

Love on wheels

A mutual desire to learn rollerblading led to romance for Joanne Ng and Lim Chiew Seng. by MELODY TAN

About a year after she and her ex-boyfriend called it quits, IT systems analyst Joanne Ng decided to pick up a new sport. She signed up for a series of rollerblading classes after reading about it in DUET. That was in 2009. Little did she know then that donning a pair of rollerblades would put her on the track to a new romance.

"I enjoy sports but I had never attempted rollerblading before. So I thought I'd try something different," says Joanne, now 27.

At the same time, Lim Chiew Seng — despite already knowing how to rollerblade — had signed up for the lessons because he thought that he would get the opportunity to further hone his skill.

Despite being a member of the then-Social Development Unit (now Social Development Network) for six years, Chiew Seng hadn't met anyone who caught his fancy. "It was hard for me to open up to new people because I'm shy," says Chiew Seng, 34, who works for an airline.

SHAKY START

By chance, the two sat near each other during the first class at East Coast Park. But a slight misunderstanding almost threw a spanner in the works.

Joanne recalls, "When Chiew Seng introduced himself to me, he told me that he lived in Ang Mo Kio. I commented that that was quite far from where we were. He replied, 'Oh, I drove.' I thought he was a show-off!"

"I did state very clearly that I was driving my sister's car,"

Chiew Seng clarifies. "Joanne misunderstood what I said.

Still, my first impression of her was that she was sweet. And I thought, 'She is pretty.'"

However, Chiew Seng did not get many opportunities to interact with Joanne after that introduction as they ended up getting paired with other people. But he did ask Joanne for her email address. After making initial contact, they started chatting online every day.

"When we chatted online, it felt like we had known each other for a very long time,"

Joanne says. "It didn't take long for me to feel comfortable with him."

Their first meeting outside of rollerblading class was a group outing to eat *nasi lemak* at Boon Lay Market and Food Centre a month later. The next group outing proved to be a blessing in disguise: the others cancelled at the last minute. This impromptu "date" proved the perfect opportunity for the two to get to know



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each other better.

Recounts Chiew Seng, “I think both of us were very comfortable with each other by then. We found that we could talk about anything without being guarded — being together felt so natural.”

SLOW AND STEADY

Three years on, Joanne and Chiew Seng have come to share more than just an interest in rollerblading. The couple enjoy taking trips together every few months; they have been to Melbourne, Bali and Bangkok. “Travelling is a good way for me to find out Chiew Seng’s habits and see whether he is able to take care of me — or even himself!” says Joanne.

Since her beau is often out of the country for work, these holidays allow the couple to spend quality time together. “Sometimes he would be away for up to a month. It can be difficult but we try to catch up by exchanging messages every few hours,” says Joanne.

By the later half of 2011, Chiew Seng knew that it was time to take the next step. “It was a feeling that developed over the two years that we had been together,” he says. He proposed in October that year and the couple held an intimate wedding ceremony at the Ritz Carlton Millenia hotel in November 2012.

The proposal was one without much fanfare — which is just how Joanne prefers it. But it still caught her by surprise. “I had bought a Groupon deal for a studio photography session. When the photographer said that we were done, Chiew Seng told him to keep going. I thought that was odd but I went along anyway,” recounts Joanne. “After a while, Chiew Seng went on one knee and pulled out a ring. I was not expecting that at all!”

GREAT WAY TO MEET

Now that they are married, the couple is staying with Chiew Seng’s parents while looking for their dream home.

The couple plans to enjoy their marriage for the first couple of years and travel a bit more before starting a family. And when they do, they hope to have two daughters.

Still, the most special activity they share will always be rollerblading. The couple agrees that activities such as these are a great way to meet someone special. “Although we didn’t hit it off immediately, the classes gave us the opportunity to get to know each other as friends first. It definitely made me feel more comfortable around Chiew Seng before we started dating,” says Joanne. “In fact, we’re not the only people who coupled up — we know of another pair who is getting married, too!”

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