



DIARY OF A REAL BRIDE



Lesley Ann D'Souza



I hope you like my blog!
I post alot about my pet dog, Sam.

Part 1 - Diary of a Real Bride



I never in my wildest dreams imagined I would be planning my big day amidst a global pandemic, but here we are! The last few months have been a whirlwind of events and I'm surprised I've managed to keep my sanity thus far. Between running my own dog training business, Paws For Applause, and coordinating my wedding day, the year 2020 will forever be etched in my memories.



Bryan, my beloved fiancé and best friend, asked me to marry him earlier this year just before the city of Dubai was placed

under strict lockdown. I was ecstatic and couldn't believe that this man who was my best friend, who knew all of my deepest secrets, hopes and desires and who had been through all of my ups and downs with me, was asking me to spend the rest of my life with him. I had to pinch myself hard to make sure I wasn't dreaming! Total cliché, I know!



Much of our marriage discussion that day entailed how my 9 year old dog Sandy would get along with her 6 rescue feline brothers and sisters once we moved to Abu Dhabi. Being a professional dog trainer, I was ready to accept this new challenge ahead of me. A life with 7 pets and the man I deeply love, this was a dream come true and I honestly couldn't wait!!

Elated to relay the news, I immediately called my family back in Pune, India and told them of our plans.

My grandmother who was 93 and keeping unwell at the time, was filled with joy that her first grandchild was soon to be married. Something the whole family was fervently hoping and praying would happen for a very long time. They were so excited, they had a waffle party that week in my honor!



Bryan and I decided that we would have a simple civil ceremony in Seychelles in August followed by a Church wedding in Pune in September with a small reception for family and close friends. While I was preparing the guest list, looking at wedding dress designs and what cake I wanted to have, my mother started making calls to wedding planners to help organize the event.





A short while later, the number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in India started slowly increasing and the entire country was placed under lockdown overnight. At the same time, global air travel came to a complete halt with international airspaces shutting overnight as well. Given these developments and the uncertainty about travel and future events, we had no choice but to put our plans on hold over the next 2 months. I was beyond devastated and started wondering what this would mean to my plans, and whether this wedding would actually happen!

During this time, my grandmother's health deteriorated and after being rushed to hospital and placed on a ventilator, she passed away peacefully the day before Easter. I could not travel for her funeral given the circumstances, so my brother and I silently mourned her passing and looked back at all the happy memories we had with her growing up. I was heartbroken



that I couldn't be there to console my mother and father, so this was a deeply distressing time for me and my family. That I was able to give her my long awaited good news before she joined my grandpa in heaven was a consolation for me, and I like to imagine that they are both shining down their blessings on Bryan and me from the skies above.





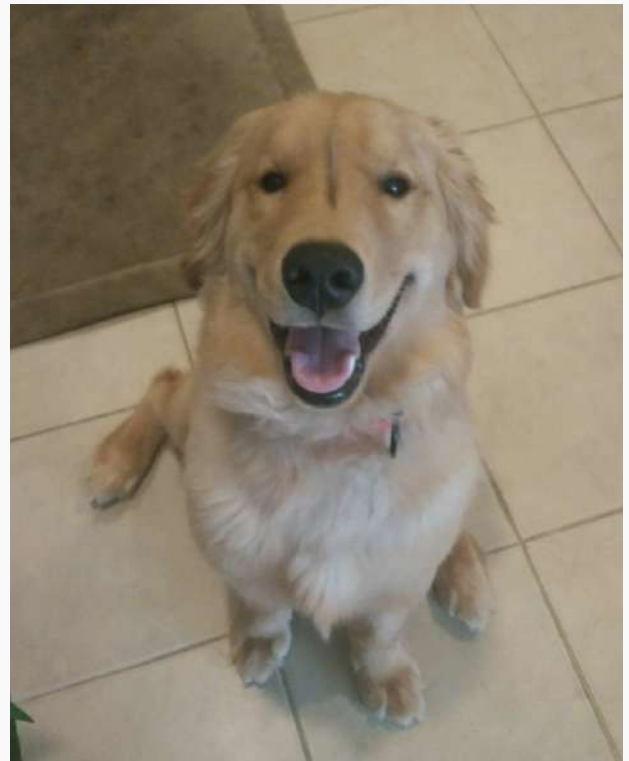
Part II



After being quarantined at home for several weeks and having to conduct my dog training lessons via Zoom, the lockdown restrictions in Dubai were gradually lifted just in time for Eid Ul Fitr. This was indeed a breath of fresh air and relief for many of us here, as we were finally able to move about freely (with strict social distancing being adhered to) without having to apply for a movement permit.

Having received great reviews and recommendations about Rebekah's Bespoke, I immediately contacted Jessy and gave her an idea of the wedding dress that I wanted to get stitched, along with my budget. She welcomed my request and we immediately started progressing with plans for material, obtaining lace samples and the timelines for fittings. I started to feel the excitement build up in me again, given that my wedding plans had been put on hold for the past 2 months.

Shortly after however, a travel ban was enforced between the Emirates of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, with only essential travel being allowed. This meant that I would not be able to see the love of my life for a few months to come! The devastation slowly started sinking in again and I started to feel overwhelmed with stress, worry and frustration.



This entire situation added pressure on me with having to plan this wedding on my own, and at the same time manage my business and keep it afloat during these trying times, whilst not having my parents with me for support. However, I held my head up high, took deep breaths and carried on, constantly reminding myself each day that “this too shall pass”.



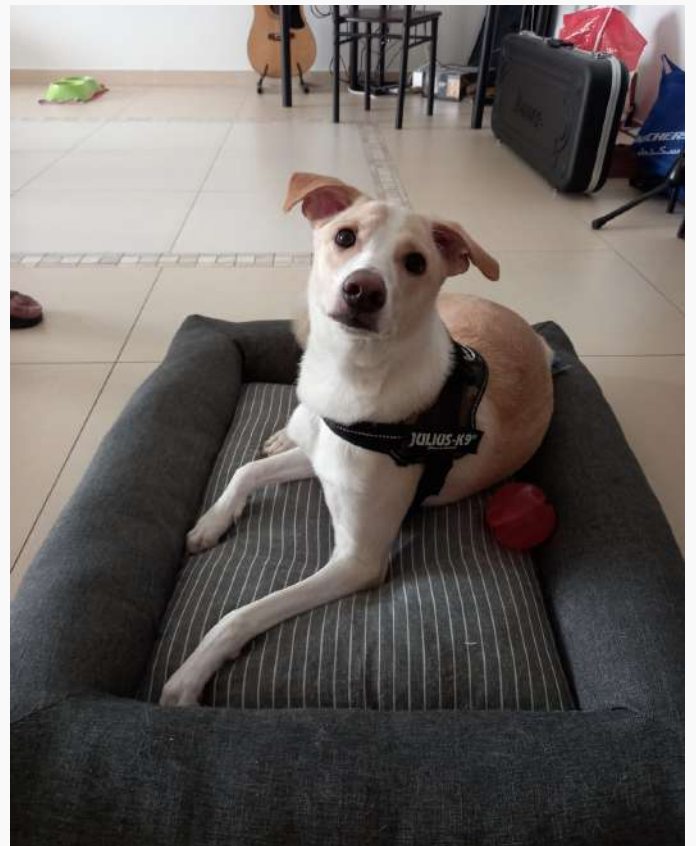
Airspace in the UAE started to slowly open up, allowing the repatriation of stranded tourists, citizens and residents into and out of the country. With the city of Dubai now resuming all economic activity, I remained hopeful that this wedding would happen and life would start to gradually return to normal closer to our wedding.

After much discussion, Bryan and I decided that we would have both the civil ceremony and church wedding in Seychelles in October with only immediate family and close friends in attendance. Given this new turn of events, I decided to change the design of my dress to suit a beach-themed wedding. Jessy was very accommodating and got to work with her team to design my dress and organize the material and lace based on my revised design.

I did my first basic lining trial shortly after, and it was at that moment that I realized that this was actually happening, and I couldn't help but be overcome with a mix of emotions. Things were finally looking up! I was going to be a bride!

I got in touch with a wedding coordinator to provide me the requirements for the civil and church ceremonies so that we could prepare the necessary paperwork. The churches in Seychelles, UAE, India and US were all still closed so we were a bit concerned that a major portion of our paperwork would get significantly delayed and we had to mentally prepare ourselves for what lay ahead.

Back home in India, the number of cases were now increasing rapidly day by day and there seemed no end in sight despite the efforts of the Indian government to keep the numbers from rising. My family and I were constantly watching and reading the news for any positive updates.



However in reality, the wedding in October seemed a distant dream.

Would I finally be able to wed the man I love and get to build a happy and content life together? Only time would tell.



Diary of a Real Bride

By Lesley Ann D'Souza

Part III

Good news was upon us when the Abu Dhabi government lifted the travel ban between the Emirates of Dubai and Abu Dhabi and set up testing centers at the border for travellers to get through. However, Bryan and I were still hesitant to cross the borders to see each other and decided to stay safe and continue our daily conversations over the phone and on Zoom. We even had weekend virtual movie date nights on Netflix which I looked forward to like a child being taken to Disneyland! This was our new normal.

During this time we reviewed our wedding plans, and given the extensive paperwork required, coupled with the lockdowns in our home countries, we decided to look at other suitable wedding locations.

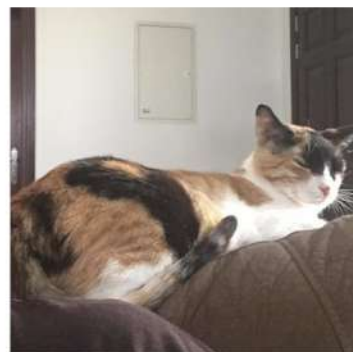
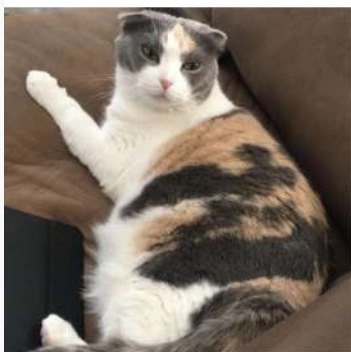
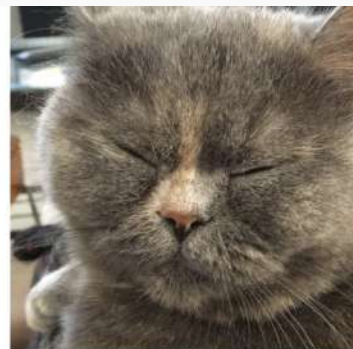


After a day's discussion, we decided that Tbilisi would be the best place to get married. With the ease of entering the country as UAE residents, simple paperwork for civil and church weddings, we informed our families of our new plans. I immediately contacted a wedding coordinator who got to work with providing us the necessary information and options to suit our budget.



Things were now getting underway and I felt a tiny glimmer of hope in my life again.

Jessy and her team in the meanwhile, were busy working on my wedding dress and contacted me to come in for my second trial. The dress looked amazing and was exactly the way I had wanted it. I had lost a little bit of weight though due to the stress I was under the last few months, but Lourdes her dressmaker reassured me that she would make the necessary adjustments and that I needed to take care of myself and get lots of rest. My best friend made sure to take lots of pictures that I could share with my mother since she couldn't be there with me during this time. I still keep looking at these pictures every day to remind myself that my day would come and when it did, it would be absolutely perfect!



By this time, the restrictions in my hometown of Pune, India were slowly being lifted allowing my parents to move about and get the necessary paperwork needed for my church wedding.

The Dubai Government then announced that they were open for travel to tourists and I was hopeful that my parents would be able to finally leave India and join me here in the UAE. However as of this writing, the Indian government is only allowing repatriation of UAE residents and we're still waiting on updates so that they can catch the next flight out.



As I reflect upon the rollercoaster of events of the last few months, I am thankful for the small blessings in my life, including my wonderful girlfriends who have helped me keep it together and to remain focused and positive. Without them I'd be at a total loss and I am so blessed to have them by my side during this period of extreme uncertainty. They have joined me on my quest to find the perfect wedding shoes and bridesmaids' dresses, as well as had long lunches where I would vent about the latest happenings surrounding our wedding plans. Oh boy, did I vent!



Our plans for October still remain, however this is completely dependent on my parents being with us on our special day. We are mentally prepared to have to postpone our wedding if the situation remains unchanged. But I still keep reminding myself that "this too shall pass".

Will we get married in Georgia as planned? Will we have to decide on yet another change of location? Will I finally get the happily-ever-after that I have always dreamed of as a little girl?

We will just have to wait and see.





Diary of a Real Bride

By Lesley Ann D'Souza

Finale

I was busy making preparations for our wedding in Georgia, with my coordinator presenting me some lovely options for our wedding dinner. The restaurant of my choice was situated atop a mountain which was accessible by cable car and had lovely waterfalls – truly a scenic view for a beautiful autumn wedding!

Just as we were about to make our initial down payment however, our coordinator contacted us with some rather devastating news. The restrictions on travel to Georgia were going to be further extended until late September, post which only citizens and residents of specific EU countries would be allowed entry. We were now, yet again, back at square one and I was starting to feel absolutely dreadful.

As I was getting my head wrapped around the fact that this wedding would need to be postponed to next year, something miraculous happened! I was contacted by St Joseph's Cathedral, Abu Dhabi who asked whether I'd prefer to get married there since services had resumed again, albeit under strict guidelines and restrictions. Elated by this fantastic opportunity that we had been presented, we decided this was indeed the best way to go.

More exciting news followed when India began allowing its citizens to travel to the UAE. I immediately got to work on getting my parents' visas processed through the help of a travel agent. Within just a few days, I managed to get approval for their visas and their airline tickets were booked shortly afterward. I was super excited. Our wedding was finally going to happen! I couldn't resist picking up Sandy and doing a silly dance with her, hahaha!

My parents finally arrived safely in Dubai, and I literally felt all my stress, worries and frustration, built up over the last few months, completely melt away as they walked through the front door. Sandy was ecstatic when she saw them and couldn't decide whether she wanted to pick up her stuffed panda to greet them with or bound at them in pure Labrador fashion.



Now that mum and dad were finally here, I was now able to immediately get to work with preparations for our church ceremony and dinner. Turquoise was my chosen wedding theme color and I got my bridal bouquet, boutonnieres, corsages and church pew decorations beautifully handmade in India and brought here in record time. Finding the right fabric and color for the bridesmaids' dresses took a bit of walking around and browsing numerous shops (not to forget a few rounds to find parking!), but I managed to find exactly what I was looking for. I had given my bridesmaids the freedom to choose their own dress designs, and the fabric suited it perfectly! I also managed to find turquoise ties for the groomsmen that were shipped to me from the UK in less than a week, despite the global pandemic. This was the easiest shopping I had done so far!

The few weeks leading up to our wedding was crazy busy with getting church documentation in order, bridesmaids' dress fittings, making sure our relatives and friends had their hotel rooms booked and aware of how to get their PCR tests done to cross the border, coordinating with the hotel for our socially distanced dinner, as well as delegating tasks to my trusted girlfriends to ensure our day went smoothly. Everything was coming together as the hustle and bustle of the wedding preps got underway.



I also did my final wedding dress fitting complete with the 3D layer of lace that was chosen to suit my design. My dress was gorgeous, and I so loved how it looked on me that I did not want to take it off! Jessy offered to have it home delivered to me, which was so convenient and really took a load off me. I could not wait to wear my dress, I was bubbling with excitement!



The day to leave for Abu Dhabi had finally arrived. That morning was incredibly busy with packing last minute items, loading up the cars and getting Sandy settled into her crate for the road trip ahead. I bid a sad farewell to my house of almost 10 years and hoped I'd be able to come back and visit soon.

My mum, who is very traditional, made clear that Bryan and I were not allowed to see each other the day before the wedding. So while he and my family had dinner at the hotel, I enjoyed a relaxing evening with my bridesmaids with cocktails and a movie screening out by the pool. I could not believe that I was just a few hours away from becoming a Mrs!



Wedding day was finally here!! I wore my bridal robe, courtesy Rebekah's Bespoke, while my makeup and hair stylist got to work. My transformation was unbelievable as I looked in the mirror and couldn't believe that was actually me! My photographer took lots of pictures and videos, making me feel like a model, and I loved every minute of it!

After receiving blessings from my family and bridesmaids, we made our way to Church. As the wedding car pulled up to the parking lot, I saw Bryan looking ever so handsome in his suit, and I just couldn't believe that this wonderful man was soon going to be my husband. I was starting to get emotional and I had to fight back happy tears to prevent my mascara from running!



Our ceremony, kept under 30 minutes as per Government regulations, went beautifully and smoothly, and absolutely nothing about it felt like it was rushed. Bryan and I were finally united in matrimony in the presence of family and close friends and it really was the happiest, most joyful day of my life. Despite the global pandemic, ever changing rules and restrictions, and all the challenges we had encountered over the last several months, the impossible was made possible.



I have watched our wedding video possibly over 20 times now, and each time, I've had tears in my eyes. Everything on the day went according to plan, and I am immensely grateful to our family and friends who made it so special and memorable.



Above all this, I am truly blessed to have Bryan in my life. He is my rock, my soul mate, my best friend. I am looking forward to this lifelong journey we have embarked on and the adventures that lie ahead, with our dog and 6 cats in tow!



Happily ever after starts right here!