

Marriage Was Not in His Plan, Divine Intervention Changed That

Brad Stensrude was seriously committed to Denise Pinto but never wanted to marry again. During a tour of Israel, he had a revelation.

By **Rosalie R. Radomsky**

Published Dec. 23, 2022 Updated Dec. 27, 2022

3 MIN READ

Denise Esther Pinto was everything Bradley Todd Stensrude could ever hope for. But, in no way was he ever going to get married again. Or, so he thought.

Last spring, while on a cruise, the two — together for almost 12 years at the time — went off on a private two-day Christian tour of Israel and Palestine, which included Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth. And, for him, a revelation.

“God came and talked to me,” he said, as they walked along the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, “and told me ‘it’s time, Brad.’”

Mr. Stensrude had a change of heart.

The couple met in August 2010 through Selective Search, a matchmaking service, six months after Mr. Stensrude — fed up with online dating — tore out an ad for it while flipping through an in-flight magazine, as did her sister on another flight six months earlier.

Mr. Stensrude, now 60, had two daughters from a previous marriage, which ended in a difficult divorce, which put the kibosh on marriage for him. He is the owner of Big Rivers, a wholesale distributor of marine-related products based in West Bend, Wis., and graduated from the University of Wisconsin at Stout.

Sign Up for Love Letter Your weekly dose of real stories that examine the highs, lows and woes of relationships. This newsletter will include the best of Modern Love, weddings and love in the news. Get it sent to your inbox.

We'd like to hear what you think about our reporting.

[Take survey](#)

After Ms. Pinto left the ad her sister had handed her on her night stand for months, she reached out to the matchmaker as part of a 2010 New Year's resolution.

"Something in my heart told me apply when you're ready," said Ms. Pinto, now 49, whose marriage also ended in divorce. But, it wasn't until six months later, the day her first grade class let out for summer vacation at Harriet Gifford Elementary School in Elgin, Ill., that the matchmaker called her to set up an interview in Chicago.

"I was in Bucaramanga at my mother's when they set up a date," said Ms. Pinto, who spent a month and a half in Colombia, where she grew up.

After returning home to Lake in the Hills, Ill., Ms. Pinto was his third match. She arrived early for their date at Seasons 52 Restaurant in Schaumburg, Ill. They spoke for three hours, and ended the evening with a hug. He went home to Slinger, Wis. the next day.

"She was checking every box," he said. But, Mr. Stensrude decided to take it slow.

Two weeks later, they met for dinner at an Italian restaurant in Crystal Lake, near his hotel and her condo. The next morning she took a Zumba class while he worked-out at her gym.



We'd like to hear what you think about our reporting.
Izahi Shemesh

[Take survey](#)

[Click here to binge read this week's featured couples.]

“He’s perfect,” she recalled her gym pals saying. “He looks like a Ken doll.”

A few weeks later they held hands during a movie in Lake in the Hills, and afterward they shared an umbrella in the rain.

“Boom,” he said. “My face goes red in a heartbeat.”

By the end of the evening they had their first kiss.

“Finally,” she said to herself, and he began visiting her every weekend.

They went on a trip to Jamaica by Thanksgiving, and the next month he accompanied her to Colombia for Christmas.

Her brother and his girlfriend picked them up in Bogotá, and at her family’s “finca,” or country home, outside Bucaramanga, instead of exchanging gifts, her family continued the tradition, started by her father, of handing out gifts — including dolls, soccer balls, colored pencils and shoes — to about 300 children from rural areas on the day of Christmas Eve.

“It was truly amazing to see kids line up for blocks for hours,” he said. “It was very moving.”

In 2014, Ms. Pinto, moved to Slinger. She left teaching behind, and joined his company helping out mainly as a corporate trainer.

They loved to travel, and last spring, after Mr. Stensrude had his revelation in Israel, he bought her a Mikimoto pearl “proposal” ring when they got back on the cruise ship. She later helped design a more formal ring.

On May 4, after they got to Istanbul, he proposed in a park between the Blue Mosque and Hagia Sophia, and she jumped into his arms.

“Even though it’s been 12 years,” she said. “It’s the right time.”

On Dec. 6, John A. Best, a supplemental court commissioner in Washington County in Wisconsin, and a friend of the couple, officiated at their house in Slinger, before her brother, and his wife.

In Jerusalem, on Dec. 20, the Rev. Dr. Jack Sara, an Evangelical Christian pastor, led a religious ceremony before 17 guests at St. Andrew’s Scots Memorial Church. Later, they arrived by bus for the reception at Studio Arcadia, a glass-enclosed restaurant, in the village of Ein Kerem, as the sun set over the Judean Hills.