

Friends first, husband and wife forever

Blake and Jennifer Harris have seen it all, from a stunning first encounter to a stunningly comical proposal

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Looking back, Blake Harris was trying to flirt.

He liked Jennifer Salter. And, because he was in the second grade, he decided to show it by running up behind her and jumping over her where she sat on the curb outside Keller Elementary. He wanted to scare her and to look cool.

Well, he managed to scare her, at least.

"I had no idea he was behind me," Jennifer says. And so - just as Blake took a flying leap toward her - Jennifer stood up. Smack.

Blake landed on his face. An ambulance arrived and took him to the emergency room, where he got stitches. And that is Blake and Jennifer Harris' first clear memory of each other.

But in the 20 years since then, the two - who married last fall - have made a lot more memories together. As they grew up in Keller, they became good friends. In fact, they were "boyfriend and girlfriend" in the third grade, Blake remembers, but only for a couple of weeks. ("I think I dumped her for a blonde," he says.) In the eighth grade, the two were assigned to play a married couple in drama class. In high school, they went camping together. There were parties, dances, football games; Blake even joined Jennifer and her family sometimes on vacation.

"Our families always said we would end up marrying each other," Jennifer says. And occasionally one of them would think dating might be a good idea, but it never happened.

"I tried to date her a couple of times, but she denied me," Blake says wryly. He remembers a dramatic scene on an eighth-grade class trip to Washington, D.C., when he poured out his heart and Jennifer shot him down. "Apparently it ruined his trip," Jennifer says. (She, of course, has no recollection.)

After they graduated from Keller High School in 2001, Blake moved to Austin for college. He and Jennifer lost touch for a couple of years, but they reconnected and fell back into an easy friendship.

The idea that they'd end up together was always in the back of their minds. In fact, they both flirted with the idea, but they weren't sure it was time. If they dated, it might not work out, and

they'd lose their friendship. Or perhaps it would work out and they'd settle down together - which they weren't yet ready for, either. "We just weren't done being young and dumb yet," Blake says. So they never pursued it - but they did feel free to pass judgment on each other's dates.

"She was dating a lot, I was dating a lot," Blake says. "We usually would just get together and tell each other why we shouldn't date the person we were dating."

After a few years of searching for the right one, Jennifer had an epiphany.

"One day I woke up and didn't want to date anymore," she says. "And I knew Blake would be the one."

In the end, deciding they were meant to be together was easy. The proposal, however, was more difficult.

Blake made plans to propose last June on a trip to Taos, N.M. On the way there, Jennifer needed emergency dental work, and she was zoned out on painkillers their first night in Taos. Blake decided to propose anyway.

"I come up with the idea that because she's so out of it, when she goes to sleep I'm just going to slip the ring on her finger," he says. When she woke the next morning, he thought, Jennifer would discover the ring and he'd propose.

It didn't go well.

To get to Jennifer's left hand, Blake had to move her entire body, and soon he realized his arm was trapped under her. From this awkward position, he tried to coat the ring with lotion so it would slip onto her finger more easily. Not surprisingly, with all this activity, Jennifer woke up. But they both pretended to be asleep for several long minutes before, at last, they gave up the act and settled for a middle-of-the-night, painkiller-hazy proposal. (Blake redeemed himself the next morning, offering a proper proposal on the side of a mountain.)

The Harrises went back to Taos for an outdoor wedding in September, where they were surrounded by friends and family they have both known all their lives. They've been married just a few months, but already they share a lifetime of memories.

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