

DOMINATING

the Distance

BY ALEX IVANISEVIC
DESIGN KALEY LEMPKE

the Distance

When absence really does make the heart grow fonder

When you're in high school and you find the special "one," it most likely makes your high school experience even better. However, looming on the horizon is the approaching reality—college. It's coming at you whether you like it or not, and if you go to different colleges, you wonder—are we going to stay together and do long-distance, or break up? It's time to collect all the maturity you were supposed to be gaining over the years and make a decision.

Two couples who bravely took on the challenge of being in long-distance relationships at Iowa State, and survived them, share their journey.

The Nervous New Couple

Michaela Sir and Shaun Sperr began dating on July 11th, 2012, after graduating from Eden Prairie High School in Minnesota—“aka, the worst timing ever,” as Michaela calls it. Michaela thought the relationship would just be a “fun summer fling” before she went off to college at Taylor University in Indiana and Shaun went to Iowa State.

“I was convinced that I was supposed to meet someone in college, so I told Shaun right off the bat that we could say that we were dating, but that we were going to have to call it quits in August,” she says. “Towards the end of the summer, I felt so sick about it. Eventually, my dad told me to pray about it and that it wouldn't be the end of the world if we kept dating and played it by ear.”

Sperr quickly agreed to try to make it work, and then they outlined their expectations for each other—how often they would talk on the phone and when they could see each other, among others.

“Even though it sounded easy enough at the time, many of those standards were hard to keep!” she says.

Making the decision to stay together was barely the beginning. When they moved away to different schools, Michaela describes that first time apart as “very surreal.”



Corrina See Photography

Shaun and Michaela Sperr got married this summer after successfully managing a three-year long-distance relationship

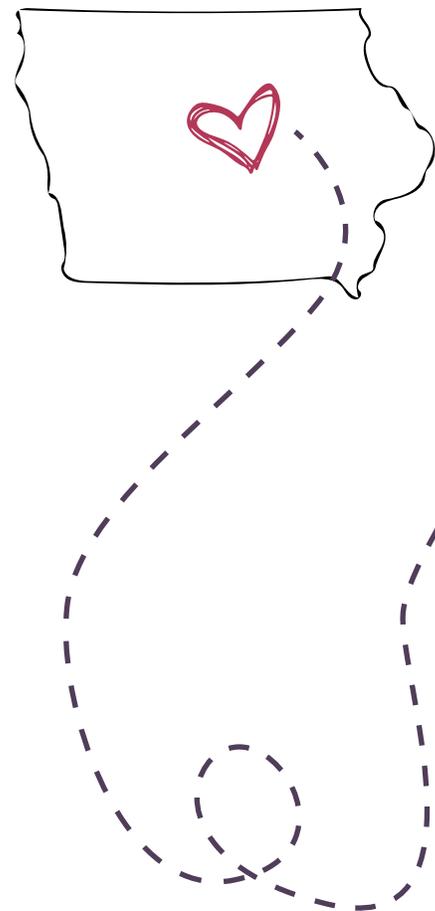
“We were so new that I hadn't had time to process what it was actually like to be in a relationship. I missed him,” she says, “the only thing that made it easier was when we saw each other, we got along so well that it would remind me why we did it in the first place.”

Michaela and Shaun eventually developed ways to make the distance a bit more bearable by using different methods of communication like Skype and even going old school by writing each other letters.

Although they had many ways of communicating, they explained that at times communication was not their strong point. They say they worked on it constantly, because a lot of spats happened when someone didn't say that they were upset. To ease their frustrations, Michaela and Shaun took advantage of the conveniences of texting and talking on the phone, which strengthened their relationship.

The Confident Couple

Justin and Tracy started dating in July 2012, the summer before Tracy started her freshman year at Iowa State. Justin was already attending Northwest Missouri State University. When they left, staying together was a given. The two of them shared a strong belief in God and this supported the commitment they made to one another. They also planned ahead to handle the challenge of distance.



"We set up some dates where one of us would travel to see the other, and we exchanged schedules so we knew when each other would be free to talk on the phone," Tracy says.

According to Justin and Tracy, that first time apart for them "wasn't that difficult."

"The hardest part was not being able to see each other. It was easier because neither one of us was afraid to say we needed the other one to come. We both would go see each other whenever the other asked," Tracy says. "It was difficult to say goodbye to each other, but we had an end goal (marriage) and it felt better being able to have a countdown to when it would be done."

Similar to Michaela and Shaun, Tracy and Justin agree, "the biggest positive was that we could easily talk to each other. We were able to Skype which made not seeing each other a little easier."

The Distance has been Dominated...

Michaela Sir (now Sperr) and Shaun Sperr got married on August 1st. The new Mrs. Sperr is glad it worked out.

"I think in general we did the best we could, and I am SO happy it is over!" she says.

Tracy and Justin Head tied the knot on August 15, 2015, after Tracy graduated from Iowa State.

"I look back at our relationship and I'm thankful what we went through. The distance made us appreciate our limited time together," she says. "I feel that it made us stronger together because of the trust and communication we had to develop."

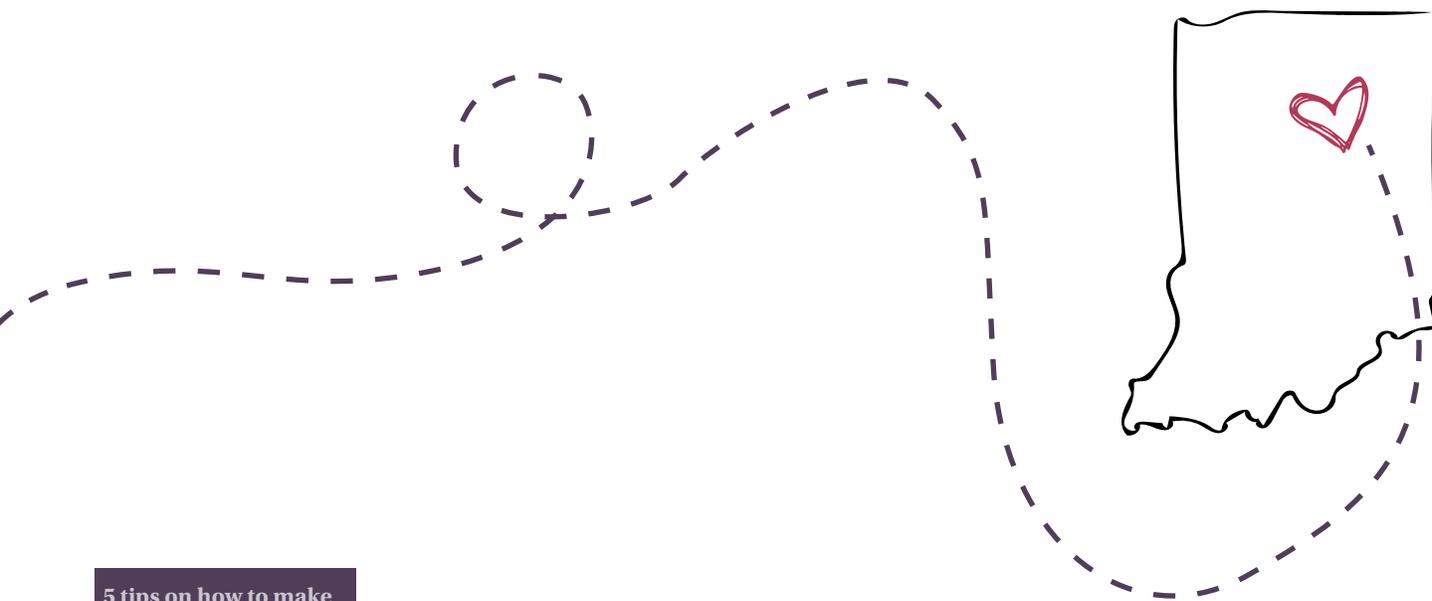
The two couples, having successfully made it through a long-distance relationship offered their valuable advice for those who are in a long-distance relationship. They say there is no such thing as too much communication, and that you need to enjoy where you are at.

"Your time apart is nothing compared to how long you will stay together. You enjoy and embrace the experiences where you are at because it will be gone before you know it," Tracy says.

Michaela and Shaun also have advice couples beginning a long-distance relationship.

"Only do distance if you are certain that you can see yourself with that person for the rest of your life, Michaela says. "Distance, like marriage, will expose your underlying problems, not solve them—so get ready to become master communicators and work on a lot of selfish habits you didn't even know you had!"

Whether you are nervous about entering a new relationship or you are completely confident, these couples show that making a long-distance relationship work is possible. ☺



5 tips on how to make your long-distance relationship easier

- 1 Communication is Key.**
Make each other feel that you are still a part of each other's lives. You can skype, text or talk on the phone—whatever will keep the two of you communicating.
- 2 Keep Busy**
If you keep your schedule busy and give yourself a lot of things to do, you are less likely to get a chance to focus on how much you are missing your significant other.
- 3 Visit Each Other**
Because it is not often, the time you do get with one another is very precious. That is why it is important to put in the effort of visiting each other whenever you can/when it is convenient for each of you!
- 4 Don't sweat the small stuff...**
The fact that you two go to two different schools sadly means that you are going to be making memories without each other\ Do not freak out if you have not received a text back fast enough, odds are they are just busy doing school or social things, as are you.
- 5 Focus on the Positives**
Reassure each other why you are together and why you want it to work. Remember why you two are trying so hard in the first place.