

## " HOW I MET CHRIS "



For those of you who have been asking about how Chris and I met, I will tell you the story. Chris and I met the summer of 1996 when Ashley was only five years old. At the time, I rented a chair in a salon doing hair as a licensed cosmetologist in Las Vegas, Nevada where I had moved with my ex-husband and my parents in 1990.

I also would work my salon schedule and appointments around certain weeks when I was modeling at conventions that frequently came to our town. It was good money that I needed and I enjoyed doing it. I don't really like to call it modeling because it wasn't as glamorous as print work and runway, but I had fun doing it anyway.

I modeled clothes, shoes, accessories, electronics, computer programs, just what ever came to town. I never took jobs out of town because I had to take care of a small child. One day my Dad, who was senior vice president of operations at the Riviera Hotel and Casino, told me that a coworker of his knew a guy that needed a model to work in his booth at a trade show in

Chicago. It was for the the NSGA (National Sporting Goods) trade show or something like that. I could never afford a vacation, so a trip to Chicago sounded like a pretty good deal to me and came at a time when I really felt like I needed to get away. My Dad's coworker was a guy named Steve Shiripa.

You may know him by his character on *The Sopranos*. Steve is actually the guy that introduced me to a friend who hired me to do that job in Chicago. Meanwhile, Chris was a jobber in the wholesale apparel business and was building a new company. He was returning from vacation when he and his brothers decided last minute to go to the convention in Chicago. Chris was living in New Jersey at the time. Fate and destiny at work.

Chris and his brothers happened to come by our booth and his brother just happened to know one of the girls I was working with through her sister. Small world. Chris and I were introduced. I thought nothing of it, besides the fact that he was a handsome guy with pretty blue eyes and dimples who was very quiet and seemed shy, but sexy at the same time.

Chris and his brothers came back around later that day and invited us to a dinner they were having. I originally said no because I didn't know them well enough, but the girl I was working with kept insisting that she knew them to be good guys. She told me that Chris wasn't going to go unless I went. I found that strange and hard to believe because Chris and I hadn't spoken much, but I was intrigued at the same time. I finally agreed to go to the dinner but only if we met them there. Chris and I sat across from each other and basically tuned everyone else out all night while we talked and laughed. We had an instant connection. I had a great time with him.

When I left, we exchanged numbers to keep in touch, never thinking it could go anywhere because of the distance between us. From that day on it was nonstop visiting and ridiculously long and frequent phone calls in which we really got to know each other and became the best of friends and fell in love. That went on for about five years. There was a year break between us after three years.

I really had no desire to move to New Jersey at the time and pull Ashley away from my family and friends and he couldn't make the move to Nevada. We couldn't move forward. I was so in love with him and I wasn't dating other people, but I was scared to make the move. After our year apart, our failed attempts to get each other out of our minds and attempts of being with other people, we both realized we were just meant to be together and it wasn't

worth fighting it anymore. We had missed being in each other's lives so much. We knew we loved each other but I just didn't know where he would fit in and where it could go.

We reconnected and then a year later he came to me and proposed to me right in front of Ashley. I had to make a decision right then and there. HELL YES! I decided to go for it. I knew if I didn't that I might regret it the rest of me life. I knew that I loved Chris, he made me laugh, we both enjoyed a lot of the same interests, we had the same family values, and wanted similar things for our future. I felt safe with him and knew that he would always take care of me and Ashley, and he'd treat her like his own daughter. It was the best decision I ever made! We've been together since and we're still going strong. I still see my Nevada friends and family often. It all worked out. (While dating Chris I also went on to work for Lancome and worked on-call for swing and graveyard shifts as a cocktail waitress for a local hotel and casino called Samstown. I also freelanced as a makeup artist, just in case you were wondering.) That's the end of my long ass story and the beginning of a new one that you're more familiar with ... my life in New Jersey.

XOXO,  
Jacqueline  
Laurita