

## Connection made from 9,500 miles away

Written by Elizabeth Barrett  
Friday, 14 February 2014 15:12 -

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Internet chat room joins two cultures.

Joining a Singapore chat room on a warm spring evening nearly six years ago had a ripple effect Jeff Anderson still can't believe.

It was there, on the Internet, that the Gothenburg native met Lenny Widjaja.

And Lenny, a native Indonesian from Sulawesi Island, met Jeff.

Before the evening was over, the two had exchanged typewritten messages privately.

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It was a couple of weeks later before they chatted again.

At the time, Jeff was an over-the-road trucker and would pull over to chat with Lenny.

Fourteen hours away, evening was falling in Singapore and Lenny was usually on her way home from the office where she was a facility manager.

For about a year, they'd check in with each other periodically and share about themselves and

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swap photographs.

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Then the correspondence started to become more frequent.

“We’d talk on and off and then it became every day and then twice a day,” Jeff said. “I found myself wanting to talk to Lenny every day.”

On her way to work or on the way home, Lenny said she’d turn on her phone and look at her online messages.

“If there wasn’t one from Jeff, it felt like something was missing,” she said.

After about 3 years, both Jeff and Lenny found themselves wanting to meet in person.

“You can’t replace holding her hand through digital words,” Jeff explained. “I didn’t know what her touch felt like.”

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Because the feeling was mutual, Lenny started to make plans to meet her chat room friend in person.

“I wanted to come to Gothenburg to see where and how he lived but my family didn’t allow it,” she said.

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Lenny, who has nine siblings, was raised in a conservative family,.

Her parents had difficulty allowing their youngest daughter to travel to the United States to meet someone she'd met on the Internet.

It also wasn't easy to get extended vacation time from work.

Finally in January of 2012, Lenny's family agreed to her visiting an aunt and cousins in Scranton, PA.

As long as Lenny's older sister, Nancy, accompanied her.

Jeff made sure he'd be traveling to the East Coast that long weekend with a semi-trailer truck full of pet commodities.

They met, along with Lenny's relatives, at a pretzel factory in a mall for an hour.

"She had jet lag and was tired," Jeff said.

The next day, the entourage traveled to Philadelphia to sightsee and shop.

Jeff met Lenny alone for breakfast the next morning before joining up with the relatives for more

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sightseeing and shopping.

“I liked him,” Lenny said while Jeff admitted “there was something between us.”

Two nights before Lenny and her sister left for home, Jeff and Lenny decided to buy something together but didn't know what.

The next evening, when the two met for dinner, he surprised her with a friendship ring—a simple white-gold band.

Lenny and Jeff then returned to their normal lives and kept talking via the Internet.

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But something had switched.

“Before, we had put family and friends first,” Lenny said.

“Now we started to put each other first,” Jeff said.

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Eventually, Lenny quit her job and decided to take a break before looking for a new one.

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In the meantime, she returned to Scranton in October of 2012 to stay with her cousin for a few days before she boarded a plane for Omaha.

“I really wanted to see where he lived,” Lenny said.

Growing up and working in large cities, Lenny was unaccustomed to the darkness of the plains at night once they’d driven through Lincoln.

“What happened to the lights?” Lenny asked Jeff.

Jeff said Lenny looked horrified because she’d never seen wide open spaces without people.

Although the two talked about marriage, nothing was confirmed and Lenny returned to Singapore.

But she couldn’t stay away.

In February of 2013, she and Nancy landed in Omaha where Jeff was waiting.

On Feb. 14, Jeff and Lenny were wed at a courthouse in Omaha.

“It was the most romantic day of the year,” Lenny said.

However the next day, when Nancy left, “was the most heartbreaking day,” Jeff said.

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“It’s very hard to be so far away from family,” Lenny said.

This Friday, on Valentine’s Day, the couple will celebrate their first anniversary.

Asked about their first year of marriage, Jeff replied, “Fun.”

Lenny laughed, looked at Jeff and said:

“I’m happy.”

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