

Taking my future husband to Temple Square was no joke — or maybe it was

My dating days were frequently filled with angst, a type not uncommon for many people. I was often frozen in decision-making fear.

I knew I wanted to marry one day. I guess because I hoped to have someone live in my house and judge me for how much TV I watch. But I wasn't sure how I was supposed to know when I found "the one." I would ask married friends how they acquired sufficient confidence their now spouse was the right person. They'd tell me stories — an experience that gave them some clarity.

They saw their partner interact well with children. Or they witnessed a kind act or a selfless gesture. Maybe they found out their significant other was rich. Each of these stories had something in common. They'd all end with the storyteller saying some variation of "and that's when I knew."

I figured I couldn't marry someone until I had a moment with the person I could one day identify as the very instant I realized we were destined to be. I can see now I was putting too much pressure on myself and creating unreasonable rules for my dates, often to my own detriment. If enough time passed without a moment of enlightenment, I'd get antsy and move on, even if I liked my dates and was having a nice time getting to know them.

It took far too long to shed this expectation, but with a lot of work and some fatigue. I finally chilled out. I was going to date and stay with the same person for as long as it was interesting and enjoyable.



Eli McCann and his husband, Skylar Westerdaal, are shown at Temple Square in downtown Salt Lake City.

And if we ultimately decided to marry, well, even better. I would no longer stress over finding my "and that's when I knew" moment.

Wooing and weaning Skylar

It was around this time I met my now husband, Skylar. He was living in Wisconsin and I in Salt Lake City. The long-distance relationship was not ideal, but we traveled to visit one another as often as we could and had a great time together. Before long, it became obvious that we'd never really get to know each other well enough, or perhaps build a life together, if we were living a thousand miles apart. No, one of us would have to move, and I did not want to be that person because I had too much stuff. Also, Wisconsin is cold.

To say I essentially became an overager, rose-colored real estate agent for Utah over the next several months is an understatement. I devoted substantial time

and energy trying to woo Skylar to the Beehive State like I was attempting to score a selection from the International Olympic Committee. Every time he visited, I'd take him on a whirlwind tour of our best sites. We explored the resorts. We hiked the canyons. I made sure to point out frequently how short the drive was — "when you think about it" — to each of our national parks.

Skylar quickly began to fall in love with Salt Lake City. As he started to contemplate relocating, I figured it would probably constitute Deseret recruiting fraud, or at least malpractice, not to educate him on the sometimes-complicated nature of living as a gay person side by side with this state's predominant religion. I decided for his next visit I'd need to take him on a tour of Temple Square and explain some things.

My intention was always to give him a neutral, almost bland anthropological presentation and introduction to Mormonism. He had no history with it so there was

no reason to hand him any of my baggage.

I planned to walk him around the grounds to see the beautiful architecture. I'd tell him about my pioneer history and how my ancestors helped break ground for the temple. I'd help him generally understand the church's less-than-commendable history on LGBTQ issues. We'd admire the landscape. And we'd finish the excursion by attending the Tabernacle Choir's live Sunday morning broadcast, "Music and the Spoken Word."

I expected he'd enjoy that last part — that it might leave a good enough taste in his mouth so that some of the other stuff wouldn't scare him away. You don't have to be religious to be impressed with the vocal abilities of this world-renowned musical body, propped in front of a famous and imposing 19th-century organ inside a domed religious edifice that serves as living proof of pioneer architectural ingenuity.

Music to our ears

We entered the Tabernacle that morning and took our seats on the south balcony. Moments later the mummified 300-plus singers entered the venue and took their seats. Some warmups were conducted and, after a few minutes, overhead cameras glided across the room as Lloyd Newell took to the podium to begin the televised broadcast and welcome the audience who would then sit and listen to 30 minutes of religious caroling.

The performance was flawless, as I expected. The choir, in fact, sounded better than I remembered. It was like the singers were all secret allies, and they knew I had brought a man there I was trying to impress. I was pleased this was going so well.

I was excited to hear what Skylar thought. I expected he was captivated, mostly because he sat in critical silence throughout the

performance. I planned to ask him for his thoughts on our drive home, but as the choir began singing the last number, "God Be With You Till We Meet Again," he leaned ever so slightly toward me to whisper something, signaling, perhaps, that he was eager to give me his reaction.

"Wow," he said. I glanced at him and nodded my head as if to respond, "I know, right?"

Then he continued his review. "Incredible," he whispered. Pointing toward the choir members in their matching robes, he shook his head in amazement and then mumbled into my ear, "What are the chances they'd all show up wearing the same outfit?"

It took a moment or two for his bad joke to sink in, but sink it did. There, amid a teary-eyed congregation that was being actively moved by the broadcast, all he could do was find amusement.

And I just sat there, thinking, in exasperation and calling upon some dormant prudish impulses buried deep within my formerly religious soul. "Where is his reverence?" This sarcastic smart aleck doesn't take anything seriously. He is willing to make a joke out of anything.

I abruptly turned and looked at him, these thoughts running through my mind. He was smiling, proud of himself and clearly wanting credit for being funny. There was a twinkle in his sarcastic eyes, and I immediately realized a life with him would include very few moments of somber solemnness. And that's when I knew.

Eli McCann is an attorney, writer and podcaster in Salt Lake City, where he lives with his husband and their two naughty (yet worshiped) dogs. You can find Eli on X, formerly known as Twitter, at @EliMcCann or at his personal website: www.itjustgetstrangere.com, where he tries to keep the swearing to a minimum so as not to upset his mother.



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