



The Marriage Edition



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In the summer of 2009 Karen received Erik's friend request on Facebook. Her heart beating fast, she rushed home to see what he looked like, frustrated that the page wasn't loading on her phone. It had been 14 years since she had last seen him, and she was excited to hear from Erik.

Karen and Erik met at the Iglesia Primitiva Pentecostal in Brooklyn when they were 14 years old. She thought he was cute, but figured he wasn't interested because he talked to everyone except her. It turned out that he was just shy about approaching the most beautiful girl. A few weeks later, when they shared a ride on a youth group trip to Six Flags, his shyness dissolved. In the back seat of the car, Erik kissed her. At the amusement park, he asked Karen to be his girlfriend. For both, it was their first love.

Karen lived in East New York; Erik lived an hour and a half away, in Bay Ridge. The distance didn't stop him from taking the subway at least once or twice a week, and on Saturdays after work, to visit her. "It was so adorable," Karen said. "He was hilarious, he used to make faces, sing songs, he was always trying to make me laugh." Sometimes Karen's older sisters chaperoned them to the movies or bowling, or on a walk to the South Street Seaport.

Erik and Karen had similar backgrounds. Karen was born in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and moved to the United States with her parents and three siblings when she was ten years old. The initial transition was difficult. She left a suburban house that was always filled with the chatter and laughter of a large extended family and moved into an apartment in what was then a rough Brooklyn neighborhood. She hugged her stuffed elephant on the airplane, while her mother tried to lure her with promises of giant burgers at McDonald's.

Erik was born in Brooklyn and grew up near Sunset Park, but his parents had come to the United States from Ecuador. Like Karen, he spoke Spanish at home. When Erik was in middle school his family moved to Guayaquil, so that he and his five siblings could experience their country of origin, and to learn to read and write fluently in Spanish.

They moved to a rough area in Ecuador. "It really made me appreciate everything I have and to never take anything for granted," said Erik, who was always a good student and from early on had a strong work ethic and a desire to get ahead in life.

At the end of their first year together Karen called off the romance. It was a hectic time in her home, and she had too much on her plate. "We really liked each other but I couldn't keep it up at the time," Karen said.

Karen moved on her own when she was 17, becoming fiercely independent and self-sufficient. She worked long hours and put herself through school, earning a degree in health care management in 2005. She now manages a physical therapy practice in Manhattan. For many years, her career trumped a social life. "I was a really bad dater," she said. "I had always been very independent, and I didn't feel the need to have a boyfriend to take care of me." Her mother moved back to Honduras, and her father passed away in 2008.

Meanwhile, Erik was also working and going to college. He left an accounting major after a year and a half, opting for a more exciting career in law enforcement. His professors at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice were retired FBI agents, police officers and immigration officials.

When she saw his picture she thought he looked incredibly handsome. For several weeks they exchanged messages, sometimes more than 20 a day. Eventually Erik called her, and they talked for five hours.

In 2006 someone told Karen that Erik had been fatally shot on duty. She searched online and discovered it was another police officer with a similar name. The following year Erik experienced the scariest moment of his career. He and a colleague were patrolling a neighborhood in Brooklyn when the other officer was shot in the ankle. It shook him, but Erik was determined to keep working. He

went on to receive a Medal of Valor, which is a New York Police Department award for acts of outstanding personal bravery performed in the line of duty, and today Erik is a supervisor in his precinct. He loves his job, he said, because he feels that he is making a tangible contribution to his community.

Karen had searched for Erik on Facebook but never found him. He had not been interested in the site, but in 2009 Erik finally caved and joined. After his brother mentioned that he and Karen were Facebook friends, Erik sent her a friend request, though it never occurred to him that they might date again. Karen received his message as she was about to board the subway. She had no suspicion that her life was about to be transformed.

When she saw his picture she thought he looked incredibly handsome. For several weeks they exchanged messages, sometimes more than 20 a day. Eventually Erik called her, and they talked for five hours. "I was so nervous when the phone rang," Karen said. "When I heard his voice I realized how much it had changed from the sweet boy's voice I remembered." The next day she was walking on clouds and smiling constantly. Her coworkers said she seemed to have a watermelon in her mouth.

In September 2009, about 2 months after they had started writing, they met for dinner. Erik was nervous as he drove to pick her up. And so was she. Erik got out of the car to greet her and she was shaking. "Can you help me tie my bow?" she blurted out, referring to the ribbons in the back of her shirt that she couldn't reach. Then she gave him a hug.

They went to Little Havana in Greenwich Village for dinner, and when the restaurant closed they still hadn't finished their meals. "We had so much catching up to do," Erik said. "There was never an awkward pause." They moved on to drinks at Son Cubano, and in between sips of her mojito, Erik slipped in a kiss.

The relationship moved quickly from there. Just a few weeks later, vacationing in Cancun, they talked about the future. "We realized we wanted the same things," Erik said. They both appreciate the value of



family and heritage. Karen always knew she wanted to have children. In fact, when she was in the fifth grade, her mother took her to a modeling agency. Karen liked the idea, but wondered what would become of her career when she got pregnant. The modeling career didn't stick, but her desire to have children did.

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Karen and Erik feel blessed by one another. "Erik has softened me again," Karen said. "I've let down my guard and become very girly. I've never really depended on anyone; I've always been on my own. And to know that I have that, it's an amazing feeling." Erik said that with Karen, he can truly be himself.

Andrew, a friend of Erik's since his sophomore year in high school, said that what makes them a good couple is their mutual respect, and that they are open to learning from one another. "They don't have an ego thing. Karen is the one who taught him how

to cook," Andrew said.

In April 2011 Erik took her to dinner at the River Café in Dumbo, with a ring in his pocket. He ate his mashed potatoes and steak with a nervous lump in his throat, but Karen leisurely savored each bite of dessert without a clue. "The chocolate cake was shaped like the Brooklyn Bridge," she recalled. And that is precisely where Erik took her to propose.

He got on his knee, and Karen said, "Yes!" "Let me ask the question," Erik pleaded, and told her he wanted to spend the rest of his life with her. After he asked her to marry him, she said "yes" again.

Their plans for a family are already underway. They bought a house on Long Island, and their daughter Camila was born at the end of 2011.

Karen's mother, Estela, is overjoyed about the wedding. "When she told me she had met Erik again I felt it was a miracle."



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