

TexarkanaMonthly

WEDDING PLAN D

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EVERYONE WILL TELL YOU THAT WEDDING PLANNING IS STRESSFUL,

but wedding planning during a global pandemic takes stress to a whole new level.

When Jackson and I got engaged in October, we were excited to plan our dream wedding in Texarkana. We were both living in Stillwater, Oklahoma, since he was working at Oklahoma State University. I speak and consult nationally, so my work is remote and requires much travel. Life was good; we were engaged and looking forward to getting married in six months!

As both of us are from Texarkana, and because I grew up going to St. Edward's Catholic Church and always wanted to get married there, choosing the church was an easy check off on the wedding planning list. As for the reception, Northridge Country Club, where my sister had her reception ten years ago, seemed like the perfect venue for our friends and large extended family to mix and mingle. That was another simple decision. The wedding party, photographer, band, florist, hotel blocks, and the wedding list were all coming together. My mom and I worked on the planning, and although stressful, it was exciting as our April 25 wedding date was quickly approaching.

Amid wedding planning, Jackson got a new job at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (ULL). Excited to be closer to family and eager to start this new chapter together, we moved from Stillwater to Lafayette at the beginning of March. Jackson started on a Monday and because of COVID-19, ULL students went to online classes that Thursday. Knowing that our wedding was 39 days away, we were a little worried, but figured this would all be temporary, and everything would be fine in a few weeks. That Sunday, the Center for Disease Control announced that no gatherings over 50 people would be allowed until May 2. After my tears, we came to the agreement that we needed to push the wedding back a few



Jackson and Amelie in front of St. Edward's Catholic Church in Texarkana, the wedding site for Plan A.



The beautiful table set by Jackson's parents beside their pool where Amelie and Jackson celebrated their "almost anniversary" on April 25, 2020.

months. Everything would be fine by July, right? There was no way this pandemic would last that long. That week we called, texted and emailed our friends and family, telling them our wedding date would now be July 25.

The same week, Jackson's office began working remotely and all of my work for the next six months was suddenly canceled. Needing to act quickly since we didn't yet have permanent places in Lafayette, we packed our bags and began our shelter-in-place at my parents' house in Alexandria, Louisiana. The next month was strange, but Jackson and I enjoyed the slower schedule and the opportunity to be around my parents. If you want to take the ultimate test of compatibility and love, try quarantining with your parents and future in-laws for weeks at a time!

In the first month of quarantine, we stayed hopeful that our July wedding would happen without a hitch and that this glitch in the plan would fade away as an unusual piece of our engagement story. The week of April 25, Jackson and I packed up and drove north to Texarkana to stay with his parents. On our original wedding date, both sets of our parents pulled out all the stops. My mom and dad surprised me by sending a new white sundress to wear for the occasion and treated us to a wonderful dinner from Verona Restaurant. Jackson's parents set a beautiful table and served us beside their pool, complete with red roses, fine china and champagne. Jackson and I ate, danced

and celebrated our "almost anniversary." April 25 may have looked very different from what we'd planned, but our parents made us feel so special and loved.

As the weeks continued, we house-hopped between both sets of parents and continued to plan for the July 25 wedding day. However, as the days went by, and the COVID-19 cases increased, it became more and more apparent that our very large dream wedding would have to be altered.

First, we decided it was best to have only our wedding party and close family present, to bring our initial list down to only 100 guests and make it safer and easier to social distance. We took steps toward making our smaller wedding work. After navigating the governmental restrictions of two states, with venues in both Texas and Arkansas, and considering that about 80 of our guests must travel to attend, we realized this 100-person wedding would still be an enormous health risk. After more of my tears and joint prayers and chats, Jackson and I decided it was in the best interest of our family and friends to have only immediate family present for the wedding, and to celebrate with the large group after the pandemic ends. Moving forward with Plan C, we changed the date to July 24, planned a tiny ceremony at the church, and a celebration after with a meal at Silvermoon on Broad.

During all of this, Jackson and I bought a house in Lafayette and scheduled to close on June 30. The movers delivered our belongings



on July 2, and that afternoon while unpacking, my brother called, telling me Governor Abbott had just mandated masks and enforced size restrictions for Texas gatherings. We had seen this before and knew what restrictions could follow. No longer novices at wedding date changes, Jackson and I decided we would marry the following weekend on July 11 in Lafayette. This was our Plan D, and we were ready to do whatever it took to make it work!

Along with my parents, that weekend we worked tirelessly to make our new house a home. For the next eight days, my mom and two aunts helped us put together a wedding. The plan was to get married at the chapel on the ULL campus where Jackson works, with only immediate family present. Afterwards, we would all come back to our new house for a meal and reception. Our original photographer, who was from Lafayette, was available, and we found a local videographer, a pianist, a violinist and cantor. Things were FINALLY looking up. In one week, we also found a deacon to marry us, a florist, caterers and a cake baker. Mom even had time to get napkins printed with our names and our new wedding date.

July 11 arrived, and I couldn't believe we'd made it; it was finally our wedding day!

It was perfect. Jackson got ready at our new house and I got ready at my aunt's house right by campus. We each spent the morning with our families and then headed to the church separately for our 1 p.m. wedding. Getting ready that morning differed from my original vision. I didn't have my army of 11 bridesmaids by my side. I didn't have the bridal brunch we had planned. We didn't have the shuttle with the fun music, getting us pumped up for the day. However, I had my family. I had quiet moments with my favorite people, times I would never have had in the midst of a big wedding.



A little after 1 p.m., I slipped my arm into my Dad's as the doors opened to the church. I saw my handsome husband-to-be in his tuxedo at the end of the aisle, looking at me with relief and joy. At that moment, all the nixed plans didn't matter. Everything in that moment was perfect. The church that normally seats 300-plus people, somehow felt full with our small group of 20. The deacon gave the most beautiful sermon on marriage, and we each had our siblings standing by our side as we said our vows. After the ceremony, we headed back to our house where, thanks to my two dear aunts, the living and breakfast rooms had been completely transformed into a wonderful



reception hall. We had our first dance, cut our beautiful two-tiered cake, ate a delicious meal, and listened as our family showered us with love-filled toasts. We were then ushered to the television room where we were surprised by a video compilation from 40 family and friends who had sent us virtual toasts. We savored every minute before loading up and heading to a resort in Bastrop, Texas, for our honeymoon.

Through our pandemic wedding journey, Jackson and I learned that when it comes down to it, a wedding really is all about the marriage. It is about joining two families to create a new family. It doesn't require the glitz and glam. It doesn't need the big band and crazy dance party—although we can't wait to have that when we finally celebrate, post-pandemic, with our original guests! A wedding just needs two people who can't wait to be married.

Our wedding day was nothing like what we had imagined, but it was perfect. July 11, 2020 was the day we finally became Mr. and Mrs. Jackson Taylor Tidwell. Let's hear it for Plan D! 🍷



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