

Harmony in Culture



THE BRICKWORK OF THE TEMPLE



Photographed by: Kimberly Lawton

Josh and Ashley Gadd married in the Provo City Center Temple seven months ago. Ashley chose this particular temple for the wedding because of its exterior. Most temples are all white, but this temple has red brick walls and a charcoal-colored roof. It is similar to the other temples because of its foundation and structure. The emotion of love that comes from the temple is also the same.

“It’s so unique and makes me realize how unique I am as well, and how important that is for everyone else,” Ashley said.

Like this temple, Ashley and Josh are unique individuals with cultural differences but the same foundations of faith and goals.

They are surrounded by the same cultures, but their families emphasize them differently. Ashley grew up in Laredo, Texas, and Tamaulipas, Mexico. In Mexico, she enjoyed time with her grandma and the rest of her extended family on the weekends.

Josh grew up in Utah and Washington. At age 12, his parents received callings in a Spanish branch. All the kids in the branch spoke English and Spanish, so Josh did not learn Spanish until he served a mission in Tampa, Florida. There, he grew more accustomed to Hispanic and Latino cultures.

They both started attending school at BYU-Idaho around the same time. Josh is studying to become a dentist. Ashley is studying to become an immigration psychologist. They first crossed paths at a game night. A friend invited her over to his apartment. Josh lived at the apartment as well, so he introduced himself. Ashley remembers how Josh opened up the scriptures on his phone.

She thought, “He has his priorities straight.”

Despite these first impressions, they both forgot about each other until they swiped up on each other on Mutual.

In March 2023, during a break from school, they decided to download the Mutual App.

According to Mutual’s 2024 Annual Dating Report, the app helps connect with members of the church around the world depending on where a person lives. This year, the top regions with new accounts were from Brazil, U.S. and Peru.

When Josh saw a picture of Ashley, he paused. Maybe she looked familiar, or perhaps it was just how gorgeous she looked with her dark, curly hair. Josh swiped up.

“The biggest thing that we saw similar to each other is how important God was in our life,” Ashley said.

Ashley also paused when she saw a picture of Josh. She looked at his blonde hair and blue eyes and thought he was cute. Swiping up, she was surprised to see that they matched. Ashley waited for Josh to text first because she wondered if Josh was interested. He sent his first text in Spanish complimenting Ashley’s smile.

When Ashley saw that text, she was thrilled he knew Spanish. She wanted someone who could grow close to her family, especially her mother who spoke little English. Family is a huge part of Mexican culture. Ashley has around ten aunts and five grandmas. Not all of them are related by blood. Her family consists of the people closest to her who give her a family perspective.

Ashley and Josh went to the temple a week or two after they started dating. They scheduled a time to do an endowment session together but arrived late to their appointment. The temple workers suggested that they do sealings instead. They looked at each other, smiled and went to participate in sealings by proxy.

During the session, the sealer mentioned that there was an opening for a sealing in a week or two if Josh and Ashley wanted to get married. That day was too soon for them, but at that moment in the temple Josh gained the confidence needed to pursue his relationship with Ashley.

They started to date exclusively, even when Josh continued to study in Idaho and Ashley visited family in Texas. They found time to text and call each other, but long-distance relationships are hard to maintain. It was during that separation that they decided to take the next step.

Josh later flew to San Antonio, three hours from where Ashley and her family lived. He rented a car and drove the rest of the way. He already knew the family when participating in the family Facetime and group chat, but this was his first time meeting the family in person.

Ashley and her family included Josh in their communications, so he already had a solid relationship with her father. They both have a love of humor and playing pranks. During the drive over, Josh pretended his phone was dying and no longer had directions to the house. Josh convinced Ashley and her family, but they did not know her dad was in on the prank. Ashley was worried and her dad left the house, claiming he would try and find Josh. Josh parked at a nearby park and climbed into the trunk of her family’s car. He then waited a few minutes in the car before he surprised Ashley with Crumble cookies.

Toward the end of this visit, Josh asked her parents and grandma for permission to marry Ashley. There is a tradition in Ashley’s family to ask both parents and grandparents and Josh wanted to honor that tradition.

Ashley met the Gadd family at a family reunion in Utah. She met his immediate family and extended family all at once. This was an opportunity to see his family in their natural habitat, altogether. There were a lot of family members who practiced their Spanish with her. She felt uncomfortable at first with all the questions, but soon enjoyed the festivities and even sang with Josh in the family talent show.

From the growing relationships between families, Ashley and Josh built their own cultural foundation.

“The biggest thing that we saw similar to each other is how important God was in our life,” Ashley said.

They supported each other in their goals of reading the scriptures and praying. They got married in the temple and strive to grow closer to God every day. Right now, they are striving to keep their goal of attending the temple every week either in Rexburg or Idaho Falls.

GIVEN A STAR OF JOY



Photographed by: Rosemary Jones

When Gabe and Marian Costa e Silva first dated, they would hang out under the stars and talk about whatever was on their mind. They would escape into an open field to get away from work, school and roommates. They gazed up at the tiny lights that penetrate the darkness and found peace.

“It also makes you feel a little small, but not in a bad way. Small like there are all these big creations around me,” Marian said.

They still find the time to look at the stars after marrying in October 2021, but soon life became even more stressful and they had only time to focus on one precious star.

Lucas popped up during the busiest part of their lives, a year into their marriage.

Marian was pregnant and taking her final classes for graduation. She worked as a supervisor for the Mac Lab at BYU-Idaho and working 40 hours a week. Gabe supported his wife at home when he could.

“I just noticed that, I have become slightly more Brazilian,” Marian said.

He could only work 20 hours because he was still waiting for a green card, so he could not take over the financial responsibilities yet.

During their busy schedule, they held a baby shower in Rexburg. Family and friends from both sides supported them and celebrated. Gabe’s parents, siblings, uncle and grandma showed up from Utah. They are originally from Brazil, but after moving to Utah, they have been able to visit their children in Idaho more often.

After the delivery, Marian quit her job and focused just on Lucas since she graduated. Her intent was always to become a stay-at-home mother. Getting a degree was her backup plan in case she didn’t get married before graduation. Gabe received his green card and started working at the Avantguard Monitoring Center. He trains people how to respond to different alarms, verify the situation and see if official personnel is needed.

The first few weeks of Lucas’s life, Marian stayed up half the night holding her child and Gabe woke up for the other half. He would do homework early in the morning while holding the child.

While Gabe worked for 12 hours, Marian spent the void of time on the phone with her family. She called her mother and left the call going for seven hours, trying to pass the time. It didn’t matter if there was a conversation. The presence of her family helped Marian as she cared for her child.

They continued forward with their trials, moving apartments and struggling with insurance. They got through it by focusing on the present and on God.

When Lucas grows up, they want him to know about their family from Brazil and North Carolina. Gabe hopes that Lucas will learn Portuguese so he can speak with his grandparents. They just want what is best for him.



Photographed by: Rosemary Jones

Marian learns Portuguese a little all the time. She uses Duolingo and her husband, but she learns the most when visiting her in-laws. Most of the family speaks English and can converse with Marian one on one. When they are in a group, however, they speak Portuguese loud and fast. Marian has improved to where she can understand the gist of their conversation and say a few phrases herself.

Marian hopes that Lucas will become as close-knit to his family as she has seen in Gabe’s family. Grandparents live with their kids and big celebrations with food and music for every holiday. Her family is from North Carolina and she has a lot of siblings who are farther away and maintaining a close relationship is hard. In Gabe’s family, everyone is closer together and when there’s a party, the whole family is invited.

Marian and Gabe already decided to keep the Brazilian culture in their life. They both love the food, and like Brazilians they eat their biggest meal during lunch whenever they can. Marian learned how to season food and cook with the heart. They enjoy meals like hard-boiled eggs on pizza and Brazilian-style hotdogs.

“I just noticed that, yeah, I have become slightly more Brazilian,” Marian said.

Now that Lucas is one year old, he is at an age where he is walking and exploring life in an interactive way. Marian and Gabe love to play with their son and spend time with him, more than looking at the stars. They chase him around and watch him grow. Lucas has become their biggest creation, escape from reality and greatest joy. He is the center of their culture and they want to give him the best of everything.



BEGINNINGS OF A SCRAPBOOK



Courtesy of: Kristal Eng "A photo from their scrapbook"

“Kristal would like to know Daniel for all four seasons, before deciding if he is the one.”

Kristal Eng grew up in Singapore and Daniel Williams grew up in England. They began dating 5 months ago in June 2024 and have started crafting a scrapbook together to capture the memories and mementos of their relationship. If they get married, they plan to share it with their families. If they break up, they plan to burn the book.

Their not thinking about breaking up any time soon. While in the United States, Kristal is taking classes in-person at BYU-Idaho. She stopped taking religion classes on campus during the spring semester because she did not like how the gospel was taught, so she started attending an institute class off-campus.

Daniel was attending the same institute class at the time. He’s living in Salem, Idaho with his single friends while studying online through BYU-Pathway. After class, they bumped into each other and Daniel asked her if she wanted to join him on a date. After that, Daniel kept inviting her to more activities. They’ve visited the zoo, played games, crafted and cooked together.

When they began dating, Daniel explained that he was not ready for marriage yet. She agreed.

“I did tell him right from the start, ‘Anything you ask within a year, my answer is no,’” Kristal said.

Kristal would like to know Daniel for all four seasons, before deciding if he is the one.

Through their mutual understanding of their relationship, they continue to get to know each other, even when their opinions differ. They know they have time to work out these differences with time.

Right now, Kristal does not want to stay in the U.S. long-term. She has been in the U.S. for a year now. She will continue studying business analytics and eventually get a job, but she hopes to raise her future

family in an environment that is safe, either in Europe or Asia.

Growing up in Singapore, Kristal noticed that young children are trusted to use public transportation by themselves. It is also common for people to reserve a public spot with their phone without the risk of theft.

Daniel, however, is content to stay in the U.S. for a long time. He has lived in the U.S. for about six years, and is currently living with his friends in Idaho. He has a solid job in accounting, and he recently submitted his citizenship application. Both of them are open to the idea that either of them might change their mind about where to live in the next few years.

Another difference is their preference in food. When they are together, they spend time doing homework and attempting to cook food. They mainly try Asian food for Daniel who had never tried it before.

“So we’ll make them together. So we’re not good at it, but we attempt to. And it tastes fine most of the time,” Kristal said.

Daniel tends to like American food more than Asian food and Kristal hopes it stays that way. If they ever get married, Kristal plans to make Daniel a sandwich every day while she enjoys her fancy noodles and rice.

Since this is the start of their relationship, and they spent two months in a long-distance relationship when Kristal visited Singapore, they have not celebrated many holidays together. They plan to celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas because they are in America and slowly incorporate their cultural holidays as time goes on. As time goes on, these holidays and memories will fill the empty pages in their scrapbook.



TWO TYPES OF CAMPING

Sarah and Ismael Tenango see camping in different ways. Sarah and her family go camping almost every year. Since they have been married, Ismael has joined them. He likes camping but he sees this activity differently from Sarah.

The West family camping trips are huge family reunions with hiking, swimming and games sprinkled throughout the day. Ismael's idea of camping is more relaxing and Sarah experienced this when she visited his side of the family in Morelos, Mexico, after their engagement.

They went camping because Ismael told his family that it was one of Sarah's favorite activities. They set up a 6-person tent next to beautiful blue waters. Sarah described the trip as luxurious because of the food. They ate hot dogs wrapped in bacon and hot dogs topped with pico de gallo. During breakfast they cooked thin slices of meat and eggs over the fire.

Ismael explained that it was common for families to show off their culinary skills during big events, even camping with their future daughter-in-law. Sarah says the food surpasses the sandwiches and cereal during other camping trips so she cherishes her experience, camping in Mexico.

Sarah's relationship with the Tenango Anaya family grew stronger from her visit. To Ismael's parents, she is Sarita (little Sarah) which is a term of endearment for Spanish speakers. They started this nickname as they met over Zoom. She learned to speak Spanish from her mission to Toronto, Canada and she practices it regularly at her job at a call center. She speaks mostly English with her husband.

Even though Ismael likes to relax while camping, he is energetic on the dance floor. Latin dancing is how Ismael and Sarah first met. Sarah started learning Latin dance when she returned from her mission.

"I was more in the known like I knew more about people and their culture. I wanted to learn more about it and dance like how they dance," Sarah said.

Sarah has always liked dancing. She grew up in Pingree, Idaho and her mother signed her kids up for dance classes instead of sending them to daycare. When Sarah found out there was Latin dancing on campus at BYU-Idaho, she went there every Tuesday. She practiced and danced for a semester and a half before she met Ismael.

Ismael learned Latin dance from his family. There's a lot of dancing when it comes to parties in Mexico and usually, Ismael went to off-campus parties to dance. Though, one week he went to the on-campus dance. The dance floor was full of people who already had partners and in the beginning, Ismael sat in a corner, watching them dance. He was about to get up, when Sarah arrived. He asked her to dance and they danced song after song. Finally, he mustered the courage to ask for Sarah's number before leaving.

"[Dancing with her] was the only good part of that night," Ismael said.

As their relationship developed, Sarah brought her boyfriend home to meet her parents. Her parents do not have much in common with Ismael, but they kept welcoming him back because of his cooking. He won them over by cooking albondigas (meatball soup), tinga (saucy chicken tacos) and pollo en crema (creamy chicken). And he is proud of his cooking skills.

They married on January 7, 2023 in the Idaho Falls Temple because it's a good middle ground between Rexburg and Pingree. Most of the family at the wedding came from Sarah's side. Ismael's immediate family, cousins and friends also attended the wedding.

The rest of Ismael's family wanted to come as well but knew they wouldn't make it so while Sarah was visiting Mexico they had a mock wedding ceremony.

Sitting in the living room, aunts, uncles and cousins were talking about the wedding and how dad they were going to be. Then, out of nowhere, someone handed Sarah a rose. They found a bible and an uncle acted as the officiator. They kissed and threw the rose 'bouquet.'

The first time Sarah knew she loved Ismael was when they watched general conference together. One moment, they looked into each other's eyes.

"And I was like, never been able to look into someone's eyes for that long and feel as comfortable as I do," Sarah said.

They strengthened their relationship even more when Sarah visited home in Pingree while Ismael continued his studies. He gave Sarah a mini Spanish Book of Mormon and every night they took turns, her reading in Spanish and Him reading in English.