

Between Reps at the Gym, a Strong Connection



Kesha Lambert

By Alix Strauss

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When Lauren Maillian joined the New York Sports Club in Harlem, her intention was to work out. Robert Palmer had the same desire.

In January 2017 that goal changed for both.

“I had seen Lauren around. She’s one of the few women who lifted weights and she was stunning,” said Mr. Palmer, 30, the owner of Be Exceptional Fitness, a fitness and wellness business.

When the trainer she was working out with walked away, Mr. Palmer went over to chat between reps. Witty banter ensued over the next 10 minutes. Mr. Palmer shared his number. Ms. Maillian, 35, who owns the LMB Group, a marketing and brand advisory

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company, promised to reach out. She did, and texted him within the hour.

Two days later they met at Mist, a local coffee shop. Their first date turned into two.

“We talked for three hours,” said Ms. Maillian, who, during the date, learned Mr. Palmer lived a block from her. “We both had meetings so we had to leave. We got together again that night. We sat in my car on the West Side Highway at 96th Street talking and looking out at the river until we got kicked out. We went back to my apartment and talked until 3 a.m.”

Things were going so well that Ms. Maillian suggested they take the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, a personality test, on their phones.

“Out of 16 different personality profiles, both of us were ESTJ-A,” said Ms. Maillian. “I couldn’t believe we are both the executive mind-set. That reinforced a compatibility.”

Ms. Maillian was divorced with two children, Chloe, then 7, and Jayden, then 9. Mr. Palmer was five years younger than Ms. Maillian. Still, their connection was undeniable.



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Over the next four months they saw each other two or three times a day. That May, Mr. Palmer moved into her townhouse. A year

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went by. There were vacations, school graduations and holidays spent creating their own traditions.

“Being with Lauren and her children felt so natural and honest,” Mr. Palmer said. “You don’t realize how many layers there are to your soul until someone peels them back. I could trust her on everything.”

Mr. Palmer proposed on Dec. 29, 2018, in their living room. After she said yes, he asked her children if he had their permission, and if he could marry them as well.

“I wanted the kids to know I wasn’t half in and half out. They showed me so much love. I wanted to commit my life to them and her,” he said.

Then 2020 brought two derailments: Mr. Palmer needed emergency knee surgery to repair a ruptured patellar tendon, and the pandemic hit. It became clear their choices were a digital wedding or wait until 2021; neither option garnered enthusiasm. Ms. Maillian’s friend, Shari Lebowitz, offered a solution. The Museum of Contemporary Art, in Westport, Conn., had closed during the pandemic. Ms. Lebowitz, who is the vice president of the museum’s board, offered the space.

“The museum had never hosted a wedding,” Ms. Maillian said. “We never thought we would be able to have our wedding in a space that’s really unique to who we are.”

On Aug. 2, 25 guests, dressed in black tie, gathered in the Helmut Lang exhibit. The couple were married by the Rev. Roxy Birchfield, a minister of the Evangelical Church Alliance.

“I said I wouldn’t get married again, but Robert supports me in a way I’ve never felt supported before. He is everything I thought wasn’t possible,” Ms. Maillian said.

Mr. Palmer said Ms. Maillian was “the person I want to spend the rest of my life with. This is the most meaningful, deep connection I’ve ever had.”

Correction: Aug. 11, 2020

An earlier version of this article misstated the previous marital status of the groom, Robert Palmer. Mr. Palmer had previously been married.

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