

Couple to marry after meeting on jury duty



Courtesy of Stephanie Johnson

Kris Kuzmic and Stephanie Johnson met on jury duty in 2005 and fell for each other while deciding a drug case. They are getting married Saturday in New Berlin. They've asked the judge from the trial, Charles Kahn, to officiate at the wedding.

By *Jim Stingl* of the *Journal Sentinel*

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They found the defendant guilty, and they found each other irresistible. Stephanie Johnson and Kris Kuzmic met on jury duty in 2005. For them it turned out to be a grand jury experience that has led to marriage. Their wedding is Saturday in New Berlin.

The Waterford couple have asked Milwaukee County Circuit Judge Charles Kahn to marry them. He presided at the drug trial where they met.

"I'm just thrilled to be involved and to be able to help them complete the circle," Kahn said.

There is no more hit-and-miss way to meet the love of your life. A computer spits out names, and strangers are summoned to the courthouse to perform a civic duty. Jury duty is not exactly the singles bar of jurisprudence, though people have hooked up that way before.

"It is remarkable in its randomness," said Clerk of Courts John Barrett when he heard how the couple got together. "It's by *statute* random."

Stephanie and Kris were both 19 years old when this story starts. They lived at home with their parents, she in West Allis and he in Franklin.

Both were reserve jurors, meaning they were instructed to call the courthouse on a Monday to see whether they were needed. The stars - and the alphabet - aligned that day to bring them together. People with names starting with the letters A through L were told to come in. So Ms. J and Mr. K headed downtown.

Stephanie remembers first noticing this young guy in a white hoodie as they lined up with other prospective jurors and headed for Kahn's courtroom. After

questioning by the lawyers, Stephanie and Kris were picked for the 12-person jury with the task of determining whether an accused cocaine dealer was innocent or guilty.

They sat next to each other in the jury box. They said hello.

Testimony in the case started Tuesday and ran into Wednesday. The jury then deliberated the rest of Wednesday and into Thursday before returning a guilty verdict. During breaks and lunch hours, Stephanie and Kris hung out together and walked over to the Milwaukee Public Museum.

"I remember going home and telling my parents there's this guy and I kind of like him at jury duty. There was an attraction there," said Stephanie, who is finishing up a medical assistant program at Waukesha County Technical College.

Kris was shy but he made her laugh. He found her pretty and easy to talk to. They were falling for each other, but they refrained from holding hands or too much courtroom cooing. Still, though, the other jurors, especially a nun and another older lady, noticed them.

"I swear to God, they were saying stuff like, 'You two are so cute together. You two should date.' They were making comments in front of all the jurors," Stephanie laughed.

When the case ended, Kris said to Stephanie something like, "Maybe I'll see you sometime." But she didn't want to leave it to chance again. She got his phone number and sent him a text the next day asking if he wanted to join her for a movie. He suggested they go the next day, which was April 9, and which would become their future wedding date.

Stephanie said she didn't go into jury duty looking to meet someone special. Neither did he. Does anyone?

"I didn't expect it to happen like that. It just did," said Kris, who works in fire protection systems inspection. "You get stuck for four or five days in a room with someone, you're going to learn a lot about them. It was a nice way to meet."

They got engaged three years later. Now they're both 25.

There's been some teasing about how they met.

"To this day, our family still jokes, 'Oh, you two were just staring at each other. You weren't even listening to the case. You put an innocent guy away and you were just looking at each other and falling in love,'" Stephanie said.

People go to great lengths to meet the right person. Stephanie and Kris lucked out with jHarmony dot Kahn.

Call Jim Stingl at (414) 224-2017 or email at jstingl@journalsentinel.com