up so we can meet in person.” I did and the rest is pretty much history. I skipped almost all of the dance workshop!! As I said, the man was a force. When I first visited his home in Kennett Square I saw all the wrestling/football memorabilia on the walls and I could tell that this man had quite a story. You usually associate people on the internet as over stating themselves to impress but Stan never did that. I didn’t know anything about his accomplishments until I came up and saw a piece of his world for myself. He clearly had been very humble when describing himself to me. That impressed me. A lot.

He knew about my line dance addiction. I had already promised myself that I would not date anyone who 1) didn’t dance or 2) wasn’t willing to learn or 3) wasn’t 100% happy sitting and watching. Line Dance was the passion of my life at that time. One time when I had come to PA to visit him, he sat me down in a chair in his dining room. He put on the song “You Need A Man Around Here” by Brad Paisley and he showed me that he had learned a very advanced line dance from the step sheet...something I STILL struggle with. He danced the whole dance through perfectly. My mouth was hanging open and then he picked me up over his head and twirled me around like I weighed nothing.

Soon we began talking about making our arrangement permanent. Months before meeting Stan, when I decided it was time to think about dating after my divorce, I wrote up a list of every quality I wanted in a man. Stan was a “check, check, check” all the way down the list. One of my items was “someone with a legacy”. One was “a bad ass with a heart of gold”. Need I say more on that??

So I decided to make the leap. He emailed me a full page of one sentence over and over. “Get on the plane”!! I did and it was the best decision (other than having my babies) that I have ever made.

When I flew up on a one way ticket, I flew into the Philly airport. As I was walking to where Stan said he would be waiting, I was greeted by 10+ people (total strangers) who had a single rose and when they

saw me they gave me the rose and said "Stan is waiting". Then I began to see posters on the floor that marked my path to him. Shortly after that I encountered a boom box, battery powered, that was playing "Bless The Broken Road" by Rascal Flatts. And then there he was. He grabbed me in the biggest bear hug and whispered in my ear "Nivie, I promise to take care of you for the rest of our lives." And he did, with passion, every day and in every way. And he continues to do so even now that he isn't physically here.

From the moment we first met until our last time together (Thursday night, sitting in our hot tub after dancing, talking about how great our life is) he has treated me like a queen. The same energy he put into coaching his athletes, caring for his students, loving his children was also given to me every single day. I learned so much from him. I'm not wired like him. I tend to take things for granted. I don't savor every moment and experience like he did. I'm going to try to do better in that regard because, for the first time in my life, I realize how precious those things really are.

We only had 12 years together (10 of it married) but I have experienced more pure love in that period than I have my entire life. I'm so grateful for him and for all the positive memories that keep flooding my mind and heart. They so far outweigh any bad ones that I can't even remember anything negative right now.

I don't know how to close this out. I am sure I will get back in the swing of things. I don't know if I will teach line dance again. We were a total team in that regard and I don't know if I can do what I did without him. But I will continue to dance. My children have ordered me to not give that up no matter how I feel. I hope to hang out with friends, try to be more social (he and I both were pretty much hermits) and live my life as I think he'd want me to...happy, experiencing things, growing as a mother, grandmother and friend.

I won't lie. I'm scared. We always joked that he was "the freight train" and I was "the kite". I don't know what I'll do without him holding me steady and not letting me fly too far off course. I am thankful for my kids, his kids and my other family and friends who I know will be watching out for me.

I find myself in situations asking "What would Stan do?" and that always gives me the direction I need. I am not the same person I was when I met him and, for that, I am so very grateful.

Thank you, Baby. You are so loved. I'll see you again!